1-31-2014

Power and Parody: Flann O'Brien's Satire of Repressive Irish Identity, 1937-1966

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POWER AND PARODY: FLANN O'BRIEN'S SATIRE OF REPRESSIVE IRISH IDENTITY, 1937-1966

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2013

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Title: Power and Parody: Flann O'Brien's Satire of Repressive Irish Identity, 1937-1966

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Humor and cultural critique have long been staples in the Irish literary tradition. Employing an Althusserian framework of Marxist thought, scholarship on the Irish comic tradition, and ideas centered on the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, I analyze the works of Flann O'Brien, the most consistently funny Irish writer since the sometimes-serious satirist Swift. Born Brian O'Nolan, coming of age in the tumult of the 1922 Irish Free State, and professionally active following the 1937 Constitution's ratification, O'Brien uses comedic strategies to expose the repressive practices of cultural institutions such as the family, the Church, and education that are privileged in that document. Ultimately, I contend that O'Brien's comic treatments of these ideological apparatuses should be seen as a serious critique of the idyllic Irish culture that the Constitution sought to impose. Celebrated as a comedic and early postmodernist author, O'Brien's cultural critiques have been scarcely considered by literary critics, an argument I consider in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two, I place the humorous work of Flann O'Brien within a context of the 1937 Irish Constitution by outlining the historical, political, and economic realities in Ireland during O'Brien's lifetime. I also establish the interpretive method I use that focuses on gaps and contradictions in texts as revealing critiques of social institutions. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five I perform that critique by analyzing the family in O'Brien's writing, contrasting idealized, traditional Irish concepts of family with O'Brien's treatment of family as a largely uncertain institution, filled with absent fathers and silent women. I continue by critiquing the Church as an

institution unresponsive to its people, one which uses punitive sanctions and the people's own miseries to justify their suffering. Further, I explore how education reproduces the dominant culture's ideologies. O'Brien critiques the Free State's role in inculcating the Irish language. Additionally, O'Brien satirizes education as the promoter of cultural capital whose serious discourse reveals what is important to the Free State. In Chapter Six I suggest that O'Brien's comical questioning of the imagined rural Irish idyllic world is actually a serious part of the creation of the modern Irish state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The time for expressing gratitude about a project like this is spread out from the beginning to the end, and, in the case of those whom I will regretfully overlook, even earlier in my life. First, my most enduring thanks goes to my director, Dr. James M. Cahalan. I thank him for his patience, his encouragement, his timely prodding, his trenchant and prompt responses to my drafts, and mostly, for his broad and deep knowledge of Ireland that he shared so generously with me. His work was complementary to the theoretical knowledge and practices of Dr. David Downing and Dr. Christopher Orchard. From them, I learned the ways that literature and criticism affect the lived worlds of scholars, their students, and all with whom they interact.

My time at Indiana University of Pennsylvania was made better by the several other professors from whom I took courses. They are models of scholarship and humanism, and their rigorous challenges to the mind more than adequately prepared me for my work. Staff members, especially in the English office, made the day-to-day administrative hurdles nearly disappear. And I owe much to the many classmates whose friendship I enjoyed while engaged in this rewarding process, particularly Gwendy Turnbull for her personal strength, and Scott Hanna for his unflagging and generous encouragement. Thanks.

To my colleagues and friends at my teaching institution, the University of Mary, I am indebted for the many ways that they made it seem normal to be teaching, advising, mentoring, serving on committees, and pursuing a Ph.D. all at the same time. My university's librarians assisted my work in countless ways, and their role as my world's best search engine cannot be discounted. I especially wish to thank the members of the English department of which I am so very fortunate to be a part. Their greatest gift to me was speaking of my degree completion, never in terms of "if," but always in terms of "when."

I want to acknowledge my large and varied family, within whom I will always be rooted. To my brothers and sisters, who didn't always know what my work was about but who always understood my need to do it, I am grateful. To my daughters, Bridget, Rachel, and Allison, who saw me less than they may have desired, and whose presence in my life is powerful even when we are not together, I love you and I thank you for who you are. To my parents, Jim and Edie, who, even before I could read, bought the set of World Book encyclopedia that I took to bed with me every night, and who found ways to bring home books from the school fair and made sure that a kid from a working-class background went to college when he wanted to. Your utter selflessness and unflinching support are beyond price. My love and thanks to you.

Finally, to my wife, Kym, who, from the very beginning, recognized in me a lifelong desire to earn this degree and then went about making it possible. Despite nearly every conceivable impediment, she has been my partner. She has reassured me when I was fearful, bolstered me when I was doubtful, cheered me when I was successful. My chief success has been in finding her: the love of my life. *Je t'aime.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SUBVERSION AS IDENTITY

On January 16, 1962, Brian O'Nolan (1911-1966), better known under his pseudonym of Flann O'Brien, wrote a brief letter to his publisher, Gerard Gross of Pantheon Books. In it, he refers to the "immense sale (here in Dublin, I mean)" and the "excellent" reviews of his new novel *The Hard Life.* He goes on to say that he does not think he will fare as well among the British or other markets as "[t]hose people are very hard to amuse—they look for overtones, undertones, subtones, grunts and 'philosophy,' they assume something very serious is afoot. It's disquieting for a writer who is only, for the moment, clowning" (Hogan and Henderson 79-80). This letter, indicative of the alternating ebullience and realistic pragmatism of O'Brien's persona in correspondence, highlights the challenge of the scholar in working with O'Brien's writing. On the one hand, there is the serious work of exegesis—seeking overtones and undertones, interpreting subtones and, sometimes, as in O'Brien's *The Poor Mouth* (originally published in Irish Gaelic as *An Béal Bocht,* 1941), literally, the grunts, applying philosophy. On the other hand, there is the amusement and the hilarity, the fun and the clowning. The great delight of O'Brien scholarship may well be the opportunity to bring the two together. This is the delight that I wish to pursue in this study.

There is an unavoidable paradox in any scholarly work conducted on the writing of artists such as Flann O'Brien. Theory and scholarly language are the mediums by which one must try to communicate the humor of the subject. The dangerous outcome of trying to explain the joke is that the joke will suffer; it will lose its humor. But if one determines that humor is useful as a strategy for revealing the foibles of the human condition, such a determination is serious work and is fruitfully explored through theory and scholarly language. In their analysis of Mikhail

Bakhtin's classic *Rabelais and His World,* Peter Stallybrass and Allon White comment, "To read Rabelais exclusively through the high literary codes of the dominant classes was, Bakhtin argued, to condemn oneself to at most a half-truth, since even the dominant codes could only be fully understood in relation to their active negotiation with low discourses" (60). Serious work and scholarly language are, therefore, thoroughly compatible with humor and the carnivalesque because humor and the carnivalesque are the strategies many writers use to address entirely serious and important ideas. Flann O'Brien was a hysterically funny writer whose works delivered scathing critiques of the socially conservative Irish Free State and early Republic. He makes readers laugh aloud but—as we've long done with his great Irish satirical predecessor Jonathan Swift's "Modest Proposal"—we also need to think critically about the serious effects and implications of his writing. Previous critics have not much done so.

In this dissertation I will discuss O'Brien's novels *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939)*, The Third Policeman* (1967)*, The Dalkey Archive* (1964)*, The Hard Life* (1961)*,* his play *Faustus Kelly* (1943), and the numerous works that originally appeared under the name Myles na Gopaleen: his novel *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth,* 1941) and the published collections of his newspaper columns. I wish to address the ways in which O'Brien identifies and subverts the dominant ideologies of the Irish State and their attendant power relations. Specifically, I will show that O'Brien's writing reveals cultural institutions of the ironically named mid-twentieth-century Irish "Free State" that was anything but free—such as the family, the Church, and education—as apparatuses of an oppressive ideology that reproduce, via hegemonic practice, the dominant relations of production and that his treatment of these institutions may be read as a means of subverting them. I will show how the material responses of O'Brien's characters depict family, the Church, and education through humorous, parodic, and skeptical strategies. These strategies,

I will argue, represent a systematic subversion of the dominant ideological implications of these cultural apparatuses and the power relations they engender. Ultimately, I wish to explore the degree to which the aggregate subversion found in O'Brien's writing posits a form of Irish identity informed by nearly twenty years of independence which, as that independence was evolving into a new iteration, was still in flux. As such, O'Brien's writing reveals that independent Ireland both is and is not what the dominant ideology believes it to be.

It has become a rather accepted notion in the study of Irish literature of the twentieth century to view Flann O'Brien as the "show" horse among the thoroughbreds, trailing James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, perhaps by considerable margins (Booker, *Menippean* 1). However, of the three, only Flann O'Brien, born Brian O'Nolan (1911-1966), or, as his Irish-speaking family might have preferred, Ó Nualláin, lived and worked in Ireland for his entire life. Joyce famously lived out the repudiation of Ireland that his character Stephen Dedalus articulated in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I will allow myself to use, silence, exile, and cunning" (218). Joyce's actual exile was a mix of his "allowances" from the oft-quoted *non serviam*; decidedly cunning, yet decidedly non-silent. His brief returns to Ireland merely punctuated his more than thirty-five years of living as a cosmopolitan in Trieste, Rome, Paris, and Zurich (Ellmann 276-91, 300-04, 322-35).

Samuel Beckett's career is, perhaps, even less often associated with Ireland and things Irish. A Protestant in the minority in Ireland, Beckett seems also to have preferred the cosmopolitan world readily available in cities such as London and Paris, complete with their built-in sense of anonymity. The contrast between these locales and the perception that Dublin

was a city in which the most promising artists tended to while away their most productive years in pubs, essentially giving away their stories to the patrons rather than writing them for sale, may also have contributed to the permanent exile from Ireland that Beckett chose in 1938 (Cronin, *Beckett* 264-67). John P. Harrington relates the confusion of Beckett's national identity that ensued from the announcement and acceptance of his Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969 (1), and further complicates the issue of the Irish Beckett by pointing out that objections to that phrase may be located in both the adjective and the noun (4-6). James M. Cahalan points out that despite Beckett's choice of residence, the Irish elements of his experience were never far below the surface of his work. He notes that Beckett's "thorough dismantling of traditional narrative form," resulting in "oral-styled monologues of a series of shifting but persistent versions of an artist as an old man," shows that "Beckett is more Irish than the Irish themselves" (*Irish Novel* 253). Even with these complications, by the time Brian O'Nolan published his first novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), under the name of Flann O'Brien—a name he chose because, as he puts it in a November 10, 1938 letter to his publisher, Longman, Green, and Company, it "has the advantage that it contains an unusual name and one that is quite ordinary" (Hogan and Henderson 67)—he was the sole remaining member of the trio writing and living in Ireland. He was to remain in his native land until his death on April 1, 1966.

Assessing the critical place Flann O'Brien occupies has been an evolutionary process. Part of the difficulty in this task, Joseph Brooker comments in his book *Flann O'Brien* (2005), reflects the vast amount of O'Brien's work that lies outside of the traditional genres to which critics most often attend. These critics seemed unable to do much more with O'Brien's writing than "to relegate it to a lightweight world of 'humour' somewhere below the proper gaze of literary judgement" (3). Consequently, it is not surprising to see Keith Donohue suggest that

Flann O'Brien presents the "anatomy" of the novel in *At Swim-Two-Birds*; the anatomy of philosophy, science, and epistemology in *The Third Policeman*; the anatomy of stereotype in *The Poor Mouth*; and the anatomy of Ireland itself in "Cruiskeen Lawn." In similar fashion, Keith Hopper works through O'Brien's *oeuvre* by exploring tensions that O'Brien recognized between an Irish literary world dominated by Yeats and one dominated by Joyce. While Hopper considers the role of censorship in the early decades of Irish independence on O'Brien's fiction and his invocation of ludic or carnivalesque strategies, he concludes that Flann O'Brien's fascination with metafictional strategies places him in a liminal position in Irish literature's "proto-post-modernism" (13). Robert Adams's cogent book *Afterjoyce: Studies in Fiction after* Ulysses (1977), remarks on the effect Joyce had upon O'Brien, yet he argues that the similarities "mark O'Brien as a *post*-Joyce if not wholly *propter*-Joyce writer" (190). Carole Taaffe's important study of Flann O'Brien, *Ireland Through the Looking Glass* (2008), endeavors to link the writer and the subjects of his comic vision with the political environment of his lifetime (2).

The increasing critical attention that Flann O'Brien's writing has attracted clearly touches on many of the important thematics: variety of form, humor, tradition, post-modernist techniques, and politics. But no critics to this point have addressed the ways in which the specific cultural apparatuses of the family, the Church, and education—the three institutions codified in the 1937 Constitution—serve as the principal areas of O'Brien's critique of the Free State. Further, I seek to show that, in spite of his side-splitting hilarity—or, perhaps, because of it—Flann O'Brien should be taken seriously as a commentator on Irish identity. To consider the letter I cited in the opening of this introduction, one may imagine that Flann O'Brien did not wish to be taken seriously. However, it is my contention that the nature of the satiric treatments

that O'Brien applies to the cultural apparatuses of the family, the Church, and education demand that we explore his comedy to expose the serious effects of his writings.

That O'Brien lived out his literary life as a combination of the unusual and the ordinary is clear to anyone who has had the good fortune to read him. O'Brien's unusual career as a writer whose true identity was shrouded by the many pseudonyms he took on often clashed with the ordinary Civil Service career he had maintained as a sort of cover for his subversive literary productions. Flann O'Brien's life and literary career also coincided with a substantial number of the seminal political and cultural events of the twentieth century in Ireland. For example, within the first two years of the life of the young Brian O'Nolan, a Home Rule bill for Ireland was passed in the British Parliament in London, only to be suspended because of the outbreak of World War I. Before O'Nolan was five years old, the ill-fated occupation of the General Post Office in Dublin as part of the Easter Rising of 1916 resulted in the executions of fifteen of the rebellion's leaders. Notably, among those spared execution were Constance Markievitz, who just two years later became the first female member of the British Parliament, and Éamon de Valera, the most dominant Irish politician and longest-serving head of state in twentieth-century Ireland, whose efforts in the 1930s would lead to the Constitution that this dissertation will focus on. Indeed, Keith Donahue, the editor of the recent collection *Flann O'Brien: The Complete Novels* (2007), identifies dozens of such political and cultural touchstones that corresponded with the life of Brian O'Nolan and his many literary identities (xxiii–xxxiii).

In setting out to illustrate the subversive nature of a writer's body of work, it would be tempting to suggest that the writer intended to undo every received idea, every utterance of the dominant discourse, and every action endorsed by those in power because it was the writer's natural or, perhaps, chosen duty to do so. But by nearly all accounts, Flann O'Brien was not a

stereotypical subversive. Clearly, his direct assault on all things facile or ignorant, as illustrated daily in his "Cruiskeen Lawn" column in the *Irish Times*, was evidence that he would not countenance anything less than honesty and commonsense in his dealings with the world. And there is plenty of commentary that focuses on the satiric, the ironic, and the political in O'Brien's writing. But, as noted by Kelly Anspaugh, Flann O'Brien was a wholly conservative, non-reactionary writer. Anspaugh characterizes O'Brien as "a devout Catholic author [writing] to a mostly Catholic audience" (2). O'Brien himself was fairly direct in his views regarding the more progressive direction in which the modern Church appeared to be heading. In a letter of November 28, 1963 (just three years before his death) to the editor Mark Hamilton of the publisher A. M. Heath, O'Brien bitterly complained about the likely reception of *The Dalkey Archive*, the novel that he was attempting to complete. He wrote, "I'm convinced that the idea is excellent and that the book will be a scalding success in this strange world where we still have Vatican Council II but no John Kennedy or Aldous Huxley" (Hogan and Henderson 85), both of whom had died just six days before. Thus, for example, to suggest that O'Brien set out to take on the ideological power of the Church would be a gross overstatement, unless, of course, the Church itself appeared to be redirecting its power. Instead, Flann O'Brien may be thought of as a subversive's subversive—presenting his critiques in ways that belie their innate criticism. As I will show later, it is in part the work of the scholar to illuminate the potential for reading these texts as critique.

I assert that O'Brien offered critiques of the repressive ideologies as embodied by the Irish Constitution of 1937. It is necessary to show, of course, that there is indeed some idea, some discourse, or some action that is the target of the writer's criticism. But it does not follow that the writer had these targets in his sights the entire time that he wrote. Consequently, as I

will develop, it is not so much that Flann O'Brien wishes actively to subvert the Irish Constitution—to do so would be foolhardy at best and potentially treasonous at worst—but that his subversive treatment of the institutions of family, the Church, and education privileged by the Constitution's direct inclusion of them suggests an important destabilization of three of the central cultural pillars of Irish identity. As Edward Said explains in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1985), drawing upon Michel Foucault's discussions of texts as representing more than the thoughts of an author or of an era, a text is "a fundamental *epistemological judgment*" (225 Said's emphasis). As such, it carries an inherent value of critique. For O'Brien, subversion itself must often act in a subversive manner—pseudonymously, self-consciously, at times, overtly—as he calls attention to the explicit artifice of his fiction. His shape-shifting identities as a writer and civil servant, his awareness of self and of the "plain people of Ireland" he lived among and loved, and the occasional slippages of the masks to reveal a full-throated bitterness work together to indicate the artifice of Irish identity coming out of 1937.

Flann O'Brien's fantastic humor is the chief strategy that he employs to invite the reader and the critic to see the subversive and transgressive tenor of his view of Irish identity. As Vivian Mercier indicates in the preface to his landmark study *The Irish Comic Tradition* (1962), there are several forms that humor takes in the hands of the Irish, dating back to the ninth century. He describes the strategies of humor within the divisions of his book as "rhetorical categories" (x)—suggesting by this that humor has a type of argument-making function—and he identifies fantasy, a treatment of the macabre and the grotesque, and wit and word play as central to humor. To these types of comic writing Mercier adds satire and parody and contends that there is little clear demarcation among these as satire, for example, "employs wit, humour,

parody, and even word play besides the irony which is often regarded as its most characteristic device" (x). These strategies and more are all to be found in the arsenal of Flann O'Brien.

Theories of comedy clearly lay out the value of the form to offer critiques of social practice. Northrop Fry seems to say that the happy ending, which characterizes comedy, is both expected and suspected. The audience knows that such endings will arrive but at a cost, which is a needed reminder that society is foolish or absurd (164-68). Eric Weitz sums up numerous theoretical postulates regarding the comedic happy ending by indicating that comedy's closure places brackets around the action which has preceded it and "recomposes" the obstacles in a way that assures the reader or viewer that "things always come right in the end" (36). While it is evident from the endings of comedies that the "rightness" with which we are left is artificial—that it is certainly, in a real world, merely temporary, and that it comes with a price, that price being the revelation of societal folly—the proper ending of comedies is a happy one. But again, as Weitz insightfully advises, "We would do well to question who defines the conditions of 'happiness' in any text" (11).

Happiness is not a quality one might equate with Flann O'Brien—not as himself, not as his progenitor, Brian O'Nolan, not as his other principal writer-identity, Myles na Gopaleen. There is a rather joyless mirth at play with O'Brien, such that, while his characters unquestionably find themselves in humorous and even comedic situations within his work, and we may even agree that the endings are, at least, not tragic, as I will be discussing at various points in the succeeding chapters, there is very little sense of rightness in them. O'Brien's own contributions to the rich tradition of Irish comedy may be deeper than had been supposed. Mercier's largely comprehensive survey of the comic tradition provides only a few brief analyses of Flann O'Brien, but among these is a high bit of praise for a writer working within a milieu that

is steeped in both oral and literary genius. "It is hardly possible," Mercier writes of O'Brien, "to conceive a more purely *literary* use of oral and traditional material than that made by the author of *At Swim-Two-Birds*" (40). It seems clear that O'Brien's use of humor functions as a kind of window through which the reader may view the shortcomings of Irish culture at it attempted to define itself while coming out of colonial oppression during the mid-twentieth century. Yet the resulting cultural efforts themselves often perpetuated oppressive practices or sought to return the nation to a mythical simpler worldview. In so doing, the dominant ideology that represented the identity of Republican Ireland opened itself to critique.

Comedy is the avenue by which this critique is played out. As Regina Barreca writes in the introduction to her collection of essays on women and comedy, "Comedy is a way women writers can reflect the absurdity of the dominant ideology while undermining the basis of its discourse. They can point at the emperor's new clothes" (19). Nancy Walker agrees with Barreca when she argues that "humor is one of the expressions of the codes by which a group operates. The topics and forms of humorous expression are an index to the values and the taboos of the group, and the humor can be so intimately tied to group identity as to be almost unintelligible to anyone outside the group" (105-06). While both Barreca and Walker are discussing the place of humor in the discourse of women as a subordinated group, the very same theory applies to many such oppressed groups. Flann O'Brien's topics of parodic comment clearly offer a careful reader the opportunity to expose the absurdity of the dominant ideology, and at the same time, O'Brien's parodies help to create an Irish identity that more materially represents the everyday world of his life than some official document might.

Among the most fruitful areas of analysis relating to humor in literature, especially as that humor constitutes a transgressive strategy is through Bakhtinian carnival. I will address and

apply in later chapters to O'Brien some of the particular arguments that Bakhtin himself makes, but here I wish to synthesize some of its applications through the analyses of several of Bakhtin's commentators.

The carnival is a site of subversion and transgression on a number of levels. On its historical face, the carnival is a location of inversion from the normal hierarchical structure. During the brief and clearly circumscribed periods of the carnival and the presence of its alternative markets, the social elements that typically possessed little or no power were elevated to a sort of apparent power—apparent, but not real, because of its temporal limitations. For the duration of the carnival, in the words of M. Keith Booker, "[t]he first and most fundamental characteristic . . . is its ambivalence—different points of view, different worlds, may be mutually and simultaneously present without any privileging of one over the other, so that the different worlds can comment on each other in a dialogic way" (*Menippean* 2). The combined juxtaposition of viewpoints as well as the ambiguity of boundaries upsets traditional notions of dominance and subordination, creating disarray, and permits for interpenetration of the dominant and the subordinate. In reference to the uses of the carnivalesque as an analytic framework, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White point out that markets merely give the illusion of separateness and enclosure. They maintain that markets are sites of intersection wherein hierarchies merge. Further, the assumed designations of "inside" and "outside" that result from the appearance of tangible boundaries are "mystified." The market "is a place where limit, centre and boundary are confirmed and yet also put into jeopardy" (28). Conceptions of inside and outside—physically, politically, and philosophically—inform Flann O'Brien's work all throughout his fiction, drama, and newspaper commentaries. The inversion of such concepts illustrates O'Brien's willingness to play with and, ultimately, to challenge accepted power structures.

We know that carnivals are finite in both their lifespan and their physical footprint, yet the conflation, erasure, and indeterminacy of borders between the official dominant productive culture and the dissident subversive culture gives observers on both sides of the power structure pause. Stallybrass and White explain this tension more fully:

> It is a gravely over-simplifying abstraction therefore to conceptualize the fair purely as the site of communal celebration. . . . As the bourgeoisie laboured to produce the economic as a separate domain, partitioned off from its intimate and manifold interconnectedness with the festive calendar, so they laboured *conceptually* to re-form the fair as *either* a rational, commercial, trading event *or* as a popular pleasure-ground. As the latter, the fair had from classical times been continually subjected to regulation and suppression on both political and moral grounds. But although the bourgeois classes were frequently frightened by the threat of political subversion and moral license, they were perhaps more scandalized by the deep conceptual confusion entailed by the fair's inmixing of work and pleasure, trade and play. (30)

By this act of cultural inversion, an act fully sanctioned and in which all fully participate, the uncertainty of identity and the forces that shape identity are brought to the foreground. The carnival and its literary manifestations, complete with parody and humor, are effective strategies of subversion. A clear example of O'Brien's inclusion of the fair as location of parody and inversion of the power of institutions is in the lengthy *feis* (festival) in *The Poor Mouth,* staged by the Gaeilgeoirí (a derisive term for non-native speakers of Irish Gaelic who are obsessed with that language). Here, as in all carnivals, fairs, and markets, the world's appearance belies its reality. O'Brien challenges the outward expectations of the viewer of the *feis* when young

Bonaparte says, "There were men present wearing a simple unornamented dress—these, I thought, had little Gaelic; others had such nobility, style and elegance in their feminine attire that it was evident that their Gaelic was fluent" (51). As I will further develop, Flann O'Brien builds his entire body of work on the blurring of boundaries of all categories and on the inversion of cultural apparatuses, and, in the process, he challenges dominant ideological notions of power and identity in Ireland.

Effectively, I maintain that Flann O'Brien's rather socially conservative worldview would have prevented him from intentionally engaging in a critique of the ideologies privileged in the 1937 Constitution. Yet he was a thoroughgoing satirist who both perceived and exposed critical gaps and contradictions in the fabric of the society that coincided with that Constitutional ideal and, therefore, the effect of the satiric depictions that O'Brien offers is to challenge the essentialism of the dominant ideology. I claim no special insight into Flann O'Brien's intentions; I prefer to claim that a reading that pries into the gaps that O'Brien himself reveals is an appropriate necessary strategy in understanding his writing.

Ideology is, itself, a term fraught with all manner of political and philosophical baggage; it is not a tautology to suggest that its meanings are ideological, since, as Raymond Williams indicates, those meanings have tended toward the pejorative. Within his discussion of the implications of ideology, Williams writes in summation: "Ideology is then abstract and false thought, in a sense directly related to the original conservative use but with the alternative—knowledge of real material conditions and relationships—differently stated" (*Keywords* 155). Terry Eagleton defines ideology as a process of legitimation that promotes beliefs compatible to it, universalizes and naturalizes these beliefs to make them seem self-evident, denigrates other ideas that challenge it, excludes opposing ideas from the discourse, and obscures social realities

in ways that closely parallel hegemonic practices (45). The 1937 Constitution of Ireland certainly engages in these defining strategies. By their nature, most Constitutions are likely to do so, to greater or lesser degrees, as they seek to define what it means to be a part of a particular nation. But this specific document, as I shall explore more fully in each succeeding chapter, illustrates its ideological motive more directly than many.

Terry Eagleton contends that oppositional ideologies differ from dominant ones in that they seek to be self-reflexive in their strategies, displaying caution because of ideologies' tendencies to be unaware of their own ideological nature (45-60). In that sense, opposition to the dominant ideology, if that opposition is indeed material and real, is not itself ideological, since it does not promote a universal and naturalized belief set, nor does it seek to do so by legitimation or exclusion of other views. As Eagleton adroitly puts it, "Ideologies are discourses unable to curve back critically upon themselves, blinded to their own grounds and frontiers. If ideology knew itself to be such it would instantly cease to be so . . ." (60).

Somewhat less restrictively, Louis Althusser defines ideology as "the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (158). Althusser maintains that ideology has no history; that it is eternal because it is "omnipotent in its immutable form throughout history (= the history of social formations containing social classes)" (161-62). He appears to mean that ideologies see themselves as being without history because this ahistorical view reinforces the essential and natural state of their existence. He further suggests that the falseness of ideology may be seen in the way that it projects itself as the *real* lived experience of social beings while at the same time it is merely the imagined and distorted relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the power relations that derive from them. To augment the difference between the ideological, abstract way of seeing society and the

oppositional, material way of doing so, Althusser remarks that "what is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (165). He bases this assessment on two theses: 1) that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence and 2) that ideology has a material existence. Ideology does not have an "ideal" or spiritual existence, but a material one. Therefore, the representation of ideology in the dominant culture's material practices and apparatuses is the key (162-66). This means that while we may wish to denigrate ideology as non-material, it is impossible to do so because the ways that ideologies manifest themselves is through material policies and practices. These policies and practices, and the cultural apparatuses emanating from the dominant mode of production, which seeks its own reproduction through such policies, practices, and apparatuses, have very real and material ramifications for the lived experience of those in the society. This is the outcome of the 1937 Constitution whose practices, while intended to define an idealized Irish Republic, are, indeed, material.

Althusser's re-working of Marx's thinking results in seeing social formations as delineated on two "levels" or "instances"—politico-legal (law and State) and ideological (religious, ethical, political). For Althusser, social formations, the material outcomes of the mode of production, feed back into the mode of production (134-35). For example, in capitalist systems, the reproduction of the skills of labor-power takes place outside the realm of apprenticeships; away from the location of production, in separate institutions, in social formations; in this case, in schools. The reproduction of skills also takes place within the institutions of family and church. In each of these, but especially in schools, the future labor-power pool learns skills ("know-how") at varying levels for different jobs. But the labor pool

also learns rules of good behavior—i.e., morality and a civic and professional conscience—which constitute a kind of class awareness determined partly by the type of labor. Finally, these rules help maintain the established dominant order/mode of production. In short, education trains some to be "order- givers" and others to be "order-takers." The result is the "effective presence" of ideology (131-32). The institutions of family, the Church, and education are Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).

According to Althusser, an important consideration of ISAs is that it is in the ISAs where resistance to the ruling class and its ideology is most possible. The difficulty of class resistance within the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs)—law enforcement, the courts, and the prison system, along with the military—as well as the contradictions inherent in ISAs makes this possible. As will become more apparent in the chapters on each institution, family and Church and education in Ireland have their coercive aspects, just as law enforcement, courts, and other repressive institutions bring about ideological outcomes. Thus, the RSAs enable and empower the ISAs to insinuate the ideology of the ruling class (the holders of power in RSAs) into the everyday consciousness of all social formations by means of what appears to be the common sense embodied in hegemonic processes (147-150). As Richard Ohmann characterizes it, "To press the identity of one's own interests with those of the larger society is the normal task of ideology . . ." (*English* 227). Ideology wants us to believe that when we are serving it, we are really helping ourselves.

To reinforce the importance of the material practices of people as opposed to the idealism of ideology, as such, Raymond Williams maintains that "[w]e have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental

contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process" (*Materialism* 34). Further still, Patrick Brantlinger argues for a more direct way of thinking about the ways that concepts relating to power and dominance may be considered. He writes:

> Better than "ideology," which is hard to pry loose from its negative connotations of illusion given it by Marx, "representation" is a term that makes room for the fact that there are degrees of justice and accuracy as well as of distortion and illusion in all forms of culture. Yet like "ideology," "representation" points to the *political* nature of all culture and discourse. This is not to suggest that "ideology" should be abandoned as a term without utility for cultural studies, but only that it is more useful when restricted to particular forms of *mis*representation than when it is treated totalistically, as that which, in common with "culture," envelopes us all from birth to death. (104)

Therefore, we should see neither the ideology that comes out of a dominant mode of production, nor the ideas that inform such promoters of that domination, such as the Irish Constitution, as abstractions. They are material representations of the dominant mode of production and have practical material consequences for the lives of those whom they affect. This enables critics of the social and cultural formations which comprise the superstructure of this base—the family, the Church, and education—to examine the variations and contradictions of both the base and the superstructure for ways that the dominant ideology may be, even unwittingly, subverted.

So, what to do with these texts?

Because hegemonies, as Althusser identifies them, are dynamic processes, if a class of people were to pose a significant challenge to the dominant hegemonic process, constituting a

counter-hegemony or an alternative hegemony, the system in power will seek to neutralize, adapt, or incorporate the challenge into itself (Williams, *Marxism* 112-14). It is within these counter or alternative hegemonies, especially as they might manifest themselves in cultural productions, that Alan Sinfield finds the faultlines or opportunities for dissidence (38-47). John Brannigan sums up the goals of cultural materialism thus: "to examine the existence of an ideological system by reading its material practices, customs and rituals" (28). Its method is to describe the "processes and forces of ideological hegemony" and to attempt to "activate the dissidence and subversion which the cultural materialist believes lies dormant in any textual manifestation of ideology" (28). Marxist theory and cultural materialism employ similar underpinnings, but because cultural materialism has broadened the scope of its analysis to all types of cultural production, it more deliberately emphasizes culture as a dynamic process, and more directly seeks to uncover places for dissidence to challenge the dominant cultural hegemony.

Marxism and cultural materialism are important theories by which the relationships between modes of production of material life and the cultural practices that societies actually live —education, government, religion, politics, media communication, science and technology— may be analyzed. Numerous theorists have noted the importance of literary study as the locus of that analysis. Williams writes, "The most interesting and difficult part of any cultural analysis, in complex societies, is that which seeks to grasp the hegemonic in its active and formative but also its transformational processes. Works of art, by their substantial and general character, are often especially important as sources of this complex evidence" (*Marxism* 113-14). Sinfield's approach to dissident readings suggests that such readings are a factor in the transformation of hegemonies (21-22).

Often political and critical engagement with cultural practices may take place from within the institutions that construct those practices as Philip Goldstein argues when he advocates for a politically active academy (1-28), especially because, as he concludes, "Marxism argues that reading reveals the discursive formations or interpretive communities whose conventions and practices constitute the reader as a political subject" (27). Exposing these conventions and practices to scrutiny serves to subvert their power, a primary task of these theories. Therefore, "reading" the family, "reading" the Church, and "reading" education both as institutions that are formed by and form the hegemonic system and as institutions that are the location of transgression of the hegemonic system is a valid and powerful strategy. This strategy may be particularly augmented by the place that Flann O'Brien held as a civil officer in the service of the Irish State, because this position afforded O'Brien inside access to the ways that these institutions influenced the policies that helped define the new Irish polity.

Marxist and cultural materialist critical engagement must also go beyond analysis to practice. Although Patrick Brantlinger seems to differ from him on the type of revolutionary outcome of cultural analysis, he quotes Eagleton regarding the function of Marxist literary criticism:

> [A] major task of both literary and social criticism today is or ought to be "to resist [the] dominance" of the mass media in helping to construct—or perhaps reconstruct—an "oppositional public sphere" through "reconnecting the symbolic to the political, engaging through both discourse and practice with the process by which repressed needs, interests and desires may assume the cultural forms which could weld them into a collective political force." (75)

In the following analysis, I will show ways in which several Flann O'Brien's texts are informed by these statements and illuminate some of the illusions and contradictions Marxist and cultural materialist critics endeavor to expose in the dominant ideology. Each of these texts identifies the inherent tension between the dominance of the prevailing hegemonic process and any type of emergent element or alternative hegemony. It is precisely this tension that invites what Alan Sinfield considers to be dissident readings of texts.

This study begins with a discussion of the conditions that brought about the drafting and ratification of the Irish Constitution of 1937. Chapter Two points out that the new Constitution was in many ways a socially conservative document in both the sense that it manifested a repressive social view and that it was not nearly so revolutionary as it may have wished to present itself. Despite whatever disappointments those who desired radical change may have evinced from the Constitution, the legalistic and cultural power of the document cannot be denied. It is against the backdrop of the 1937 Constitution that Brian O'Nolan took on his personae of Flann O'Brien and Myles na Gopaleen and wrote his novels, plays, and newspaper columns. During this era, the cultural institutions of the family, the Church, and education that were valorized by the Constitution reflected a strained mixture of the idealized, post-Victorian rural desires of the de Valera administration and the naked realities of the changing new nation.

In Chapter Three I begin the more focused discussions on the specific cultural apparatuses that the Constitution privileged and how these institutions are represented in the writings of Flann O'Brien. Article 41 of the Constitution would seek to project a particular set of norms for the role of the Family in modern Irish society and, further, to ensconce marriage into a place within the culture that stabilizes the Family. A fundamental characteristic of the family as depicted in the writing of Flann O'Brien is absence—absence of father, absence of mother,

absence of family. In these aggregate absences, O'Brien challenges authority, a reading that I wish to make more theoretically profound by applying the tenets of the Bakhtinian carnival.

Chapter Four continues my analysis of specific ideological apparatuses. In this case, I look carefully at the role of the Church in Flann O'Brien. Once more, the ways in which cultural apparatuses seek to establish and perpetuate their authority through their material practices is an important area of discussion, with, of course, an eye on the means by which such practices are subverted in the writing of O'Brien. While Flann O'Brien was a Catholic all his life, he consistently introduced challenges to the ways that the Church interposed itself into the social fabric of all things Irish. His somewhat indirect critiques, leveled as they were at the Society of Jesus and other seeming targets such as James Joyce, reinforce what I would describe as a strategy of submerged subversion.

The final ideological state apparatus that I examine is education. In Chapter Five, education as a promulgator of power, in the ways that it naturalizes its goals, its methods, and its agenda, is shown to be under attack by Flann O'Brien's satires. I discuss how the implications of seriousness and its role in establishing the reproduction of ideology in culture is often the domain of schools and education. Culture's largely uncritical view of education as means to subjectivity and empowerment serves to hide from cultural awareness the ways in which it is also the source of reproduction of the dominant ideology. In Ireland, the study of the Irish language as a nationalistic marker was complicated by the compulsory nature of the curriculum. I analyze Flann O'Brien's comments on this central issue, along with the problem of cultural capital and its potential for being a false measure of status. The study concludes with my discussion of the continued struggle for Ireland to both possess and recognize its traditions and attempt to enter the modern world.

CHAPTER 2

AN UNHOLY TRINITY: IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUSES AND THE IRISH CONSTITUTION OF 1937 IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For mostly good and obvious reasons, historians and scholars of Irish culture focus a great deal of attention on the Irish Constitution, as ratified by plebiscite in July of 1937, and declare it a political and nationalistic watershed document. The Constitution was, after all, the result of a Constitutional Committee that had begun work in 1934, a committee that had drafted and redrafted articles and amendments and sections and clauses for nearly three years. It was almost literally the life's work of Éamon de Valera (1882-1975), whose political life was tied to a dream of complete Irish independence and complete Irish unification—one dream delayed, the other unfulfilled. Historians and scholars have not focused their attention on the 1937 Constitution as its cultural effects are represented in the work of Flann O'Brien. The timeframe of the drafting, ratification, and implementation of the 1937 Constitution overlaps substantially with central events in the life, career, and writing of O'Brien as well. This chapter addresses the social and cultural realities of the institutions of family, Church, and education that are privileged by Articles 41, 42, and 44 in the Constitution (see Appendix for complete text of the Articles). In the process of discussing these realities, I will connect the life and career of Flann O'Brien to this history, particularly with respect to any specific involvement he may have had with policies emerging from the Constitution. Before this specific discussion, however, it will be valuable to provide a brief context for the development of the Constitution of 1937.

It would be very easy to overlook that there had been in operation since the Free State Treaty of 1922 a Constitution that had not only served during a time of extreme civil tension, but which would, upon the introduction of the 1937 framework, become both history and palimpsest.

The shadow cast by the Constitution of 1922 could be taken for granted much of the time, but from its influence one could not escape. The intended influence of the Free State Constitution of 1922 was such that, wherever possible with regard to the governing relationship between Ireland and England, the new Constitution would negate the old. The 1922 Constitution, despite its Article 2 assertion that "all powers of Government and all authority legislative, executive and judicial in Ireland, are derived from the people of Ireland," was burdened by a number of unpalatable concessions to English authority that were part of Ireland's dominion status vís a vís Great Britain. These included the existence of an oath of allegiance to England, identifying the king as chief executive, the imposition of a governor general for Ireland, and the right of the crown's Privy Council to hear appeals (Keogh and McCarthy 40).

Dermot Keogh and Andrew J. McCarthy indicate that the Irish government of William T. Cosgrave, president of the Executive Council from 1922 to 1932, held policy positions that sought to define Ireland's dominion status within the British Empire as equal to full sovereignty, but the constitutional limitations remained a driving force behind more republican politics (41). After Cosgrave dissolved Dáil Éireann, the Irish Parliamentary body, in January, 1932, Éamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil party's legislative gains did not garner a clear parliamentary majority. However, the coalition Fianna Fáil formed with Labour made de Valera president of the Executive Council, only the second person to hold that post (Keogh and McCarthy 43). When de Valera similarly dissolved Dáil Éireann in 1933, his party Fianna Fáil, in a clear attempt to appeal to an anti-dominion sentiment, ran on a campaign platform of emancipatory principles, most of them held over from their 1932 republican manifesto. These positions were headlined by a call for the abolition of the Oath of Allegiance and were punctuated by proposals to cut by half the annuities paid by farmers to their former English landlords, as had been established

under the provisions of the Land Act of 1923; to protect home markets for Irish agricultural and industrial goods; to preserve the Irish language; and to establish industry in the western Irish region known as the Gaeltacht (Keogh and McCarthy 49). Each program principle was intended to sever, in overt ways, the connections with England that so rankled diehard republicans like de Valera. Brian O'Nolan, as he was known in his school days, and his fellows at University College, Dublin were, according to his biographer Anthony Cronin, in a unique position not only to reap the overall benefits that accrued mostly to the peasant and bourgeois classes as a result of Irish independence, but also to criticize the society that emerged from it (*Laughing* 47). That he most certainly did. The ideological desire for the 1937 Constitution to assert emancipation from all previous oppressors seemed to give way to a manner of repression of its own, against which, I argue, the writings of Flann O'Brien responded.

As tempting as it may be to suggest that the mood of the country had shifted with the sweeping in of de Valera and Fianna Fáil, in fact, most contemporary commentators view the situation immediately after 1932 as a continuation of policies begun under William Cosgrave and his administrations. First, Fianna Fáil was far from a monolith, comprised, as Diarmaid Ferriter portrays them, of "traditionalists, modernisers, visionaries, conservatives, radicals, cranks and optimists" who were more a "sectional grouping" than a "national movement" (359). Second, the need to form a governing coalition with Labour in 1932 and the rather meager 49.6 percent plurality and seventy-seven seats, which afforded a majority of only one vote in the Dáil in 1933 (Keogh and McCarthy 49), are also indicative of their relatively underpowered mandate.

There were, therefore, numerous ways in which the new Constitution would take its cue from the old. Terence Brown observes that the Constitution of 1937 was a "cautious document" that retained such established social and cultural paradigms as the preeminence of the Catholic

Church, small landholder property rights, and a general desire to preserve the kind of rural ideals that de Valera envisioned for an Irish republic. In particular, Brown suggests, de Valera took a deferential approach to the Church's continued involvement in educational and social policy, especially with respect to marriage and family, partly because that approach was consistent with his ideology and partly because, given the Church's power in such matters, to do otherwise would have been potentially hazardous politically (153). The result, according to Brown, was "the steady development of Irish society into a stable, deeply conservative, parliamentary democracy where change, if it was to occur, would occur slowly within the framework that the Constitution provided" (154). This status appears not to be accidental as, according to Joseph Lee, one of de Valera's stated goals for the Constitution was to construct it in a manner which would require no "fundamental change" when unity with the northern counties was eventually to have been effected (203).

Flann O'Brien wrote his novels, plays, and newspaper columns always with an eye on the cultural behaviors of his fellow Irish people. O'Brien did not defer to the sanctity of many institutions, and the Constitution did not escape his shrewd assessments. He necessarily couched his comments in a tongue-in-cheek tone, but the criticisms were present nonetheless. Writing as Myles na Gopaleen in his "Cruiskeen Lawn" columns of the *Irish Times*, he took the liberty of ribbing the Constitution's language on the age of eligibility for the office of President. Myles begins by stating the unstated obvious point that the Constitution is "your ultimate and fundamental statement of your Irish identity and destiny," adding that it is "an unconscionably careless document" (*Further Cuttings* 137). He then claims that it is filled with linguistic expressions that are bad, both in English and in Irish. In addition to his concern over the inexactitude of the language of the Article in question—an issue about which much of O'Brien's

writing laments—one of the problems he has is that the arbitrary designation of age thirty-five for the presidency means that fully one-quarter of electors, who need only be twenty-one years old, are voting to place someone in an office for which they are not themselves eligible. He suggests that this may cause many of those "ineligibles" not to vote because "they will resent the implication that they are all unimportant juveniles" (138). It is important that Myles point out that the document is "ultimate and fundamental" since it is within this document that several of the targets of his critiques lie in their privileged places. Thus, Flann O'Brien's parodic subversions of the apparatuses of culture are a challenge to the way that they frame Irish identity and destiny.

The dominance of the cultural apparatuses of the family, the Church, and education in the lives of the everyday Irish was, therefore, officially reinforced by their privileged place as accorded by the Constitution. For instance, family is central in the critique O'Brien offers in his first novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939). The unnamed narrator's immediate family is absent, so he must rely materially on the begrudging largesse of his priggish uncle. This uncle berates him unceasingly because he believes that the narrator is not applying himself to success in the education that the uncle claims the narrator's father has entrusted to him. When the narrator, despite this shrewishness, earns his degree, the uncle proudly bestows him with a gift, appearing to have had confidence in the lad's fine outcome all along. O'Brien continues his assault on the family in his Irish-language novel *The Poor Mouth* (originally published in Irish Gaelic as *An Béal Bocht,* 1941). Here he permits the main character, Bonaparte O'Coonassa, to be born without any seeming awareness on the part of his father as to how the blessed event could have happened: "I was born in the middle of the night in the end of the house. My father never expected me because he was a quiet fellow and did not understand very accurately the ways of

life" (13). When the clueless father inexplicably disappears for the greater portion of the novel, Bonaparte has to learn the lessons of life from mother and grandfather, including the travails of courtship, marriage, and fatherhood, a state he enters into as unaware as his own father had been. The "fathers" are reunited in the novel's final pages when each recognizes the other from the name they share—"Jams O'Donnell"—a name that is reflective not of the identity with which they were born, but of the way that the English-speaking world wishes them to be. Bonaparte asks the older man "Phwat is yer nam?" "Jams O'Donnell! said he." O'Brien continues the conversation:

> Wonder and joy swept over me as flashes of lightening out of the celestial sky. I lost my voice and nearly lost my senses again.
>
> My father! my own father!! my own little father!!! my kinsman, my progenitor, my friend!!!! We devoured one another with our eyes eagerly and I offered him my hand.
>
> The name and surname that's on me, said I, is also Jams O'Donnell. You're my father . . . . (124)

As I will address more specifically in Chapter Three, the fact that all Irish males in the Gaeltacht were dubbed "Jams O'Donnell" on their first day of school suggests that these men—one entering the jail while the other departs it—may or may not actually be father and son. But the tenuousness of family and identity are linked in the humor of O'Brien's sardonically hilarious depictions.

The Church suffers no less under O'Brien's unblinking gaze. In his newspaper column "Cruiskeen Lawn," again under the name Myles na Gopaleen, his employment of the metaphor of the catechism, inspired quite possibly by Joyce's use of that technique in the "Ithaca" episode

of *Ulysses*, to critique the use of clichés among the Irish says volumes about both his view of the Irish use of language and about the formula of the Church's approach to teaching its doctrines, an issue I will take up more fully in Chapter Four. The question-and-answer format he appropriates exposes the limitations of the linguistic imagination of the Irish at the same time that it implies that the Church is likewise limited in its view of what constitutes both correctness and the means to arrive at it. Linking these ideas of one question and one answer offered an ingenious way for O'Brien to suggest the inflexible nature of the Church. "Cruiskeen Lawn" is an Anglicized form of the Gaelic words *cruiscín lán*, meaning "the little full jug"—surely filled with some strong alcohol. The always hard-drinking, indeed alcoholic O'Brien thereby set the scene and tone in which these article were to be received: as the comic ramblings of a drunken yet erudite stage Irishman, in this case stationed over his typewriter, with the typewriter imagined as stationed in a pub beside whiskey or some other strong drink.

More directly, much of the central action of O'Brien's later novel *The Hard Life* (1961) is devoted to both revealing and critiquing the hypocrisy of the Church's teachings on social justice with respect to women. Mr. Collopy's pet project, of which readers learn little until the unfortunate ending of the novel, determines to offer women equal access to relief from one of nature's unavoidable inconveniences. While Collopy's good friend, the Jesuit Father Kurt Fahrt, seems sympathetic enough, he will help Collopy only as much as he perceives the Church would permit. Even a cameo appearance by the Pope, reported, as I will discuss later, via secondhand accounts, cannot save either the women of Ireland or Collopy himself.

Certainly, *At Swim-Two-Birds* is as much about the narrator's education as it is about his nebulous family. The same may be said for *The Poor Mouth.* In fact, while none of the novels or plays, and few of the newspaper columns, are themselves primarily about education, the

importance of education is nearly always just below the surface, principally because Flann O'Brien intends to unmask it. A pervasive sense of education as drudgery informs *The Hard Life.* There O'Brien's depiction of education's banality leads Collopy's nephew Manus to abandon school so that he may plagiarize materials in the National Library and then sell them as though they were the products of his own education—under the name of a distinguished professor, of course. Thus, O'Brien humorously subverts the power of education and strikes at commodity capitalism at the same time. Yet O'Brien himself was highly educated, the holder of not only a B. A. degree from University College, Dublin, like Joyce, but also (beyond Joyce) an M. A. from the same university in Old and Middle Irish Gaelic. It was at UCD that O'Brien began his career as a satirist under other pseudonyms in the university newspaper and literary publications. The ambivalent attitudes that Flann O'Brien takes toward the family and the Church and education help to show that any document so proscriptive as the 1937 Constitution cannot possibly be anything but idyllic.

The symbiosis indicated above among the family, the Catholic Church, and education was hardly new in Ireland and was not unique even outside of Ireland. Yet it is this fact, the very naturalness of the relationship among the major cultural institutions of Church, education, and family, that deserves attention. These institutions, Louis Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), produce profound and largely unchallenged, even unquestioned, influence on the daily lives of people. But further, ISAs function to replicate the dominant ideological power relations in society. According to Althusser's analysis of Marx, because no mode of production may be maintained unless the social formations which emerge out of it also serve to reproduce that dominant mode of production, all social formations are both informed by and reinforce the existence of the mode of production (127-29).

The legalistic place established for the cultural apparatuses of family, education, and the Church within the Irish Constitution of 1937 thus reinforces their ideological influence. If the very document that guides a society's vision of what is privileged within that society makes certain institutions central to the formation of governmental policy, then there can be little question as to the place these institutions have for those interested in maintaining the dominant ideology. The importance and ubiquity of cultural apparatuses in any society may be seen in the way that the radical social theorist C. Wright Mills identifies them. He writes:

> The cultural apparatus . . . is composed of all the organizations and *milieux* in which artistic, intellectual and scientific work goes on, and of the means by which such work is made available to circles, publics and masses. In the cultural apparatus art, science, and learning, entertainment, malarkey and information are produced and distributed. . . . It contains an elaborate set of institutions . . . schools and theaters, newspapers and census bureaus, studios, laboratories, museums, little magazines, radio networks. It contains truly fabulous agencies of exact information and of trivial distraction, exciting objects, lazy escapes, strident advice. (qtd. in Denning 38)

There is no part of society that may not be seen as a variation on a cultural apparatus. It is necessary, therefore, to use a knowledge of this pervasiveness, as M. Keith Booker implores us, to "understand and delineate" the workings of ideology so as to "interact with ideology in more critical and productive ways" (*Dystopian* 15). The important fact that Flann O'Brien was centrally involved in civil service, in the construction of art, and in newspapers—and that he was a wry and gleeful purveyor of learning, entertainment, malarkey, and information—recommends him and his work as a locus of analysis of cultural apparatuses.

The privileged position accorded to the cultural apparatuses of family, the Church, and education by virtue of their place in a document such as the Irish Constitution also means that these apparatuses are necessarily viewed as representing a kind of discourse that is set against other discourses that rarely have such privilege. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White speak to this implicit discourse hierarchy:

> When we talk of high discourses—literature, philosophy, statecraft, the languages of the church and the University—and contrast them to the low discourses of a peasantry, the urban poor, subcultures, marginals, the lumpenproletariat, colonized peoples, we already have two "highs" and two "lows." History seen from above and history seen from below are irreducibly different and they consequently impose radically different perspectives on the question of hierarchy.
>
> Indeed they may and often do possess quite different symbolic hierarchies but because the higher discourses are normally associated with the most powerful socio-economic groups existing at the centre of cultural power, it is they which generally gain the authority to designate what is to be taken as high and low in the society. (4)

Not only do the discourses of the family, the Church, and education enjoy their designation as high discourses by dint of their position as cultural apparatuses, but the hierarchy which is established by the place they hold in the high discourse of the State and its chief existential document, the Constitution, in contrast to less official and powerful cultural forms, affords them even greater potency. That these cultural apparatuses and their official discourses are often countered in Flann O'Brien by his lower and more pedestrian fictional treatment of them further makes the family, the Church, and education interesting loci of inquiry.

Ireland's Constitution, as it was accepted on July 1, 1937 and enacted on December 29, 1937, makes provision for the three areas of my analysis specifically in Article 41, Article 42, and Article 44. The Constitution has been notably amended since that ratification, so it is necessary to present the articles as they appeared in 1937. The full texts of the pertinent articles are appended at the end of this study; here I provide a brief summary of their contents. Article 41 enshrines the family as the nation's primary social unit whose moral position entitles it to protection. In particular, women are, by virtue of their indispensability as mothers, ensured that they will not be "obliged by economic necessity" to work outside the home. The article further promises to defend marriage from "attack" and prohibits both the dissolution of any marriage made within Ireland as well as marriage to anyone whose marriage was dissolved outside of Ireland.

The Constitution's framework for education, Article 42, also acknowledges the family—this time as "primary and natural educator of the child"—and permits for that education to be conducted at home, in private schools, or in public schools. Thus, family decisions to educate their children as they believe best may only be superseded by the State's compelling interest in the "common good," which extends only to the provision of a "certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social." Even in such cases, the child's welfare is the paramount determiner of what is best. Article 44, on Religion in the new independent State, begins with a statement of the "homage of public worship" owed to God and confers a "special position" upon the Catholic Church on the grounds that it is "professed by the great majority" of the Irish. The next sub-section acknowledges that other religions exist in Ireland. The Constitution takes pains to declare that there shall be freedom of exercise of religion and that it does not "endow" any

religion with official status. All religions are at liberty to establish schools and other institutions, such as charities, which are protected by law from being appropriated without compensation.

It is important to point out that Article 44 specifically deals with what the Constitution calls Religion, not the Catholic Church. But until the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution went into effect on January 5, 1973—an amendment specifying that the "special position" of the Catholic Church as well as the recognition of other named religious denominations be removed—there can be little argument that the terms "Religion" and "the Catholic Church" were not virtually synonymous. As the Constitution was being drafted, there were many in Ireland who desired such an equivalence to be codified. Diarmaid Ferriter chronicles the consultations that Éamon de Valera had with the future Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, during the drafting of the Constitution and comments that "many zealous Catholic activists" were disappointed that there was not a declaration of Catholicism as the state religion (369-70). Despite their disappointment, the tenor of the 1937 document implies a de facto establishment clause in which the Catholic Church receives top billing, and despite the non-endowment guarantee, there is an indication that religion of one sort or another plays a prominent role in the matters of the State. In addition, the special position statement regarding the Catholic Church, which was in effect for over thirty-five years, is a completely new idea in the Constitution of 1937 in comparison to the statement on religion in Article 8 of the 1922 Free State Constitution. It is, therefore, quite clear that the Constitution as conceived for the nascent republic in 1937 intended a central place for religion within the workings of the State and that, at least by implication, this place would be largely filled by the Catholic Church.

Even a rather cursory reading of the Articles above will reveal the degree to which the cultural institutions of Family, Education, and Religion are intertwined. The Family is regarded

as a moral institution and the Catholic Church's prohibition of divorce informs the Constitution's legislation against the dissolution of marriage as well as the marrying of any person who has been divorced, even if that divorce was decreed and sanctioned in another country. Education falls primarily under the purview of the Family, particularly with respect to the moral and religious desires that the Family may have for their child's education. Education that takes place in schools sponsored by religious institutions is subsidized and provided by the State, and any necessary imposition into education undertaken by the State will always give due regard to the rights of the children. These connections are presented as natural and the words "inalienable and imprescriptible" are used to describe the rights accorded to these institutions, even where their influences on one another are present. It would be almost impossible to discuss the Irish family without reference to its role in the educational system or without invoking some aspect of Catholic dogma or social teaching. In effect, the three cultural institutions are inseparable in the daily life of the Irish. As I mean to elaborate throughout Chapters Three, Four, and Five, the constitutionally legitimated cultural apparatuses of Family, Education, and the Church form an unholy trinity of repressive power and influence in Ireland during the lifetime of Flann O'Brien.

The writer we commonly refer to as Flann O'Brien was born Brian O'Nolan on October 5, 1911, in the town of Strabane, County Tyrone, in the north of Ireland (Cronin, *Laughing* 9). His education, to which I will direct additional attention in Chapter Four, was conducted largely at home until he was eleven years old. When Brian's father Michael finally arranged for more formal schooling for his sons, he chose the Christian Brothers School at Synge Street in Dublin. There, Brian's experience must have been like that of so many Irish pupils of the Christian Brothers—a mixture of drills, memorization, and fear of "the leather." Anthony Cronin cites a "Cruiskeen Lawn" column by "Myles" / O'Brien from much later that captures the place:

> Teachers were both Christian Brothers and laymen and, though they were not by any means uniformly savage, the worst of them were scarcely human at all. . . .
>
> I remember a loutish teacher announcing that since it was only six weeks to the Inter Cert exam he was about to start a reign of terror. "I'll make ye dence," he said, with unintended pronunciational ambiguity. I would not be bothered today to denounce such people as sadists, brutes, psychotics, I would simply dub them criminal and would expect to see them jailed. (*Laughing* 25)

When, in 1927, the family moved from Dublin proper to the separate Blackrock township, Brian began to attend the much more student-friendly Blackrock College, a school that catered to the burgeoning Irish middle class and, Cronin notes, boasted among its recent pupils Éamon de Valera (*Laughing* 31). The experience of Blackrock propelled Brian O'Nolan to enroll in University College, Dublin where, near the end of his first year, he started to earn some fame as a member of the Literary and Historical Society. This group, claims Stephen Jones in his introduction to *A Flann O'Brien Reader* (1978), appeared to play the role in Flann O'Brien's schooling that music had played in Joyce's (xvi). The six years that he spent studying and writing at UCD (1929-1935), where he earned a B. A. in 1933, were critical to the development of the characters and the pseudonyms that Flann O'Brien would put to use for the next thirty years, specifically, as Anne Clissmann notes, the Brother Barnabas character and pseudonym that stylistically informed the voice of the "Cruiskeen Lawn" columns (38). Clissmann offers an example from the university magazine *Comhthrom Féinne* that illustrates the satiric tone: "With true generosity," Clissmann begins, "Brother Barnabas sent a gift to the college for the new year. It was a painting. It showed Brother Barnabas 'walking through a snow-storm . . . clad in white

pyjamas, followed by a flock of white ponies. Overhead, as if leading the way, is a mystic white guillemot'" (42). The painting was a blank sheet of paper.

After Brian O'Nolan belatedly completed his thesis, entitled "Nature in Modern Irish Poetry," and earned an M. A. from UCD, he entered the Civil Service in July, 1935, in large part on the basis of his broad general knowledge and his strong skill in speaking the Irish language, the language of his home and of his education (Cronin, *Laughing* 66-74). His decision to join the Irish Civil Service meant that he was effectively following the lead of his father, who served on the Board of Revenue Commissioners (Cronin, *Laughing* 23). While in the service of the Irish government, a position he held until his forced retirement in 1953—a retirement precipitated, in good measure, by writing very unflatteringly about public officials in his column in the *Irish Times*—O'Brien had a front row seat to the unfolding of the official actions that emanated from the Constitution. Anthony Cronin explains that the Irish Civil Service had a well-earned reputation for providing those employees who were fortunate enough to land positions a stable and predictable career and a sufficient pension upon retirement.

However, the Civil Service was also known to countenance little in the way of political riskiness. Consequently, diligence and political invisibility on the job were prized qualities while inventiveness and ingenuity were not. It is worth noting that Flann O'Brien was not the only Irish writer of the era to serve the Irish state in the Civil Service. Brinsley MacNamara (1890-1963), Eimar O'Duffy (1893-1935), and Merwyn Wall (1908-1997) all spent some time as members of government agencies (Cahalan, *Irish Novel* 216). O'Nolan's time of service, beginning as it did two years into the parliamentary ruling period of Fianna Fáil, was influenced by the atmosphere of that party's increasing ideological inflexibility (Cronin, *Laughing* 76-77). The naturally irreverent young O'Nolan, who had achieved a measure of notoriety as a prankster

while at UCD, likely had to temper his personality in the early years of his time at the Department of Local Government. Cronin indicates that O'Brien was surprisingly discreet in performing his duties as Private Secretary to three Ministers for Health and Local Government, a position he took up in 1937 and one that placed a high value on discretion and political tact. The Private Secretary was the gatekeeper to the Minister and often set the tone for the type of relationship that the Minister would have with his subordinates and with other members of the Cabinet (*Laughing* 95-96).

Peter Costello and Peter van de Kamp indicate in their book *Flann O'Brien: An Illustrated Biography* that Brian O'Nolan had been writing the book that would ultimately be titled *At Swim-Two-Birds* during the summer of 1935 when he entered Civil Service, but that it was not his intention to publish it. They claim that the evidence for this is that there was no published work from 1935 to 1938 owing to O'Nolan's new position leaving "little time for even part-time literary activities" (61). However, Cronin complicates this view by suggesting that by taking his Civil Service position, O'Nolan merely "postponed the dilemma of whether the vocational claims of the writer's calling should be paramount" over all other aspects of his life (*Laughing* 81). While I agree with Costello and van de Kamp that the situation in which Brian O'Nolan found himself after his father's untimely death meant that he would have to supplement his income by writing (61), the level of literary activity he had engaged in before entering Civil Service—his contributions to the UCD alternative student magazine *Comhthrom Féinne*; his short-lived humor magazine project, *Blather*; the work he had completed resulting in his M. A. thesis; and, of course, the work already completed on the novel—indicates that writing was not reserved only for the passing of spare time. Whether it was his intention or not, the steadily increasing responsibilities that O'Nolan took on, both in service to the State and service to his

family, provided an almost perfect cover for the unconventional approach that he would apply to the realities of the political and cultural landscape that ensued from post-1937 Constitutional Ireland. As I suggested in the introduction to this study, O'Brien was able thereby to operate as a subversive who was not readily identified as such.

O'Brien reserved his critiques on the role of the state in cultural matters for his writing. Thus, a further connection between O'Nolan's service to the state and his subversion of officialdom was effected when, on October 4, 1940, he began writing a column for the *Irish Times* (O'Brien, *Hair* 1). Following a long-established tradition of assuming *noms de plume* for the purpose of providing satiric commentary, including the assumption of his Flann O'Brien moniker for *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Brian O'Nolan took the name Myles na Gopaleen when his column appeared for the second time (Costello and van de Kamp 71). Of course, in addition to the apparent necessity of keeping his identity as the writer of the column, called "Cruiskeen Lawn," from his civil service employers and which allowed, as Anne Clissmann indicates, the real-life Brian O'Nolan to "retire to an impregnable and safe position" (3), the name Myles na Gopaleen has its own significance. The name derives from a character in a Dion Boucicault play called *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) which itself was based on a novel entitled *The Collegians* (1829), by Gerald Griffin (Costello and van de Kamp 71). O'Brien's choice of pseudonym for the column also reinforces his antiquarian interests and knowledge of Irish literature of the nineteenth century to accompany his scholarly knowledge of Old and Middle Irish literature as presented in his M. A. thesis at University College, Dublin. The multiple degrees of remove (like the Chinese boxes in *The Third Policeman*) from O'Nolan's true identity and the embeddedness of meaning that the name suggests—"Myles of the little horses" was, according to Anthony Cronin, a "semi-heroic figure who is yet part outlaw and part picturesque peasant

storyteller" (*Laughing* 115-16)—permitted O'Nolan to be both an insider and a critic of the system at the same time. In his book *Public Works*, Michael Rubinstein further observes that, since it was illegal for a civil servant to speak publicly of political matters, Brian O'Nolan was protecting himself from the law, but that, additionally, he "divided himself into multiple selves with multiple pseudonyms in order to enable himself to do his job and to follow his literary vocation" (99). This was the indiscretion that O'Nolan had committed that ultimately resulted in his forced retirement. Brian O'Nolan, by this time, had been appointed Private Secretary to the Minister of Local Government, a post that required he spend significant time attending the Dáil Éireann. The overall disappointment O'Nolan experienced in watching the churnings of government firsthand informed the satiric and critical tone that Myles na Gopaleen took in writing his column. "His life as a civil servant," Costello and van de Kamp drolly put it, "was of creative use to him" (79).

In the following section, I will offer a snapshot of the state of conditions in Ireland during the period roughly contemporaneous to the professional life of Flann O'Brien. I wish to work through a discussion of family, Church, and education to provide a historical and sociological context for discussions of each as they are illustrated in O'Brien's writing. These analyses will be the subjects of the separate chapters on each cultural institution that will form the body of my study. Because it is my contention that the cultural institutions of the family, the Church, and education potently inform one another, the degree to which these connections are present will be evident throughout this section.

The unexpected death of his father in 1937, when Brian O'Nolan was only twenty-five, is a significant detail in the family life of the author. Family as a cultural institution during the years just before the establishment of the Free State and into the 1960s was far more complicated

than the naturalized idea of family as projected by the Constitution suggests it should be. While the Constitution of 1937 was shaped politically, written, and ratified under the government of Éamon de Valera, the influence of this most central of twentieth-century Irish political figures supersedes this critical action. When the Easter Rising of 1916, whose epicenter was the famed General Post Office, was quelled, many of the leaders were imprisoned and fifteen were executed. De Valera, Commandant at Boland Mills, one of six volunteer battlements outside the General Post Office, was spared, no doubt, in part, because the American Consul in Dublin made claims of American citizenship for him—claims, F. S. L. Lyons maintains, that were "not strictly accurate" (376). This reprieve, however, made in exchange for a life sentence of penal servitude, enabled de Valera to re-emerge during the Irish Civil War of 1922-23 as the political leader of those opposed to the 1921 Treaty that provided for the separation of Ireland into a twenty-six county Free State and a six county Unionist territory loyal to England (Lyons 461-64). As indicated above, eleven years after the Treaty, de Valera and Fianna Fáil came to power and sought to rectify the situation of the divided nation legitimated by the Treaty. Off and on—mostly on—from 1932 until 1959, Éamon de Valera served as parliamentary leader of Ireland. Prior to that, he was helping to lead a movement that eventually resulted first in a Free State and then to an outright Republic. After that, de Valera served as President of Ireland—a position representing more of a culturally symbolic leadership role than that of head of state—until 1973, leaving parliamentary politics to serve in this more ceremonial capacity (Lyons 583-85).

De Valera's particular spin on the way that family would be shaped in Ireland was a reflection of his idealized rural notions of Ireland in general. His own rural Munster background (Lee 74) may have been merely the beginning of what has been characterized as de Valera's fascination with the rural idyll (Ferriter 365) and images of bold peasant self-sufficiency (Lee

186). In biting and hilarious satiric prose, Flann O'Brien challenges these notions of an idyllic, self-sufficient peasantry in both his early Irish language novel *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth*) and in his second, albeit last-to-be-published (only the year after his death) novel *The Third Policeman.* O'Brien clearly appears to be playing upon the common definition of the expression "poor mouth." To "put on the poor mouth," one makes "an exaggerated assertion of poverty." In particular, the motifs of the rural Gaeltacht are subject to parody in *The Poor Mouth* when O'Brien writes, "I don't think there'll ever be good conditions for the Gaels while having small houses in the corner of the glen, going about in the dirty ashes, constantly fishing in the constant storm, telling stories at night about the hardships and hard times of the Gaels in sweet words of Gaelic is natural to them" (35). And this very funny tautology undoes the rural idyllic world imagined by Dublin-dominated leaders of the Free State:

1. The tempest of the countryside was too tempestuous.
2. The putridity of the countryside was too putrid.
3. The poverty of the countryside was too poor.
4. The Gaelicism of the countryside was too Gaelic.
5. The tradition of the countryside was too traditional. (50)

A scene from *The Third Policeman* describes the serenity of the fabled Irish countryside, culminating with this description:

> Ahead of us went the road, running swiftly across the flat land and pausing slightly to climb slowly up a hill that was waiting for it in a place where there was tall grass, grey boulders and rank stunted trees. The whole overhead was occupied by the sky, serene, impenetrable, ineffable and incomparable, with a fine

> island of clouds anchored in the calm two yards to the right of Mr Jarvis's outhouse. (86)

By the end of that novel, when the reader becomes aware that this heavenly scene is part of a ceaseless ring of hell for the narrator, this is how the Irish idyllic countryside has been inverted:

> The sky was livid and burdened with ill omen. Black angry clouds were piling in the west, bulging and glutted, ready to vomit down their corruption and drown the dreary world in it. . . . The trees by the road were rank and stunted and moved their stark leafless branches very dismally in the wind. The grasses at hand were coarse and foul. Waterlogged bog and healthless marsh stretched endlessly to left and right. The pallor of the sky was terrible to look upon. (197)

Beyond whatever expectations may have attended Éamon de Valera's rise to power, the image of Ireland as idyllic and rural, self-sufficient and strong, was doubtless shared by many, both in and outside of Ireland. Terence Brown suggests the widespread nature of that vision:

> After the War of Independence and the Civil War in a politically divided island with a border truncating the country, the image of the creative unity of the west, the vision of heroic rural life in the Gaeltacht or on a western island served as a metaphor of social cohesion and an earnest of a cultural unity that transcended class politics and history. Islands of Gaelic-speaking people in a sea of Anglicization, the Gaeltacht and the western island represented that ideal unity which nationalist ideologues had envisioned and prophesied, but which reality had failed to provide. (81)

There certainly are ways in which de Valera's (and others') vision of family in Ireland is upheld and reinforced by the reality of the period. Finola Kennedy's *Family, Economy, and*

Government in Ireland (1989), a comprehensive study of the interplay of family, economic, and governmental factors in Ireland, cites the sociologist Charles Horton Cooley's definition of primary groups and their roles as socializing transmitters of culture. These primary groups are characterized by intimate, sympathetic face-to-face association and cooperation, among which family is a critical example. By this definition, the institution of family is both influenced by broader culture and is an important influence on culture (4). That means, of course, that governmental policies have impacts on families and at the same time are informed by the presence of families and governmental concern for their well-being.

The rise of Fianna Fáil, de Valera's republican party, secured an outright majority in the Dáil Éireann in 1933. Joseph Lee observes that both agricultural and industrial policies floundered in the 1930s worldwide economic crisis. Policies to reverse emigration trends yielded little positive result. Other policies, such as the Unemployment Assistance Act of 1933, the National Health Insurance Act of 1933, and the Conditions of Employment Act of 1936 were all designed to provide aid, in one form or another, to families who might otherwise have suffered even more dramatically during the crisis (195). But these policies also abetted the perhaps inevitable conversion away from an idealized rural Irish culture to a more modern and industrial one. Terence Brown describes the phenomenon this way:

> When Irish writers turned to rural Ireland to discern there an unsullied tradition, they naturally highlighted those aspects of that life which suggested an undying continuity, an imperviousness to change, an almost hermetic stasis that transcended history. In so doing they were popularizing a notion of tradition that ignored the degree to which Irish rural life by the early twentieth century was as involved with the processes of history and social change as any other. (76)

Both Flann O'Brien, in *The Poor Mouth*, and his precursor Tomás Ó Criomhthainn (Thomas O'Crohan), whose memoir *An tOileánach* (*The Islandman*) served as a model for O'Brien, capture this idea in their oft-repeated phrase, reported and translated by James M. Cahalan in *The Irish Novel* as "Ní bheidh ár léitheidí arís ann" or "Our likes will never be there again" (243). This phrase applies to all manner of reputedly soon-to-be-extinct characters in *The Poor Mouth*. Ambrose the pig "died of his own stench" and "I do not think that his like will be there again" (28); "during the course of the feis many died whose likes will not be there again" (61); at the end of the novel, as Bonaparte goes into jail, his final line declares the truth—"I do not think that my like will ever be there again" (125). The sad (to Éamon de Valera) truth of Ireland's transformation is that one may declare that Irish society should be preserved in amber, but the realities lie elsewhere.

These historical processes brought on an emergence of a growing merchant class, and facilitated changes in the practices that were previously associated with the rural ethos:

> The traders who sought respectability discouraged haggling over prices and warily eyed their competitors as they dispensed credit to the farm community that could not have existed without it. A concern with social class absorbed their excess energies directing the better-off traders to ally with members of the various professions to found tennis and golf clubs, establishing these as the symbols of polite social improvement. Life for the successful shopkeepers and the professional classes was comfortable if unadventurous. (Brown 79)

O'Brien's depiction of the middle and professional classes tends to de-emphasize the actual work of the characters, and instead reflects their awareness of the perceptions associated with their class status. Thus, in one of his more unkind moments, the young student narrator in *At Swim-*

Two-Birds can identify his uncle as "concerned-that-he-should-be-well-thought-of. Abounding in pretence, deceit. Holder of Guinness clerkship the third class" (25). And in his later novel, *The Dalkey Archive*, and perhaps more in line with the changes that Ireland had undergone between the 1930s and the 1960s, O'Brien's narrator Mick describes his sometimes girlfriend, Mary, as having a "top job which Mick knew paid well and involved consorting only with people of standing" (55). Concerns with status are somewhat secondary to my analysis of cultural institutions in this study, but certainly Flann O'Brien's writing represents this class awareness.

The economic transformation that was taking place in Ireland had its impact on the demographics of Irish family life as well. According to census data from 1936, 1946, and 1951, Ireland consistently trailed every nation in Europe and North America in the percentage of its population that had ever married. This persistent truth appears to be reflected in the general lack of intact families, the frequency of absence of parents, and the minimizing of marriage in O'Brien. While the average percentage of populations that had married by age 64 for the comparison nations was 88.9 percent for males and 85.5 percent for females, in Ireland, those percentages were 70 percent and 76 percent respectively (Humphreys 253-55). Irish males and females also tended to marry at later ages than other national populations. According to the same data, by age 39, Irish males were married at only a 50 percent rate, while Irish females were married by age 39 at a 65 percent rate. In comparison, other nations exceeded 50 percent marital rates for males and 65 percent marital rates for females largely by age 29 (Humphreys 254). In rural areas of Ireland, the numbers are so aberrant that they are nearly not to be believed. In 1936, an astonishingly high 72.8 percent of rural Irish males remained unmarried by age 34 compared to their town counterparts' unmarried rate of 47.9 percent and by 1951, the rural unmarried male rate had gone down only to 68 percent (Humphreys 256). These data show

that there was little change in the state of marriage owing to nearly fifteen years of Constitutional privilege bestowed to the family.

Flann O'Brien, as Brian O'Nolan, illustrates several of these demographic points. He had to take on the responsibilities of family when his father Michael O'Nolan, the man whom Brian ostensibly followed into the Civil Service, died with no apparent warning. Leaving a small savings of £550 and a large home and family to fend for itself, Michael O'Nolan effectively bequeathed to his third son the care of mother and siblings (Costello and van de Kamp 61). Civil Service security of employment must have seemed a welcome relief to the younger O'Nolan, who, at age twenty-five, was now almost the sole supporter of his family. Perhaps because of the parental role that he assumed, O'Nolan did not marry until he was thirty-seven and, for reasons that are not entirely clear, and like his great satirical predecessor Jonathan Swift, he had no children (Cronin, *Laughing* 167).

Urbanization affected marriage rates in the middle of the century as the percentage of single males and single females at age 34 in town areas dropped from 47.9 percent and 42.8 percent respectively in 1936 to 42.2 percent for males and 37 percent for females by 1951 (Humphreys 256). Alexander Humphreys points out that the earlier age of marriage for urban males and females in comparison to rural dwellers is "peculiar" to Ireland, since marriage in the rural areas of Ireland "is so extremely late that it [late marital age] can scarcely be maintained in the city" (243). Finola Kennedy provides a survey of reports and statistical studies that show these trends of low marital rates and high marital ages, both rural and urban, but particularly rural, to be a product of two factors. First, there is the factor of the famines in the mid-nineteenth century when marriage rates were quashed by death and emigration, and, second, there were the Land Purchase acts that prevented the subdivision of farms among the sons of the landowner.

Along with the relative nonexistence of other means of making a living in rural areas, these Land Purchase acts left few men in positions to support a family. The result was that females in rural areas moved either to towns, where they faced greater competition for eligible men, or away from Ireland altogether (*Family* 28-29). Thus, the above statistic indicating that nearly 73 percent of rural males were unmarried in 1936 is belied by the fact that, in 1946, marital rates among farmers—those who owned the land, as opposed to farm workers or relatives helping on the farm—was 72 percent in comparison to an overall rate of only 45 percent for rural male workers (*Family* 57). Because marriage was usually followed by a fairly significant number of children, Kennedy points out in her follow-up study *Cottage to Créche: Family Change in Ireland* (2001) that marriage often meant starvation or, at least, poverty for those who did eventually marry. As she puts it, in the days preceding the economic upturns of the 1960s, it was a matter of "Marry if you can afford to do so" (2).

In the 1930s, American sociologists C. M. Arensberg and S. T. Kimball studied rural life in County Clare and dubbed the system that prevailed in it and other rural counties "familism"—a system of highly developed social roles, headed by the patriarch whose unchallenged place was to raise livestock and prepare his eldest son and, under this system, sole heir eventually to succeed him. During this time the son was held in abeyance as a "boy" even, on occasion, until his fortieth birthday and beyond. When the time arrived for a changing of the power structure in the household, typically when the father was eligible for a meager old-age pension, the heir would take a wife and settle into what was now his farm. The elderly father and his wife would retire from the central place of the home—the kitchen—to a small wing of the house littered with the symbolic trappings of the family and its history (Brown 13-15). And the pattern would begin anew. For the patriarch, the role of economic king of the home evolved into the role of keeper of

the lore of the family. These may well have been the people to whom de Valera looked for atavistic models of rural and domestic bliss for all the Irish.

One parodic portrayal of such "bliss" is presented by O'Brien in one of the end scenes of his long-delayed novel, *The Third Policeman* (1967). John Divney, the narrator's accomplice in a twenty-year-old murder, sits in the kitchen of his home. "He had grown enormously fat and his brown hair was gone, leaving him quite bald. His strong face had collapsed to jowls of hanging fat" (195), while his wife, herself "old, very fat and very grey," yet great with child, waits upon him. Here they are visited by the shade of the narrator, a man whom Divney had set up for an explosive death in order that Divney may keep for himself the money they stole from their victim. The still-young appearance of the narrator's dead presence is like that of the son who claims the land from his decrepit father and who, in the novel, sends the "father" literally to his death: "He turned lazily towards the open door, half-arose and gave a scream . . . . [H]is loose face shrunk and seemed to crumble to a limp pallid rag of flesh. His jaws clicked a few times like a machine and then he fell forward on his face with another horrible shriek which subsided to heartrending moans" (195).

Despite Ireland's chronically low marriage rates and high marital ages, Finola Kennedy's assertion that "plentiful numbers" (*Cottage* 2) of children followed from marriage means that birth rates exceeded the average birth rates of several comparable nations. In particular, in the decade 1936 to 1946, owing to reduced outmigration during the war years and a slight uptick in marriage rates, the number of births per thousand population in Ireland was 20.4, or roughly two births per thousand above the average in much of northern and central Europe. That number increased in the next five years to 22 births per thousand, greater than all other comparable nations except the Netherlands (*Cottage* 19). However, as Kennedy also cautions, birth rates are

not to be confused with marriage fertility rates. While birth rate reflects an overall number of births per thousand population, and likely indicates for Ireland the slight increases in the raw number of marriages, fertility of marriage data are the number of births per marriage during the entire duration of the marriage. These numbers declined from 414 births per 100 marriages in 1911—the year of Brian O'Nolan's birth—to 353 births per 100 marriages in 1961—just a few years before his death. These declines were to become even more notable for the period after 1961 (Kennedy, *Family* 36-39). That there is a decline at all during a time when the Irish Constitution provides its official sanction of family as a critical institution ought to give cause for questioning the value of that sanction.

It is also worth noting that in Flann O'Brien's five novels, there are mentioned only three births—in *At Swim-Two-Birds* one birth, which is only in the imagined novel-within-a novel, is the result of a rape perpetrated by one "fictional" character on another; in *The Poor Mouth* one birth results soon after in the death of the child, and the other is the birth of the narrator, whose parents both seem unclear about the cause of the event. O'Brien concludes his novel *The Dalkey Archive* with the promise of a birth, but here, too, there is some distinct uncertainty as to how this promised birth could be possible, a point upon which I will elaborate at length in Chapter Three. Flann O'Brien clearly does not follow any sort of cultural norm in his portrayal of the size of families in his work, a choice that is particularly surprising in light of the eleven siblings he had.

As I earlier suggested, the birth of children in many Irish marriages was often associated with harsh conditions. One striking example of these conditions may be seen in the common practice of performing a procedure known as a symphysiotomy, or widening of the woman's pelvis during difficult deliveries. Between 1949 and 1954, Dr. Arthur Barry claimed to have

performed over one hundred of these procedures at the national maternity hospital on Holles Street, Dublin—the same hospital made famous in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. This procedure, which the doctor claimed was preferable to caesarian section, may well have been performed because Catholic moral doctrines privileging the life of the child over that of the mother had influenced the hospital's policies. Discontinued in the 1960s, symphysiotomies came to be seen as dangerous, having caused permanent pain among many of its recipients (Ferriter 501).

Woman died in childbirth during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s at rates that made the very act of having children a considerable hazard. In 1921, the maternal mortality rate, due to a combination of medical conditions during childbirth as well as diseases during pregnancy and child delivery, was roughly one maternal death for every two hundred births. In some Irish counties, the rate was nearly one and a half times that. To be certain, this seeming fact of life for women was both accepted as such and unacceptable, and the widespread use of penicillin and other drugs in the 1950s made childbirth far less dangerous, until, in 1994, Ireland could boast the lowest rates of maternal mortality in the world, down from a frighteningly high 481 deaths per 100,000 births in 1921 to a mere 3.8 deaths per 100,000 births in 1991 (Kennedy, *Cottage* 32-33; 51). But the decades immediately preceding and following the Constitution of 1937 were not kind to women, especially mothers. O'Brien's Irish-language novel, *The Poor Mouth*, despite its play upon the style of the Great Blasket Island memoir *An tOileánach* (*The Islandman*) by Tomás Ó Criomhthainn, published in 1929, is set in a somewhat indeterminate time, so it is not clear that O'Brien wishes to reflect this deadly time for women and children. However, the novel reflects the tragic reality of high mortality rates among mothers and children as both the young wife of the protagonist, Bonaparte O'Coonassa, and their year-old son,

Leonardo, succumb within a few lines of one another. Both the harshness of this reality and its relative commonness are shown in O'Brien's bathos-tinged account. Finding his infant son in a state of "indisposition," Bonaparte hastens to locate his wife to seek her assistance:

> What do you think but that I found her stretched out, cold in death on the rushes, her mouth wide open while the pigs snorted around her. When I reached Leonardo again in the place I had left him, he was also lifeless. He had returned whence he had come.
>
> Here then, reader, is some evidence for you of the life of the Gaelic paupers in Corkadoragha and an account of the fate that awaits them from their first day. After great merriment comes sorrow and good weather never remains forever. (87)

The paradoxes of late marriages, low marital rates, the gradually falling marital fertility rates, and the common conception that Irish Catholics were prolific in the size of their families are hard to explain. One theory that seems to touch on all three cultural institutions in this study suggests that both marriage and large families were approached more cautiously after the Famine years because economic downturns were particularly hard to survive. The Church's attitude toward women—that they were to be obedient and self-sacrificing, as well as repressive of their sexuality—meant that when few males could inherit a farmstead, few women could see themselves in positions as wives, and, consequently, as mothers. This led to the high rates of emigration among women, for economic reasons, principally, but also for the increased opportunities they sought to be regarded as independent, to be well-educated, and to be self-determining in their personal sexual lives (Coogan, *20th Century* 168-69).

In addition, women faced an uphill battle with regards to employment when Éamon de Valera had carved out for the government the right to prohibit outright or to limit the extent to which women could work within industry. The 1936 Conditions of Employment Act states:

> When any regulations made under this section are for the time being in force in respect of any form of industrial work it shall not be lawful for any employer to employ to do such form of industrial work either (as the case may be) any female worker or so many female workers that the number of female workers so employed by such employer bears to the number of other workers so employed a proportion greater than that fixed by such regulations. (Section 16, § 2)

Tim Pat Coogan comments that this Act had an effect that ran counter to previous constitutional guarantees as well as to the 1916 Proclamation which called for equal rights and opportunities for all of Ireland's citizens (*20th Century* 223). Because the Conditions of Employment Act preceded the Constitution itself, it unquestionably informed the two provisions of Article 41, section 2 on the place of women in Irish families.

The second cultural apparatus that held sway over Ireland with a vise-like grip was the Roman Catholic Church. "Modern Irish history could easily be viewed by a Catholic apologist as a morality play," writes Donald Akenson in *A Mirror to Kathleen's Face* (1975), his study of twentieth-century Ireland, "with the unfolding of events leading to a virtuous and meaningful conclusion, in this case the enthronement of the Catholic authorities as the conscience of the nation." From Akenson's perspective, the power and the influence that the Church possesses is significant, but is also garnered with the complicity of the laity. He continues, "The church in Ireland has exercised more power than in any other advanced country in the twentieth century. Its power has been based both on practical realities, such as its great financial resources and

social influence, and upon the church's control of various esoteric mysteries relating to the other-world with which the Celt has always been preoccupied" (93). However, Diarmaid Ferriter suggests that there was at the heart of "Ireland's legendary institutional adherence to the Catholic faith" a brand of subversive resistance to "excessive enforced piety" (334) that manifested itself, at least in part, through a carnival atmosphere in connection with the commemoration of one hundred years of Catholic Emancipation in 1929. Emancipation, which repealed the Penal Code that had institutionalized religious intolerance and which granted to Catholics the right to hold office and to be educated in a sanctioned school (Kineally 7-11), was a watershed event which may well have propelled the Church into the place of political, social, and cultural power it has enjoyed for nearly two centuries in modern Ireland.

It is impossible to adequately describe the magnitude of the Irish Catholic Church's influence within a few paragraphs or pages. Similarly, it is difficult to limit discussions of that influence to a period ranging within a few decades. Emmet Larkin's magisterial study of the Catholic Church in Ireland, covering the period of 1850-1918, runs to eight volumes and several thousand pages. During the time period Larkin addresses, one important theme is the increasing significance of the clergy. On the institutional power of the Church in the pre-Emancipation days, Larkin commented that the strength of the small landowner class, insufficient on its own to bring about repeal of the penal laws, had to be wedded to that of the clergy, a conjoining that the Catholic leader Daniel O'Connell, known as the Liberator, was able to accomplish. He writes of O'Connell that "by incorporating the clergy he secured the only institutional apparatus that permeated, however imperfectly, to the grass roots, and from the masses he acquired all the strength and menace implicit in their aggregate numbers" (*Dimensions* 96). While this two-headed strategy was successful in securing Emancipation, it failed as a strategy in securing

repeal of the 1800 Act of Union with Britain, Larkin contends, because of two factors. First, O'Connell was unable to effectively incorporate the Church into that cause and, second, he lacked sufficient influential British support for repeal. Citing John B. Broderick, Larkin writes, "Early in 1834, when O'Connell had been agitating repeal for over four years, the bishops formally capped their caution at their annual meeting by forbidding the use of Catholic chapels for political purposes and exhorting their priests to abstain from those political activities that were not in keeping with their calling" (*Dimensions* 97). Far from removing the Church from political involvement by their actions, the bishops clearly permitted the power that had evolved out of the successful campaign for Emancipation to influence the repeal debate against O'Connell and what they may have perceived to be O'Connell's own growing power and influence. By bestowing their influence on one occasion and by withholding it on another, the Church's hold on power was thereby strengthened. Indeed, by the 1840s, the Roman Church's hierarchy condemned any further involvement of the Irish Church in political affairs, causing repeal efforts by both O'Connell and the more radical Young Ireland movement to implode (*Dimensions* 97).

Selective political activity by the clergy is on display and is the subject of Flann O'Brien's critique in *The Hard Life.* Father Kurt Fahrt, S. J., offers disquisitions on all subjects in his frequent, whiskey-sodden talks with his friend Mr. Collopy. But when pushed by Collopy to assist him in a venture that would bring much needed aid to the women of Dublin on a sensitive matter—the absence of public lavatory facilities—he demurs. Collopy begins:

> Decent people should look after women—isn't that right? The weaker sex. Didn't God make them the same as he made you and me, Father?
>
> --He surely did.

> --Then why don't we give them fair play? Mean to say, you or I can walk into a pub—
>
> --I *beg* your pardon, Collopy. I certainly can *not* walk into a public house. You never saw a priest in a public house in your life. (42)

The Jesuit's refusal to engage in this battle is not so much based on his sense of its justice, or lack of justice, but on the way that he is himself both implicated in the act of denying public toilet access to women, by virtue of his maleness, and is also put upon by the laws of the Church that would seem to deny him that access as well.

After 1891, when the death of Charles Stewart Parnell—popularly known as the "uncrowned king of Ireland"—left a power void in the Irish party and the various players in the Irish-Ireland movement worked to establish their bid to supplant the party over a thirty-year timeframe, Sinn Féin and Éamon de Valera were ultimately successful because they eventually received the grudging and initially suspicious support of the Church in much the same way that the Protestant Parnell had done in the 1880s—by keeping the Church in the legislative loop. Once support for Parnell had been damaged by the scandal surrounding the divorce proceedings of his eventual wife, Kitty O'Shea, the Church also aided in Parnell's fall from grace (Lyons 197-99). The Church continued its give-and-take approach to supporting or undoing the political fortunes of those in secular power for the next forty years. In fact, it was the impression the Church had of the devotion of the rank and file members of Sinn Féin to the Church and its priests that helped to salve the wounds of the demise of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1918 (Larkin, *Dimensions* 118). That the Church's support of de Valera's faction of Sinn Féin was guarded and held in reserve was evidenced, according to Emmet Larkin, by its support of dominion rather than republic status in 1921—a clear repudiation of de Valera (*Dimensions*

120)—and an issue that later helped to sweep de Valera and Fianna Fáil into power in 1932. For approximately one hundred years before the birth of the Irish Free State, the Catholic Church and its clergy were in a near-constant position of power brokerage with the political forces of Ireland over the heart and soul of the identity of the nation as it evolved.

Larkin argues, ultimately, that the longstanding political relationship between leader and party and the Church which was begun with O'Connell, reinforced by Parnell and continued even through the de Valera years had the effect not only of making the Irish nation more certain and secure, but also of assisting it in controlling the most violent of the nation's tendencies as expounded by Young Ireland, Fenianism, and the republican strain of Sinn Féin. All of this had the final result of making the state, once it fully emerged, more Catholic than it might have been otherwise (*Dimensions* 122). From the perspective of the Church, a free Ireland was a Catholic Ireland. Terence Brown remarks:

> It is arguable, indeed, that what concerned many people in Ireland in the 1920s and the early 1930s was not a conflict of Anglo-Irish and Gaelic culture but the tensions between a social majority and a minority, both identified in part by religious affiliation. Such certainly was the impression created by some of the Catholic Action associations and organizations that flourished in the 1920s and early 1930s, all of them determined that Irish life in the independent state should bear a frankly Catholic complexion and that Catholic power should assert itself unambiguously in social and economic terms as it had been unable to do in the past. (115)

In his novel *The Dalkey Archive*, Flann O'Brien invokes the influence of the Catholic associations and organizations that Brown mentions. Convinced that he has discovered the long-

believed-dead James Joyce in a bar in the town of Skerries, O'Brien's character Mick queries the old man about his most famous work *Ulysses*, a book the old man denies writing and which, he contends, had been written by a team of pornographers. Instead, he claims to have written "mostly pamphlets for the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland. I am sure you know what I mean—those little tracts that can be had from a stand inside the door of any church; on marriage, the sacrament of penance, humility, the dangers of alcohol" (175). While the Catholic Truth Society is only one of several such associations, O'Brien has his fun with both the Church and with his predecessor Joyce—especially when he suggests that Joyce would comment on marriage, a condition that he avoided for nearly twenty-seven years after he left Ireland with Nora Barnacle, and also on the dangers of alcohol, a problem that Joyce shared with O'Brien.

One of the ways that the Church flexed its muscle during the 1930s was with a series of well-structured and highly visible celebratory events. In addition to the centenary celebration of Catholic Emancipation mentioned above, an enormous gathering of Catholics descended on Phoenix Park in June of 1932 for the closing High Mass commemorating the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of St. Patrick's mission to Ireland. Estimates of over one million attendees for this Mass, which also marked the conclusion of the Dublin Eucharistic Congress, made the Irish crowd the largest percentage of any host nation's population for like celebrations (Tanner 294). Marcus Tanner comments that, although the crowds were substantially smaller in Cork, in Limerick, and in Waterford and in Tuam in 1936 for various other Catholic celebrations, the grand scale of the overall triumph of the Church's public presence in the 1930s is remarkable for two reasons. First, the strong showing of the Church's visible power seemed a somewhat ironic resurgence of the Republican political force that had lost the Civil War in the 1920s only to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the population, a resurgence that would ultimately inform

the Constitution and Irish politics more broadly in the coming decades. Second, the Church and state affiliation had the effect of trading one sort of imperialistic relationship for another (297-98). Thus, in the same year that Fianna Fáil called for an end to the Oath of Allegiance to Britain, over one-third of all Irish people attended a High Mass in Phoenix Park presided over by a papal legate from Rome whose welcoming drive through the streets of Dublin was greeted by thousands on their knees (Tanner 295). It is little wonder that James Joyce gives us Stephen Dedalus's complaint to the Englishman Haines against colonialism:

> —I am a servant of two masters, Stephen said, an English and an Italian.
>
> —Italian? Haines said.
>
> A crazy queen, old and jealous. Kneel down before me.
>
> —And a third, Stephen said, there is who wants me for odd jobs.
>
> —Italian? Haines said again. What do you mean?
>
> —The imperial British state, Stephen answered, his colour rising, and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church. (*Ulysses* 1.638-44)

Perhaps Haines is too immersed in his task of appropriating Irish cultural capital to be aware of the Irish condition, but the Irish certainly were not. Tim Pat Coogan has quipped, "[A]s Mother England vacated the corridors of power, Mother Church took them over" (*20th Century* 170). While the entity to which the Irish swore their governmental allegiance changed after de Valera's ascent to government, the allegiance to Mother Church was, if anything, intensified.

I noted earlier that Ireland's movement toward urbanization created changes in the demographics of marriage and family. In most European nations, such a trend toward the city also had implications for religious life among the citizenry. Terence Brown describes an unusual situation whereby the secularization that typically accompanies urban demographic shifts did not

take place in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s. He attributes this to the power of the Catholic Church and its ability to dominate Irish society. Brown argues that the very dynamism of the urban shift may have contributed to the steadfastness with which Irish urbanites clung to their Catholic positions, contending that many of these new Dubliners were recently denizens of more rural and traditional areas. Thus, the gradual secularization that ordinarily attends the population's move to urban centers had not had time to develop. This had an impact not only on the religious life of the Irish but also on their family life, resulting in strong family bonds in Ireland at a time when many other European countries were experiencing loss of familial bonds. In fact, Brown notes, "Often, indeed, the move to the city brought the country man and woman closer to the actual bricks and mortar of the church than they had been in the countryside. Between 1940 and 1965 thirty-four churches were built in Dublin and twenty-six new parishes were formed" (209). The O'Nolan family's move from the more remote town of Strabane to the capital city of Dublin echoes these reasons for moving into the city of Dublin and it is there that Brian O'Nolan remained for the duration of his days, a devout Catholic (Cronin, *Laughing* 52). His belief in the Church, however, did not impede his parries at its actions on earth.

The ideological power of the Church, as well as its tentacle-like reach into both the institutions of family and education, may not have been more in evidence than in the failure of the so-called "Mother and Child Scheme." Beset by a host of pressing health concerns in the years following World War II, in particular the growing threat of tuberculosis, the newly-formed inter-party government of John A. Costello was left to implement a health plan first envisioned by Dr. F. C. Ward and further developed by the de Valera government's first Minister of Public Health and Welfare, Dr. Jim Ryan. The centerpiece of the plan called for improving health inspections in schools, finding ways to reduce the effects of infectious diseases, and, most

notably and problematically, providing free medical care for mothers and for all children up to age sixteen without the requirement of means testing. Costello's coalition government appointed Dr. Noel Browne to the task and Browne, young, idealistic, and driven by his own personal family losses to tuberculosis, succeeded in stemming the tide of the disease, thanks in large part to the availability of an effective vaccine. Bolstered by this success, Dr. Browne naïvely undertook to enact the part of the Ryan health plan that applied to medical care for mothers and children.

When Ryan first formulated the plan in 1947, the medical community expressed deep concerns that the government provision of free care would threaten their livelihoods. But the truly powerful reservations about the plan came from the Catholic Church which, based on its claims that the plan violated family rights, the Church's authority in educational matters, and, critically, the Church's doctrines on social teaching, filed a private complaint with Éamon de Valera. In 1951, Dr. Browne was met by the same obstacles. But, unlike de Valera and Ryan, who were excused from the fray by virtue of their party's loss of governmental power, Browne found himself tilting at the members of the medical community, the Catholic Church, and the leaders of his Clann na Poblachta party as well as the entire inter-party cabinet. Through a series of missteps, over-reaches, and underestimations of the power of the status quo, Dr. Noel Browne's public career came to a screeching halt (Lee 313-18).

When the *Irish Times* published an editorial expressing the widely-held—and seemingly correct—view that Browne's resignation after the scheme's defeat was ordained by the Catholic bishops' pressure on the Cabinet, there was backlash against the newspaper. Myles na Gopaleen, as O'Brien's *Irish Times* persona, engaged in this complex bit of Irish political infighting by writing a series of columns defending the newspaper's editor, while at the same time waging a

journalistic assault on one of its attackers, who happened to be President of University College, Cork (Cronin, *Laughing* 178). The entanglements between the state, the family, the Church, and even the institution of education could not be more clearly—or, perhaps, obscurely—in evidence. Had the implications of the health plan excluded any one of these arenas, the Mother and Child Scheme might have gone forward. But the calculus of the unholy trinity of family, the Church, and education in this matter appears to have doomed it from its inception.

Almost from its official beginnings, educational policy in Ireland has had ties to the Catholic Church. The premier historian of Irish education, Donald Akenson, points out in his book *The Irish Education Experiment* (1970) that for nineteenth-century Irish people, educational issues of importance were nearly always seen as religious issues (2). He indicates that, in comparison to both England and Scotland between 1800 and 1900, Ireland's system of popular education by the central government, located at that time in England, preceded theirs by about forty years. This is especially surprising in view of the relative lack of industrialization, significant urbanization, or breakdown in agrarian order and family structure in Ireland, factors that tend to drive the establishment of a centralized educational system. The original non-denominational character of the system devised in 1831 gradually and inexorably gave way to a de facto denominational system by 1851 as the Catholic Church grew in power (6-15).

While Akenson is almost exclusively discussing the National System in Ireland as it developed in the nineteenth century, the enduring legacy of that system heavily influenced the state of education into the twentieth century. For example, among five factors Akenson identifies in the creation of the National System is the tradition of legislative intervention in educational affairs and the Irish peasantry's desire for their children to be schooled, each of which persisted into the timeframe this study explores. The effort by the Parliament in Ireland to

encode the National Education System into the culture was certainly part of a broader goal to undercut the Catholic Church's role in education, and the hedge school—wholly unauthorized sites of learning, hidden among the hedgerows of the Gaeltacht during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—became the not surprising Catholic response. These itinerant projects sought to answer the need that Catholics felt for educating their own during the prevailing Penal Law period, without which, Akenson contends, Catholics felt they would be "ground into economic helplessness, permanent social inferiority, and religious ignorance" (50). O'Brien's depiction of the rural school in *The Poor Mouth*, upon which I will elaborate in Chapters Three and Five, appears to be based on the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century hedge school model but with decidedly non-Irish Gaelic motives.

Diarmaid Ferriter reports, however, that by 1900, the Catholic Church was in control of some 9,000 of the national schools and that the attendance rate at national schools was a lackluster 65 percent. Relatively poor attendance notwithstanding, illiteracy rates were fairly low—approximately 12 percent. However, the physical facilities of the national schools, even in the metropolitan area of Dublin, were inadequate; only 63 of 167 national schools in the colonial capital had toilet facilities (88). Donald Akenson argues that the Irish Free State authorities eventually had to face the problem of the low proportion of children on the primary school rolls who attended school regularly. Despite the existence of the Compulsory Attendance Act of 1892—legislation requiring parents of children aged six to fourteen to send them to school at least seventy-five days a year and which was designed to bring Irish attendance levels to the standards of the English—average daily attendance stayed around the seventy percent mark during the second decade of the twentieth century (*Mirror* 11). During this approximate timeframe, Anthony Cronin informs us, none of the O'Nolan children attended school. Not until

the family's move to Dublin in 1925 did Brian O'Nolan receive any school-based education. When the now thirteen-year-old Brian began his brief career at the Synge Street Christian Brothers School—"[t]here could hardly have been a worse choice" in Cronin's estimation—he had read his way through much of his father's extensive library of both Irish and English language books (*Laughing* 24-27). Levels of attendance in Ireland failed to reach the legislatively expected level of eighty-five to ninety percent in large part due to lack of cooperation from the main municipalities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford. These municipalities' refusal stemmed from the Catholic Church's opposition to compulsory school attendance on the grounds that such compulsions infringed on parents' rights, an ideology that appears to have informed the language of Article 42 on Education in the Constitution. In addition, the government's denial of financial aid to the Christian Brothers schools irritated the local governments and the Church, thereby offering no incentive for parents to send their children to schools with any regularity (Akenson *Mirror* 11). The nearly inextricable reliance of civil educational authority upon the authority of the Church meant that neither the priorities of the Church nor the educational bureaucracy were fully met. And the loggerheads at which these disagreements about priorities placed both institutions continued well into the early- to middle-twentieth century.

Not long before Flann O'Brien's lifetime, Irish universities were few and attendance was confined to a small minority. Dublin University (University College, Dublin); the Queen's Colleges of Cork, Belfast, and Galway; and Trinity College accounted for a total of approximately 1,000 students in 1908 (Ferriter 89). Of course, by the 1930s, there was a very clear delineation drawn between Trinity College, seen as a symbol of historical unionism, and all others in Ireland, culminating with what can only be characterized as a ban on attendance at

Trinity by any Catholics (Tanner 299). However, the growing separation between Catholic and non-Catholic educational purviews did not result in a privileging of Catholic success, at least in terms of facilities. According to Diarmaid Ferriter, in the 1930s and 1940s, conditions in schools were "appalling" (430); the Catholic Church's apparent opposition to necessary reforms to the management system of primary schools seems to be the reason.

The importance of ideological positioning in schools had been evident in the nationalistic era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the Gaelic League partnered with youth educational organizations such as the Irish Fireside Clubs. In particular, the Irish Fireside Clubs (IFC) fostered Irish-language instruction primarily outside the national school curriculum and emphasized self-sufficiency and personal independence. Ríona Nic Congáil indicates that the IFCs and, later, the Gaelic League, held a central position in the indoctrination of children by cultural nationalist movements during its active period which extended into the years of the Irish Free State (112). This movement emphasizes the ideological importance of education both in and outside of traditional structures and problematizes cultural nationalist movements by showing their desire for the uncritical acceptance of their ideological agendas. In addition, Patrick Ledden observes that religion and social class were important determiners for not only whether Irish children attended school, but also where they attended. Owing to their respective origins, both the National Schools and the Christian Brothers schools were most likely to contain the poorest students, regardless of religious affiliation. Differences in social class and religion imply much about the kind of education an Irish child would receive in early twentieth-century Ireland (330-332). O'Brien illustrates some of the ideological outcomes that schools were expected to provide to their charges in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in *The Poor Mouth*, and in *The Hard Life,* as well as in several of his newspaper columns. But he also addresses the social

expectations and outcomes of education in more general ways in his treatment of scholarship and the intelligentsia throughout his work. Observations on these concerns will be more thoroughly developed in Chapter Five.

Tim Pat Coogan indicates that Éamon de Valera himself knew that for the vast majority of Irish, primary education was their only education. While there were 464,000 pupils in primary schools in 1950, there were only 7,900 in university. Further, the curriculum of the schools to which most Irish were confined was heavily loaded with the teaching of the Irish language and the Roman Catholic catechism and the teachers were themselves quite limited, most having been either small farmers or small shopkeepers prior to their teacher training, the preponderance of which was available only at Catholic colleges. Coogan states that "it would be almost impossible to overstate the amount of built-in resistance to change in the Irish educational system which existed in the relationship between the Church, an extremely conservative department [of education], and politicians . . ." (*20th Century* 429).

While the compulsory education of children in the Irish language was being increased, which resulted in a reduction of the time spent on other subjects, the number of native speakers of Irish was diminishing, shrinking from 200,000 in 1922 to half that number by 1939, only to fall again by half in 1964 (Lee 134). This is an amazingly precipitous drop in Irish speakers from the post-Famine year of 1851, especially when one considers that, even after starvation and emigration had cut the population of Ireland by half, only one-quarter of the remaining population, or approximately one million people, spoke the native language (Kiberd 21). O'Brien's Irish-language upbringing and the strong likelihood that he was employed in the Civil Service on the basis of his fluency in both the written and spoken forms of the language suggests that Irish language education was an important issue for him. The importance of this issue is

indicated particularly by the prominent role it plays in *The Poor Mouth* both in the way that the language holds a central place in the plot and the fact that the novel was written in Irish, but the language issue is never far from the text throughout his work, particularly in many of his "Cruiskeen Lawn" columns in the *Irish Times*.

Several failed efforts to "make Irish pay" were effected, especially in the Gaeltacht. Among these were incentives to students to write their examinations in Irish and penalties to schools whose teachers were not proficient in Irish, regardless of their subject area. Joseph Lee concludes that "[t]his approach did little to elevate Irish, but much to demean education" (135). Luke Duffy, an important member of the Labour Party, believed that the future of Ireland's political and economic freedom lay with the improvement of the civil service and he linked the requirements of the civil service exams with educational curricula, suggesting that the former directly shaped the latter (Lee 197). While Duffy can perhaps not be blamed for doing so, he had clearly associated education with the reproduction of the relations of production, a viewpoint right out of the theory set forth by Louis Althusser. This emphasis on education and its role in the success of a more truly autonomous Ireland helped to set the stage for the place it held in the 1937 Constitution.

Michael Mays comments on the importance of education as part of de Valera's national identity project. While the centrality of Irish language preservation, promotion, and propagation certainly were important goals of the educational vision of Fianna Fáil, Mays indicates that, for de Valera, "education must impart a whole range of national values, must be the means by which individuals could be socialized in the first instance as *national* subjects" (107, Mays's emphasis). De Valera contended that the schools, especially those in the National Schools system, "were to be at the heart of Irish life, preservers of the past, shapers of the present and the future" (107).

Given the article-level position of education in the 1937 Constitution, this set of goals illustrates how de Valera saw the construction of a unique and autonomous Irish nation as likely the most important outcome of that Constitution and that education would play a critical role in that construction. Mays further discusses the links between education and both the Church and the home and family. He explains that beyond the teaching of traditional academic material, education was intended to promote virtue and character-building, "the inculcation of a middle-class idea of respectability," and would transcend the classroom to impact the home. The tripartite disciplinary authority of the teacher, the priest, and the father coordinate with one another to ensure that hierarchies are preserved so that the proper national virtues are effected (107).

Yet for all the lip-service paid to education, particularly in the 1940s, in the years during and following World War II, better known in Ireland because of its official neutrality as "the Emergency," while other members of the Irish civil service were granted modest cost-of-living awards in 1944, teachers received only a tiny fraction of those increases. When, in 1946, the Irish National Teachers Organization went on strike to protest a continued lack of compensation, a seeming hold-over from wartime exigencies, the Church weighed in supporting the teachers. In a complex bit of business which saw de Valera contend that he could not offer raises to one group of public servants at the expense of others equally deserving (an apparent contradiction of what had occurred in 1944), the Church played both sides, bowing to governmental requests to take into its schools students who were affected by the work stoppage. Even this action by the Church was complicated by the fact that schools run by orders of sisters did not follow the actions of the schools run by the Christian Brothers (Coogan *20th Century* 337-38).

The whole series of episodes illustrates what happens when religious and civil powers are so interconnected. Neither the Church nor the government suffered adverse material effects, but nearly everyone else did. This conclusion seems to be at the heart of O'Brien's theme in his novel *The Hard Life*. Bemoaning the lack of action on his project, Collopy holds both the city council and the Church equally responsible for not getting things done. When a member of his committee suggests that the best way to get the attention of the council is, following the model of Guy Fawkes, to "[p]ut a bomb under the City Hall" (77), Collopy asks his companion Father Fahrt what the Church would think of such an action, opening the door for a round indictment of the Church's refusal to get involved as well. Collopy concludes his harangue with the cogent observation that, while the Church had put Fawkes up to the plot, it was only he who paid the price: "But Lord save us, poor Fawkes couldn't climb up the ladder to the gallows, he was so badly bet and broken up in the torture. He had to be carried up. And he was hanged outside the building he tried to blow up for the greater glory of God" (80).

By the 1960s, the Church's influence on education was no less prominent. Of 569 secondary schools in operation in 1964, roughly 465 were under management of Catholic religious orders; in 1961, almost three in five teachers at that level were members of religious orders (Coogan, *Rising* 216). And, though the timeframe slightly outstrips the parameters of this study, Tim Pat Coogan cites Irish Church-State relations authority J. H. Whyte's observation that, even into the early 1970s, the Church's control over education in Ireland exceeded that of every other nation in the world (*20th Century* 168).

At nearly every turn, one can see that policies and practices relating to the cultural apparatuses of family, the Church, and education have implications for economic conditions. Rural Ireland's inevitable march toward greater industrial urbanization, low marital and birth

rates punctuated by large families and the likelihood of attendant poverty and disease which resulted from them, struggles with equitable employment as well as emigration are family and social concerns with economic consequences. The Church's political machinations in connection with nationalistic questions and movements, the level of control that it commanded over questions of education, and the power of the Church to shape social policy also influenced the economic landscape. Finally, the transmission of ideological beliefs which takes place in schools and, arguably, outside of them as well, clearly determines who the intellectual power brokers will be, with impact on such issues as access to education, levels of funding and physical conditions in schools, and curricula, all of which will keep most Irish people in their appointed social place. Marxist and cultural materialist readings of texts recognize that cultural production of all types is inextricably bound to the economic system—the power structures of the means of production. Institutions such as family, the Church, and education are used by the power of the dominant ideology to help maintain and expand the means of production. Thus, a close examination of these ideologically-informed institutions can reveal where they serve their hegemonic, albeit official, functions and where the gaps in their representation might serve as an entry point for discussions of how they may be subverting those functions. Flann O'Brien constantly addresses one or another of these cultural institutions in his work. As this chapter has indicated, the family, the Church, and education as cultural apparatuses pervade the novels, the newspaper columns, and even the plays of Flann O'Brien and, in nearly every treatment of them, the writer reveals faultlines that invite the critic to discuss their subversive value.

In the next three chapters I will be exploring in more detail how the ideological effects of the cultural apparatuses in Ireland is undermined by Flann O'Brien's writing. In Chapter Three, the ideological apparatus of the family, endowed with special status by the 1937 Constitution in

Article 41, comes under scrutiny. Flann O'Brien routinely challenges both the received place of family and the idealized expectations that the idea of family raises in Ireland.

CHAPTER 3

"MY FATHER AND I WERE STRANGERS": THE FAMILY AS APPARATUS OF IDEOLOGY

The Monty Python film *The Meaning of Life* offers an extravagant parody of the dominant ideological state of affairs in Yorkshire, England in the early twentieth century regarding the place of family. As the stork delivers what appears to be the one hundredth child to the family of man who has just learned that his coal mining job has disappeared, the man comes to the realization that he must sell his children for medical experimentation. This drastic and preposterously black-comic action is necessitated by the Catholic Church's remonstrance against any sort of artificial birth control, which means that, in this parodic portrayal of the Church's doctrine toward families, every time this man wishes to have sexual relations with his "wife"—humorously played in Pythonian manner by Terry Jones—they must have a baby. In the West End style musical theatre number that follows, the dominant chorus rings out the ideological position: "Every Sperm is Sacred." As part of a long line of biting satires harking back to Swift's *A Modest Proposal* on the role played by large, predominantly Roman Catholic families in the ultimate stability of social life, this moment suggests that adherence to dogmatic belief often results in absurdity.

While I will address more directly the ideological implications of the Church in Chapter Four, absurdity may well be the default condition for families in the writing of Flann O'Brien, whether they are represented by O'Brien himself or by Myles na Gopaleen, Brian O'Nolan's other chief alter-ego. In a collection entitled *The Best of Myles*, one of his famous "The Plain People of Ireland" columns in the *Irish Times* begins, "The son of Pharaoh's daughter was the daughter of Pharaoh's son. Know that old one?" The legendary Plain People of Ireland, whom

the author alternately celebrates and derides, ask incredulously "How could that be, man? How could a man's son be his daughter at the same time?" (103). Myles has now doubled the fun. Not only has he posed a challenge to the Plain People, wording that challenge as the setup for a joke—an "old one"—but he has the Plain People respond in a manner that alters the statement. He did not say that the man's son was his daughter. He said that the man's grandson—Pharaoh's grandson by his daughter—was the daughter of the man's son: Pharaoh's granddaughter by his son. Or did he? Of course not. The fact that Pharaohs of ancient Egypt, especially in the Ptolemaic dynasty, could be women merely lines up with the jokester's game of sons being daughters. Additionally, however, Myles pulls a maneuver like that of Stephen Dedalus, who "proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 15). Myles posits an algebraic equation as well, conflating what seem to be unlike values: "Let x equal the son of Pharaoh. Go further—call him Mr. X. Then what you have is Mr. X's daughter was the daughter of Mr. X, surely not an unlikely relationship in all the circumstances" (103). In the process, Myles has done to the confused and confusing relationship what the Plain People could not do, that is, state equivalencies. One must read the joke equation as "Pharaoh's daughter equals daughter of Pharaoh" in order for the "old one" to work. This type of joke, what Richard M. Kain has identified as an Irish bull—a "logical statement of an absurdity" (157)—is common in Ireland. Indeed, in 1803, the Irish literary matriarch Maria Edgeworth collaborated with her father on a text entitled *An Essay on Irish Bulls* in which the two argue that Irish bulls defy definition. In the introduction to that essay, the Edgeworths wrote that bulls are part "incongruity of idea," part "confusion of idea," part "laughable" idea. Many, they claimed, are not of Irish origin, but it is, perhaps, no ironic stretch that in their brief chapter entitled "Irish Newspapers," they locate a

particular source of Irish bulls in the newspapers of the time, where "there is no great danger" that readers will find anything except folly. This has been Myle's plan—to confound and amuse everyone, through the newspaper. Incongruous, confused, laughable, and foolish are words that also describe the state of the family in the writing of Myles na Gopaleen and Flann O'Brien.

In the same compilation of columns in the *Irish Times* in which the Pharaoh joke appears, Myles na Gopaleen offers a view of the family that represents a dominant ideological position, one clearly and characteristically couched as a satire:

> For me the family is . . . *everything.* And what more lovely than a family of girls! Any person calling himself a man . . . anyone taking to himself the honourable style of Parent—nay, Guardian—any such jolly defendant leading (how false there sounds the Active Voice!) a life of quiet desperation, knows but too well what resinous high-tensile heartstrings bind the girls to . . . the grandest, finest, best and bravest old . . . Momma in Earl DeWarr, sorry in all the world. How dear to such fellows the familiar scene around the crackling log fire in the vast baronial hall assuming—just for the hell of it—a maximum fibre stress of 1,000 lbs/in (sq) for each log. (378)

He continues to draw the scene of candles reflecting off the mahogany wall panels and of elk-hounds on the tiger-skin rugs, evoking the broadest of Victorian stereotypes in a colonial era. Establishing this position as the starting point for the institution of family is consistent with the idea that the hearth is the scene of family interaction. Yet Myles once again undoes the apparently heartfelt seriousness of the scene with the ridiculously whimsical factuality of the log's heat content. In *The Nineteenth-Century English Novel: Family Ideology and Narrative Form*, James F. Kilroy writes, "In the virtual museum of the visual arts, the gallery displaying

English painting of the nineteenth century is dominated by genre painting: depictions of ordinary people—*les gens*—primarily in domestic settings. The hearth is the dominant setting in which comfortable scenes of parents and children are presented" (1). While the artistic depictions of the family gathered around the crackling log fire, surrounded by the trappings of the civilized gentry represent the ideological norm, O'Brien frequently uses the hearth as the locus of protest as well, thereby subverting the dominant ideological narrative. In this brief parody of the expected domestic refuge, Myles firmly plants his tongue into his cheek, calling into question the devotion that parents have for their children as the children themselves wait desperately like inmates for the jailer to release them.

Flann O'Brien consistently approaches the family and the implicit ideological place that the family occupies in Irish society with a humorous and subversive eye. The laughter that the reader indulges in masks the seriousness of the critique in which O'Brien engages. The family—imagined by the Free Staters as a bulwark of tradition and stability in Irish culture, especially after it was ensconced in the officialdom of the Constitution—comes in for O'Brien's comic undoing. Through his comedic inversions, Flann O'Brien effectively challenges the privileged place of the family and its role in the shaping of Irish identity in the Free State.

Scenes of ordered domesticity such as those discussed by Kilroy are powerful ideological tools. These scenes suggest that the home ought to be a location of controlled stability reflective of a larger social and cultural stability. Tony Bennett suggests that what he calls the "exhibitionary complex" is a mechanism of power that uses the display of ideas through museums, courts, and the like to inculcate into the populace what the state expected of them as citizens. The relationship between the populace and the displayed ideas was made to seem not one of terror, as was suggested by a Benthamite open penitentiary, but one of lessons learned

about civility, of civilization. Bennett indicates this civilizing force: "To identify with power, to see it as, if not directly theirs, then indirectly so, a force regulated and channeled by society's ruling groups but for the good of all: this was the rhetoric of power embodied in the exhibitionary complex—a power made manifest . . . by its ability to organize and coordinate an order of things" ("Exhibitionary" 130). The family, as represented in the popular depictions, was an ordered exhibition of the state expectations. However, political discourses of the reality of family life served as a repudiation of the imagined ideal. In the literature of the nineteenth century, the types of domestic narrative paintings that Myles described in his ideal family scene are pervasive. Myles uses their iconic ubiquity as a locus of humor intended to challenge their truth and, ultimately, their assumed stability. Again, James Kilroy comments, "The very feature of Victorian genre painting that subsequent generations found offensive—the insistent moralizing—constitutes its inherent protest and its participation in the public dialogues of the time" (3). The ideological importance of both the depiction of family life in its idealized forms and the moralizing that Kilroy identifies as part of that depiction is further addressed:

> The viewer of a stereotypical Victorian domestic portrayal is expected to judge: to regard the scene of a mother and child embracing while the father appears in the doorway, returning from work, as emblematic of the family as a model of social solidarity, or the scene of one generation attending the deathbed of a grandparent as inspiring dignified and dignifying sentiments, or the scene of little brothers and sisters returning from school as a recognition of the security provided by home life in its most elemental manifestations. (4)

The Victorian world did not end at the shoreline of England. The Victorian worldview was pervasive in a colonial era, an era out of which Ireland was slowly, yet determinedly,

emerging. Joseph Brooker brings the Victorian domestic image around to Ireland. He seems to indicate that the viewpoint that newly emancipated Irish people were to embrace was one of the idealized West when he argues, "Again [the Irish] language stands for a large social idea: the Gaelic-speaking peasants of the West embodied an idealized Ireland of primitive community, traditional values and ethnic purity" (63). This is the idea of the Ireland envisioned by Éamon de Valera, as outlined in my previous chapter. Flann O'Brien challenges these ideological depictions at nearly every opportunity with comic, albeit realistic, depictions. In a scene that describes the death of Mrs. Crotty in *The Hard Life*, the deathwatch proceeds in James Kilroy's expected dignified and dignifying way, with candlelight in the dying Mrs. Crotty's room and the priest in attendance to administer last rites and hear her confession (57-58). However, in the funeral scene, O'Brien undoes this edifying attitude by way of Manus's behavior. Manus's sullen drunken state is not an expression of grief for the dead. Instead, he intends to further cleave the "family" by announcing his intention to leave school and, eventually, the household entirely, claiming that "An Irish address is no damned use" (67). The episode results in a row between Mr. Collopy and Manus, effectively overshadowing the dignity of Mrs. Crotty's burial and clearly pointing up the discordant nature of the family.

Collopy's grief over his wife's death is, of course, genuine, despite the fact that he has no children with her. Indeed, Mrs. Crotty is mother to no person and has no filial or familial connection to any other character besides Collopy. Her general place within the novel is that of a person who is unpleasant. This is in part because of her pain, but also because of the nature of her physical ailment, an indisposition that shows itself primarily in bedwetting. Either way, this unpleasantness makes it easy for the reader to dismiss her, just as Manus has. In this way, the reader, as Kilroy suggests, does make a judgment, and the view of family one takes away from

this novel is hardly that of the rural ideal. Humor ultimately gives way to O'Brien's serious commentary about illness, loneliness, and death. This humor-becomes-serious commentary carries over to the very functions of the family as depicted in O'Brien's work.

Family functions were changing with the industrialized landscape. The family that had once been a relatively self-contained and self-sustaining social entity was rapidly being challenged by the urbanization that marked the nineteenth century. One view that scholars have taken on the place of the contemporary family is that the traditional roles of the family are being supplemented, if not, indeed, supplanted by other institutions. Typical family functions, such as socialization of children, are, according to Martine Segalen, shared with such institutions as education. Another view, suggests Segalen, is that the family as a social unit is stronger than ever because it is the primary locus of emotional relationships: "According to this view, all the warmth of those social relations that once embraced a wide range of kinfolk, neighbours and friends is now seen as being focussed [*sic*] more narrowly and more intensely on the nuclear family and on close relatives" (2).

A common argument suggests that a move toward industrialization weakens the family. These views argue that as fathers, principally, although not exclusively, the primary wage-earners, spent increasing time away from the nuclear family during the week, more expectations fell to women for nurturance of their children than had been the case in the rural world. James Kilroy contends that such claims have "been solidly refuted on the basis of examination of statistical evidence" (8). The continued suggestion that the family's demise was imminent as a result of the changes in society may well be the most compelling evidence of its continued importance, especially to the ruling class. Segalen identifies the link between family stability and the dominant ideological value of that stability when she writes, "The instability of

proletarian families was a source of concern to the dominant classes, who wished to restore the power of the family and that of patriarchal and monarchical authority and to use the former as an instrument to foster morality amongst the working classes" (2). Segalen advises that a view of the family as being in crisis might be better replaced with a view that considers the lived experiences of families through the "economic, social and cultural upheavals of the last one hundred and fifty years" (2-3). In that timeframe, argues historian Jerry Z. Muller, the family came increasingly to be the locus of economic as well as biological reproduction. This was a result of the socializing, civilizing, and educating role that families played in shaping future workers and consumers. "To use the language of contemporary economics," Muller notes, "the family is a workshop in which human capital is produced" (33).

Flann O'Brien grew up in a family that may have had more advantages than many in Ireland in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Despite this relative privilege, as Brian O'Nolan, Flann O'Brien witnessed firsthand the effects that the domestic role expected of women in Ireland had on his family when his father, Michael, died unexpectedly in 1937. Michael O'Nolan's untimely death left his wife, who had little or no place in the economy, financially responsible for several young children, a responsibility that ultimately redounded to the twenty-five-year old Brian. One should note that the relative economic ease of life that the O'Nolan family experienced during Michael's lifetime places it in virtually direct conflict with the economic life of many other Irish families, such as that which was experienced by James Joyce. Both Brian O'Nolan and James Joyce grew up in large families. But while the Joyces moved from one domicile to another with great frequency, each move reflecting a downward turn in the family's financial solvency because of John Joyce's failures, the numerous changes of address for the O'Nolans was always the result of a promotion for Michael. And even though

Brian was the third child of twelve, he never writes of large families, preferring, instead, to create lone characters or those with one sibling and, perhaps, an extended-family pseudo-sibling.

The 1922 Constitution's disposition on roles for women was not an official factor in Brian O'Nolan's mother being unprepared for the responsibilities befalling her after her husband's death. There are relatively few references to gender in that document and the few that exist are invariably egalitarian. Article 3 opens with a statement on eligibility for Irish Free State citizenship by saying "Every person, without distinction of sex . . ." after which it stipulates the conditions of said citizenship. In similar fashion, Article 14 outlines the qualifications for the right to vote for members of the Irish legislative bodies, Dáil Eireann and Seanad Eireann, identifying the minimum ages of twenty-one and thirty, respectively, as the thresholds for the two houses, but also stating that "All citizens . . . without distinction of sex" would be conferred this right. After these two references, the Constitution is silent as to gender. It remained for the Constitution accepted in 1937 to so carefully carve out gender-role distinctions. Article 41, Section 2, Sub-section 1 of this Constitution reads, "In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved." Sub-section 2 continues, "The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home."

The language of these stipulations appears to be looking out for the welfare of women. The support that the State receives by virtue of women's place in the home is so valuable, the Constitution suggests, that it should not be jeopardized by any "economic necessity to engage in labour" outside of the home. The rhetorical battles of women's labor within the home—labor nearly wholly without compensation—have been sufficiently fought without my having to

restate them here. Whether Agnes Gormley O'Nolan, Brian's mother, desired a work-life outside of the home is neither known from the available biographies of her son, nor is it, perhaps, of real consequence. The fact is that she gave birth to twelve children between 1908 and her husband's death and was, thus, effectively in no position to take employment outside the home. That Michael O'Nolan earned a salary sufficient to support his family made her place in the home secure—that is, as long as he remained alive.

The general disposition of the family as represented by Flann O'Brien and Myles na Gopaleen runs counter to both the more egalitarian 1922 Constitution of the Irish Free State and the significantly more conservative 1937 Constitution. The latter, shaped largely by the work of de Valera, urged a decidedly Irish brand of Victorian domesticity. This Victorian domestic world is dominated by hierarchies of fathers and, to a much lesser extent, mothers. Marriage is paramount, and the children who issue from these marriages are dutiful and obedient. As suggested by Kilroy's analysis, the principal feature of the family is presence—presence of fathers returning from work to find their wives and children present to greet them; presence of preceding generations who have led the way toward the stable middle-class life that all enjoy now because of their labors; presence of the school-age children whose return home signals a continuation of the cycle of forward progress. However, the dominant feature of family in the writing of Flann O'Brien / Myles na Gopaleen is absence. The absence of the family—so central to the proper functioning of Ireland as it flexes its newly independent muscle—is depicted humorously. But it is by this negation of the dominant ideological view of the family as legitimated by the Constitution that I see the writing of O'Brien / na Gopaleen as subversive.

The nuclear family and even close relatives are largely absent in O'Brien's writing. There may certainly be more to it than this, but Michael O'Nolan's death seems only to have

made permanent and total a situation that was regular and ongoing—his absence in the life of his family. This absence of father in the O'Nolan household further exacerbated the divided roles of Brian's parents along gender lines. Peter Costello and Peter van de Kamp speculate on the role this fact may have had on the lack of identifiable parents in Brian's later writing. They conclude that there was an overall gap in communication between the elder O'Nolan and his children that resulted in Brian's search for a model to guide him in his life (32). It is perhaps small wonder, then, that despite the lack of a physical presence of parents in the novels written under both the Flann O'Brien and the Myles na Gopaleen identities, so much importance is placed on the relationships between the main characters of these novels and some kind of surrogate parent. This is particularly true for the paternal role. One might characterize the male parental roles that are present as being fulfilled by either false fathers or absent fathers.

Biographical details of the type of relationship that Brian O'Nolan had with his own father seem to conflict with one another. While Peter Costello and Peter van de Kamp contend that the young Brian sought for figures to fill the void created by his father's frequent work-related absences from the family, the author's brother offers another view. Ciarán O'Nuallain writes:

> There are many kinds of father and they are likely to be as different from one another as people are. There are fathers who explain things and discuss current events with their children almost from the time that they attain the use of reason . . . . It would be foolish to say that our father was like the "Victorian father," that closed person having no real intercourse with his family you read about in English history and literature. On the other hand, he and we were not garrulous in voicing

> and discussing our opinions. It was not a question of churlishness—it was our habit or our nature. (57)

Ciarán further notes that while he was writing his own first book in the same room in which his father was working, "it never occurred to me to tell him what I was doing and likewise it didn't occur to him to ask" (58)—an apparent contradiction to the suggestion that Michael O'Nolan was not closed to communication with his own family. And yet, even though it seems that the father didn't know of his sons' involvement with their cottage industry publication, *Blather*, it appears that he may have read it anyway because he had a copy of every issue among his papers that were examined after his death (59). It is true that the flesh-and-blood reality of the father's relationship to his children was likely complex. The relationship that Brian O'Nolan had with his father may not fully explain the nature of the relationships he created in his writing, but the frequency with which the absence of fathers appears in that writing certainly invites discussion about meaning. Joseph Brooker suggests that one of the constants of Flann O'Brien's fiction is "the literalization of what was metaphorical" (34). Where Brooker particularly applies this idea to such devices as the aestho-autogamy of *At Swim-Two-Birds* as the literal version of the metaphorical creating of a character, I argue that the literal absence of parents in O'Brien, especially fathers, is emblematic of a metaphorical truth. O'Brien makes a very serious point about the subversion of the power of authority represented by fathers, in particular, when he comically erases those figures from prominence in his writing.

The ubiquity of parentless characters in literature may be so well established that to discuss its place in O'Brien may seem to state very little. Indeed, Edward Said's book-length discussion of origination and authority in fiction, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, identifies this condition as a manifestation of "the extraordinary fear of the void that antedates private

authority" (92). Said goes on to describe how the novel's characters are all treated by their author as children who have been granted life by that author, but who also knows that he can neither experience their story nor fully give them up. In this sense, the author lives through the lives he has created on the page, without those lives ever having been really fathered (93). If all fiction operates this way, then O'Brien would be no different. But it is in O'Brien's consistent use of the trope of the fatherless character that we may see the power of this idea in the Ireland of the mid-twentieth century. As Declan Kiberd clearly indicates in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, Ireland's invention is to be found in the triune convergence of the ancient Irish and their assimilation of outside influences, the period of English colonization, and the diaspora that flung the Irish into every corner of the globe (1-2). Origination and authority, generation and development, may be hard to pinpoint.

O'Brien's engendering of self, of characters who are themselves authors and creators, and who borrow others' creations, as in *At Swim-Two*-Birds, could suggest a form of sterility within the creativity. This idea is represented in his fiction and is even played out in O'Brien's own married life. There is the uncertain factuality of Brian O'Nolan's unverified marriage to eighteen-year-old Clara Ungerland in 1933—a marriage doomed because of her consumption. According to O'Nolan, she died a month after they married. Peter Costello and Peter van de Kamp observe O'Nolan's references to the Wagnerian-style tale he tells in an interview that appeared in *Time* in 1943—a tale on the theme of *The Palatine's Opera*, a story that tells of a young Irishman in love with a German immigrant's daughter—and Costello and van de Kamp intimate that O'Brien's story may be as fictitious as Wagner's (48-49). One may conclude that this marriage is an elaborate fiction. And of course, there is his rather late and surprising marriage to his co-worker, Evelyn McDonnell, a marriage that appears to have come out of

nowhere in December of 1948. Anthony Cronin reports that the marriage caught all of O'Brien's friends unaware. He indicates that "Most of them regarded [O'Brien] as simply uninterested in women; many of them had heard him make remarks which suggested an active hostility to the other sex. In a country where celibacy was not regarded as an unnatural or inexplicable state, he was regarded as a natural celibate" (*Laughing* 168). The marriage produced no children.

Flann O'Brien complicates the concepts of origination, authority, generation, and development in the openings of both his first and his last novels. Bernard Benstock comments on the *de rigueur* statement at the beginning of *At Swim-Two-Birds*: "All the characters represented in this book, including the first person singular, are entirely fictitious and bear no relation to any person living or dead" and its virtual opposite in *The Hard Life* which reads "All the persons in this book are real and none is fictitious even in part." Benstock anticipates Said's ideas on the creative power of the author when he says "O'Brien's cleverness is well taken: The traditional disclaimer presumes that reality is superior to fiction, while O'Brien's 'second thought' does not so much ally him with his creations as claim for them a reality of their own" (69). Keith Hopper also addresses the problem of authority or, better, anti-authority, as he explores O'Brien's postmodernism. For Hopper, O'Brien's postmodernist self-reflexivity on the author's central role as creative presence works against most modernist and realist literary conventions (14). Perhaps there is little need for the characters of O'Brien's creation to have parents since he has taken that role for himself. The characters are either totally of his engendering, necessitating no parent, or they are merely being recorded, as Tess Hurson suggests, as one would in a documentary (120).

From the very beginning of O'Brien's published fiction, the absence of the father is emphasized. Even before it is established that the narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* lives with his

uncle rather than with his parents, O'Brien offers the second of three possible openings for the narrator's novel by telling the reader that "Mr. John Furriskey . . . was born at the age of twenty-five and entered the world with a memory but without a personal experience to account for it" (1). Readers will later come to understand that O'Brien (or his protagonist or Dermot Trellis, depending on whom one might wish to credit for the characters' creation) calls this phenomenon "aestho-autogamy," a means of generating characters for use in fiction that does not require that they be born as infants and live their lives up to the point of their insertion into the story. John Furriskey is not born; he does not have a father. He simply appears, fully ready to be used by the author. The comic ridiculousness of a person being born at age twenty-five is not so ridiculous at all. No readers really expect the author to provide all the necessary history of their characters from birth, but for O'Brien to call attention to this convention is also to call the nature of fiction itself into question. Ultimately, because of O'Brien's penchant for iconoclasm, as he marks the artifice of literariness, the result is subversion of the dominant ideology, both of what it means to create fiction and of what it means to create a family. This is a strategy that O'Brien uses repeatedly.

Dermot Trellis's use of aestho-autogamy to produce a "living mammal from an operation involving neither fertilization nor conception" (37) invokes the mode of reproduction in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), an author and text that O'Brien incorporates into his own novel when he describes the narrator's most-prized books (3). In a sense, the notion of aestho-autogamy is also presaged by the way that O'Brien addresses the creation of or appropriation of characters: "Characters should be interchangeable as between one book and another. The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors could draw their characters as required" (19-20). The fact that aestho-autogamy eliminates the need

for “known quantities” as progenitors is also a possible comment on the continued “uncalled-for fecundity” (37) among Irish women. Furthermore, the narrator credits the popular Mr. William Tracy, “eminent writer of Western romances,” and another of O’Brien’s fictional creations, with the scheme that would essentially convert the production of family and family members into a capitalist enterprise: “He also envisaged the day when the breeding and safe deliverance of Old Age Pensioners and other aged and infirm persons eligible for public money would transform matrimony from the sordid struggle that it often is to an adventurous business enterprise of limitless possibilities” (38). Here one may clearly see O’Brien’s satiric commentary on marriage as a sacred social trust and on the place of women, particularly mothers, in Ireland and especially as it is ensconced in the Constitution. Too frequently in the economically-challenged Ireland of the post-1937 Constitution, marriage is merely the vehicle for the production of persons who are not seen as valuable to the society except as recipients of pensions or other public monies.

In another token of fatherlessness, the great tormentor of the novel’s narrator is his uncle, who stands in for the narrator’s absent father: “It is a great pity, observed my uncle, that you don’t apply yourself more to your studies. The dear knows your father worked hard for the money he is laying out on your education. Tell me this, do you ever open a book at all” (2). Based on the mix of both past and present tense verbs used here (“worked hard” and “the money he is laying out . . .”), it is difficult to determine whether the narrator’s father is deceased. He is merely not present, which leaves the narrator’s uncle to prod him and to keep track of his progress. There is a clear and resigned antipathy in the attitude of each character toward the other, in part because the uncle’s nagging is what the narrator might expect his father to do, and the narrator’s apparent sloth is what the uncle might expect from a son of his own. Thus, each character plays the role that is expected, but not with the person from whom the role might be

expected. Yet, as Bernard Benstock points out, the narrator's sloth "triumphs over" (64) the uncle's nagging when he passes his examinations with distinction, in a clearly subversive twist on both the family power calculus as well as the educational one.

Similarly, in the last novel that O'Brien wrote, *The Hard Life*, he repeats this early scenario of the absent father. However, while it is the case that the narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* never speaks of either father or mother, thereby erasing them from his world throughout the novel, young Finbarr in *The Hard Life* clearly addresses his parents' absence. Finbarr asked "where the mammy was." He remembers, "It is not that I half knew my mother. I knew half of her: the lower half—her lap, legs, feet, her hands and wrists as she bent forward. Very dimly I seem to remember her voice. At the time, of course, I was very young. Then one day she did not seem to be there anymore. So far as I knew she had gone away without a word, no good-bye or good night" (3-4). Again, a reader sees this as a humorous, quasi-nostalgic observation. However, notable in this passage is a decided lack of influence and presence of the mother. But even more striking is the lack of a discernible maternal voice; even though Finbarr "dimly" recalls the voice, he ultimately does not hear her last words to him. Also, this remembrance emphasizes her roles as a mother and as a woman in biological and physical, yet disembodied, terms rather than in parental terms. Finbarr's mother is a fractured collection of utilitarian body parts, all but silenced in his world. In contrast, the reader sees the upper-half representation of Finbarr's father: "At the time I found all this very vague and unsatisfying. I had never met my father at all but in due time I was to see and study a faded brown photograph—a stern upright figure wearing great moustaches and attired in a uniform with a large peaked cap" (4). While this description of the boy's father also focuses on absence, it does so by emphasizing the upper part of the father—moustaches and cap. He has a face, if not a voice. And even though it seems

he does not have a strong and actual tie to his father, having "never met" him, the associations with the father are more powerful. Finbarr's father is brown and uniformed, upright and stern. Even though he too is absent, he is clearly more graphically imprinted in his son's mind. This comical, gap-filled passage says a great deal about the realistic place of women in the consciousness of Ireland's citizens, particularly in a post-1937 Constitution society. While fathers, even absent ones, have faces and are generally more visible and powerful, mothers have only utility and, even if they are foggily perceived, they are all but silent.

Finbarr's first exposure to and awareness of Mr. Collopy, his appointed guardian, is not substantially better: "I do remember clearly enough my first glimpse of him was, so to speak, his absence." He has told us as well that this may not be a true memory of Mr. Collopy, but, instead, "rather a synthesis of all the thoughts and experiences I had of him over the years, a long look backwards" (9). Once again the "father" is aligned with absence, but this time that absence is juxtaposed with sight imagery through Finbarr's glimpse and his look backwards. "Over an ample crown, long grey hair was plastered in a tattered way. The whole mouth region was concealed by a great untidy dark brush of moustache, discolored at the edges, and a fading chin was joined to a stringy neck" (10). Thus, while Finbarr's physical sense of sight and Collopy's corporeality suggest presence, this may be a kind of illusion, mere thought. Finbarr and his brother Manus are now in the care of their proxy family, but the relationship is not fulfilling, as is graphically illustrated by these sense perceptions.

Not that Finbarr desires that his family world be unfulfilling. He tries to embrace and understand the new world he has entered:

> It is seemly for me to explain here, I feel, the nature and standing of the persons present. Mr. Collopy was my mother's half-brother and was therefore my own

> half-uncle. He had married twice, Miss Annie being his daughter by his first marriage. Mrs. Crotty was his second wife but she was never called Mrs. Collopy, why I cannot say. She may have deliberately retained the name of her first husband in loving memory of him or the habit may have grown up through the absence of mind. Moreover, she always called her second husband by the formal style of Mr. Collopy as he also called her Mrs. Crotty, at least in the presence of other parties; I cannot speak for what usage obtained in private. An ill-disposed person might suspect that they were not married at all and that Mrs. Crotty was a kept woman or resident prostitute. (13-14)

Note the formality of the constructions and the diction and Finbarr's awareness of the formality of the relationship between the married couple. There is also a great emphasis on the "halfness" of the various relationships and on the lack of connection between any of the parties except between Finbarr and Manus and between Annie and her father. It is as though there are small coherent families within the larger frame of "family." References to "kept woman" and "prostitute" clearly show that marriage is portrayed as an economic relationship, bordering, even, on concubinage. Indeed, even here O'Brien uses language denoting presence and absence.

Flann O'Brien's texts reward readings that uncover the binary nature of presence and absence, readings that are theoretically informed by the work of post-structuralism. Privileging of presence over absence in binary relationships is clearly outlined by Jacques Derrida in his discussions of deconstruction. Derrida seeks to set as indeterminate the long-held Western notion that presence reigns over absence by its association with the representations of signs for signification. He writes, "Difference can no longer be understood according to the concept of 'sign,' which has always been taken to mean the representation of a presence and has been

constituted in a system (of thought or language) determined on the basis of and in view of presence." Derrida continues, "In this way we question the authority of presence or its simple symmetrical contrary, absence or lack. We thus interrogate the limit that has always constrained us, that always constrains us—we inhabit a language and a system of thought—to form the sense of being in general as presence or absence, in the categories of being or beingness" ("Difference" 937). It seems that neither presence not absence should be accorded a position that privileges one in a more powerful ideological place than the other. Therefore, one might effectively argue that the absence of fathers in O'Brien does not so much signify a lack, but is merely interpreted as such by the dominant culture. Clearly, there is no vacuum of power in the novels, despite the relative absence of fathers as the culture's typical locus of family power. As we shall see more directly in Chapter Four, the Church holds an even more compelling expectation of the father as power figure in the family. Mary Wollstonecraft points out this cooperative effort to maintain paternal authority within both the family and the Church in *Vindication of the Rights of* Women: "[T]ill society is very differently constituted, parents, I fear, will still insist on being obeyed, and constantly endeavour to settle that power on a Divine right which will not bear the investigation of reason" (173). This viewpoint may represent a way to justify family obedience with Church obedience in O'Brien's novel *The Hard Life*.

In the dominant ideological world, the presence of fathers denotes power and control, where absence of fathers may well suggest that these desired outcomes of families are themselves absent. And because power and control are important in stable cultures and, especially, to those who see themselves charged with the maintenance of stability, absence is a threat. Ellen Willis argues convincingly that both the family and the Church as ideological apparatuses operate to perpetuate power relationships in terms of "patriarchal authoritarian"

postures. She contends that the ideology of the dominant culture seeks to replicate this patriarchal structure: "The basic impulse of patriarchalism, in this sense, is the drive to dominate nature, a project that requires control over sexuality (nature within us), control of women and children (unto whom the anarchy of nature and sexuality is projected), and social hierarchies that assume people's inability to govern themselves" (97).

In particular, the presence / absence binary with respect to paternity is an important element in Flann O'Brien. In O'Brien's novel *The Third Policeman*, as in most of his novels, the narrator is parentless. The events leading to this condition are somewhat ambiguous, in part because the narrator himself relates them to the reader and he does not know the details. While he claims to have been "born a long time ago" (7), he presents the story of parental loss from the apparent perspective of himself as a young boy, more or less incapable of fully understanding his own history. When the narrator is informed of the death of his mother, a public-house proprietor, hearing simply that she is "gone," he believes "that she might be back on Wednesday" (8), oblivious about the euphemistic use of the word "gone." His father's disappearance from his life shortly after that equally escapes his grasp. The same fat man in a black suit who had delivered the news of his mother's death returns and says, apparently of the narrator, "The poor misfortunate little bastard" (8), although, once again, he fails to understand that he is that character. Thomas Shea remarks in his study on the exorbitant nature of Flann O'Brien's work, "The comic confusion centers on a basic discrepancy between experience and the language of experience. As a child, the narrator perceives the absence of his parents yet his know-how with words is inadequate to a 'proper' understanding of the event" (116). Language both expresses and hides the truth from the narrator at the same time. The imputations of the boy's illegitimacy that arise out of the way that he says "it is possible that things happened

differently with my mother and with the customers late at night" (7) are perceived by others but not by him. The narrator knows that his mother is gone, but does not immediately know of her death. But more problematically, he knows that his father is gone, but may not have any real idea who his father is. Although there is a father—one who is present to the narrator—the true nature of the father, and even the true identity, as it is implied, is absent.

Flann O'Brien also teases us with the thought that a child may be born without its father having anything to do with it or, at least, any awareness of how it happened. In his Irish-language novel *The Poor Mouth*—his most consistently satirical, Swiftian book—O'Brien's protagonist, Bonaparte O'Coonassa, reports that his father, while present at his birth, "never expected me because he was a quiet fellow and did not understand very accurately the ways of life. My little bald skull so astounded him that he almost departed from this life the moment I entered it" (13). Absence of the father, in this case, even of his awareness of the process of paternity, continues to inform the thematics of Flann O'Brien's work. However, O'Brien complicates this issue further when he continues, "The people said that my mother was not expecting me either and it is a fact that the whisper went around that I was not born of my mother at all but of another woman" (13). Carolyn Dever comments on the place of both men and women in paternal questions:

> In the context of paternity anxiety, the mother is the *sujet suppose savoir*, the only figure whose testimony can validate legitimacy; thus the desire to contain female sexuality retrospectively collides with empirical evidence of maternal transgression. The overdetermined language of the maternal ideal thus emerges to distract from—and to compensate for—the massively disruptive potential of such testimonial power. (109)

It would seem that while there may be valid doubt as to the paternity of a child, there could be no such doubt of the maternity. Yet, in both *The Third Policeman* and *The Poor Mouth*, O'Brien plays with the "overdetermined language of the maternal ideal." O'Brien uses the virtual impossibility of maternity doubt as a humorous play on paternity anxiety. The possibility of doubt about paternity undermines male power and, as such, is a counterbalance to the expected authority of males. Therefore, Bonaparte's father's unacknowledged paternity anxiety is not particularly surprising. Men will not consciously entertain the prospect of an alternative paternity about which to be anxious. Either way, such paternity anxiety has its impacts on male effectiveness. O'Brien's novels rarely offer views of truly effectual male characters, partly because the traditional fatherhood role is compromised in most of the work.

The fatherhood role is so dramatically compromised in *The Dalkey Archive* that the protagonist, Mick (O'Brien infrequently names his main characters, but in this case he has used an unfortunate, but likely deliberate, ethnic slur), cannot have seen it coming his way. In the concluding lines of the novel, Mick's longtime girl, Mary, has surprised him with the news that she intends to marry his good friend Hackett, as it seems they have grown close while Mick has been occupied with metaphysical questions. When Hackett suddenly gives Mary over to Mick, proclaiming him to be "all right," Mick asks Mary if she meant to marry Hackett and she replies, "No Mick. You're just a bloody fool." Mick takes up where Hackett had left off, and obliquely proposes: "But the bloody fool you're going to marry?" (203). Mary accepts, but is not finished with the surprises, for as the couple discusses Mick's feeble mother and her decision to go live with her sister, Mary announces, "I'm certain that I'm going to have a baby" (204).

O'Brien's parody operates on a number of levels in this scene. First, the situation can only be described as a reversal of the Biblical annunciation from the angel Gabriel, this time with

the "virgin" Mary making the declaration. Second, Mick's intention in meeting Mary that evening was to break off their relationship, having earlier determined that he was better suited for a life in the clergy so that he could live out his burgeoning and, as I will discuss further in Chapter Four, heretical God-complex. Thus, in this opera-buffa turn, O'Brien offers us a subversive reading of the New Testament, with a non-virgin birth fathered by a non-God, who is not the father at all. Finally, Mary is a woman of the new, modern Ireland. She has an education, experience in France, is trained in music, and has a "top job which Mick knew paid well and involved consorting only with people of standing" (55). Mick even articulates the reasons why she is unsuited to him as a mate and concludes, "A reasonable case could be made for establishing that in fact she despised him. What was she, really, but a gilded trollop, probably with plenty of other gents who were devout associates? Or slaves, marionettes" (142). Mick's equating Mary, as a woman with her own ideas and her own means of support, with a trollop who treats males as slaves or puppets is deeply problematic and may even appear to validate the subservient place to which women were relegated in the dominant ideological framework of post-1937 Ireland. Mary would appear to run counter to everything that the Constitutional framework for families promotes. Surprisingly, Mary embodies all of the potentialities that have been denied to women like Annie in *The Hard Life,* women who occupy a pre-Free State Irish existence. Yet, in the final analysis Mary capitulates to the ideological expectation to marry and have a family, although perhaps not in that precise order. O'Brien's ambiguity about several of the details suggests a swipe at the authority of the family as traditionally structured.

This undermining of authority is informed by some critical analysis on O'Brien's predecessor, James Joyce. In "Paternity: The Legal Fiction," Karen Lawrence draws upon the

episode in *Ulysses* in which Stephen Dedalus tantalizes his audience of cronies and scholars at the National Library with the notion that "Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?" (*Ulysses* 170)—a passage that is a piece in the algebraic puzzle by which Stephen hopes to prove the paternity and grandpaternity of Hamlet and Shakespeare and ghosts. Lawrence analyzes both the legal and the fictional aspects of Stephen's statement on fatherhood. She summarizes Derrida's essay "Plato's Pharmacy," in which Derrida, she claims, emphasizes the "authority and the incertitude that attend the concept of paternity in Western culture" (90). Lawrence goes on to identify numerous ways that Joyce illustrates and elaborates on Stephen's postulate on the legal fiction of paternity, including Joyce's drawing upon what she calls "pater texts" (92), in particular his use of *The Odyssey* as pater text of *Ulysses*, noting, for example, the incertitude embodied in the relatively few actual references to the Homeric tale and the fact that the titles are variations of one another, not precise echoes. Flann O'Brien has used a similar pater text for his *The Poor Mouth*: *An tOileánach* (*The Islandman*, 1929) was a memoir by Tomás Ó Criomhthainn (Tomás O'Crohan) that clearly served as a guide to the sort of tale of the western Gael who believed that "the like of us will never be again" (O'Crohan 244), except as re-told by O'Brien—an idea that served, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, as a source of critique of the rural idyll. The paternity of O'Brien's text is not much in doubt, but the same cannot always be said for the biological paternity of any given son, as Stephen Dedalus contends.

The narrator's father in *The Third Policeman* may well have confronted this situation when he learned of his wife's death. However, the absence of Bonaparte's mother's testimony, even her seeming lack of knowledge of the validity of her own maternity, is an inversion of the typical paternal anxiety which could call into question whether a man is his children's father, but

which could not similarly question the mother's role. This also implicitly subverts the patrilineal ideology that dominates Western culture. But to do so directly would be problematic for O'Brien. His use of the apparently illogical and utterly comical situation of a woman not being certain that her child is her own implants the dissident challenge whether it is his intention to do so or not. Margot Gayle Backus has argued that the "transgenerational unspeakability pertaining to unauthorized sexual and social desires" (17) creates confusion in the nuclear family that manifests itself in what Esther Raskin calls "gaps and lacunae" (qtd. in Backus 17). In each of the cases indicated above, the gaps and lacunae relating to parental identity seem to invite readings that critique the traditional dominant ideological role of family as both publicly and privately monogamous. This would certainly confront the ways in which both the legal system and the Church would regard marriage and the ways in which these institutions expected children to be contained within and controlled by marriage.

Ideologically, the question of the narrator's lineage in *The Poor Mouth* is challenged still further by the events of his first, and only, day of school. When the oppressive schoolmaster demands to know his name, the narrator begins, "Bonaparte, son of Michelangelo, son of Peter, son of Owen, son of Thomas's Sarah, granddaughter of John's Mary, granddaughter of James, son of Dermot . . ." (30). A litany reminiscent of the Biblical list of "begats" and smacking of some of the puzzling language about Pharaoh's sons, daughters, and granddaughters with which Myles na Gopaleen worried the Plain People of Ireland, this answer is also clearly a declaration of the narrator's lineage and identity for ten generations—extending undoubtedly to a time well before the Act of Union with England in 1800. Bonaparte provides this answer because, as he says, "I had only Gaelic as a mode of expression and as a protection from the difficulties of life"

(30). However, neither the truth of his Irish identity nor the Gaelic language provides Bonaparte with protection:

> Before I had uttered or half-uttered my name, a rabid bark issued from the master and he beckoned to me with his finger. By the time I had reached him, he had an oar in his grasp. . . . He drew it over his shoulder and brought it down hard upon me with a swish of air, dealing me a destructive blow on the skull. I fainted from that blow but before I became totally unconscious I heard him scream:
>
> —Yer nam, he said, is Jams O'Donnell! (30)

While this scene is decidedly hilarious, it is equally serious in its ideological meaning. The christening bestowed by the schoolmaster, Osborne O'Loonassa, who himself is clearly not English, seems intended not only to be universal, but embodies elements that are both Anglo (James) and Irish (O'Donnell). Irish Gaelicism and its very purity are challenged in this renaming process. The implications are that true Gaelic lineage is immaterial and that, because this name is given to all the boys in the school, one after the other, one Irish name or person is the same as any other. This false naming also emphasizes an absence of authentic identity. At the same time, the episode offers a cogent parody of a similar false naming that takes place, for example, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* There, the very young Stephen Dedalus is falsely called "Lazy little schemer" by Father Dolan to account for an infraction of which he is as innocent as Bonaparte. But, in a passage that presages Bonaparte's false naming with a wooden oar at the hands of the schoolmaster, Stephen is struck by the priest's metal-cored leather pandybat (57-58). Where Joyce shows Stephen visibly shaken by a palpable injury, O'Brien's parody pays little attention to any physical impacts on Bonaparte, thereby imparting to the scene an unrealistic, children's-cartoon violence that, though initially bloody, does not last. The

cartoon quality of the episode is reinforced by Ralph Steadman's illustrations that accompany the Patrick Power translation.

Depicting a monstrously gaunt schoolmaster leveling an oar upon the limp body of Bonaparte while lethargic and sick-looking schoolmates serve as witnesses, all against a backdrop of the pouring rain seen outside the window, the illustrations occasion many of the stereotypes O'Brien conjures in his novel, and aid tremendously in projecting the humor of the book. However, the ideologically violent outcomes in O'Brien are no less obvious. The ideological outcomes presented by O'Brien are, indeed, hardly new. As James M. Cahalan notes in *The Irish Novel*, the re-naming scene in O'Brien is actually a re-working of a scene from a 1924 novel by "Maíre" (Séamas Ó Grianna), an Irish language work entitled *Caisleáin Óir*, in which the "protagonist is given his official name" (243). The same uncertainties of identity that concerned "Maíre" within a few short years of the Irish Free State continued to hound Flann O'Brien more than three years after the implementation of the revised 1937 Constitution.

Consequently, the naming action that is perpetrated on Bonaparte may also be seen as a form of interpellation. Louis Althusser argues that ideology interpellates, or hails, individuals as subjects for the purpose of making them part of ideology. He further contends that, while interpellation appears to be sequenced in time—that is, there is a "calling" followed by a "recognizing" of having been called—in truth, ideological interpellation is a concomitant situation. Subjects are always-already interpellated by ideology (174-75). In an action that is both quite literally painful in its humor and literally truthful about the ways that ideology is beaten into people's consciousness, the young Bonaparte nearly has his skull "interpellated" by the oar that crashes upon him. Bonaparte is hailed into the ideology of identity that is aligned with family naming. Later, his mother tells him, " . . . don't you understand that it's Gaels that

live in this side of the country and that they can't escape from fate? It was always said and written that every Gaelic youngster was hit on his first school day because he doesn't understand English and the foreign form of his name and that no one has any respect for him because he's Gaelic to the marrow" (31-34). Ideology names everyone. In this case, the ideological apparatus of education, of which I will speak more in Chapter Five, is performing that naming. However, because naming is also a function that families perform, the ideology of identity, of ethnicity, and of paternity also obtains in this action. Bonaparte rejects, as best he can, the ideological call. However, try as he might, he cannot succeed because, as Althusser suggests, subjects believe that they are outside ideology but are actually always in it (175).

In fact, none of the young charges at Bonaparte's school will succeed in rejecting or escaping this ideological call as the master summons each of them in turn and they, having learned nothing from the previous experience of their fellows, are christened "Jams O'Donnell."

> When my eyes were in operation again, there was another youngster on his feet being asked his name. It was apparent that this child lacked shrewdness completely and had not drawn good beneficial lessons for himself from the beating which I had received because he replied to the master, giving his common name as I had. The master again brandished the oar which was in his grasp and did not cease until he was shedding blood plentifully, the youngster being left unconscious and stretched out on the floor, a bloodied bundle.

Bonaparte drolly quips, "No young skull in the countryside that day remained unsplit" (31). Even Bonaparte's grandfather, The Old-Grey-Fellow, was "hit one day of his life and called *Jams O'Donnell* as well" (34). Because of the way that ideology hails everyone, it should be no surprise that history has its precedents for what happened to Bonaparte. Indeed, as Althusser

concludes, "the structure of all ideology, interpellating individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject is *speculary*, i.e. a mirror-structure, and *doubly* speculary: this mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning" (180). The reflexive reinforcement of ideology informs the daily lives of subjects while seeming to be the natural way of things. Therefore, all are called; all recognize that they are called. All are implicated in the dominant ideology and are dominated by it. Consequently, Bonaparte O'Coonassa weakly "utters" his subversive Irish name while the schoolmaster O'Loonassa savagely "screams" the dominant ideological name. O'Brien's tale, while not overtly an exposé on interpellated subjects, reveals this ideological phenomenon and, in doing so, comically attempts to subvert it.

Such comic subversion is at the heart of the Bakhtinian carnival. In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that comic literature of the Middle Ages took much of its influence from the legitimate, albeit temporary, inversions of power that were endemic to the medieval carnival. These festivals were marked by reversals, where fools and knaves were crowned king, later to be deposed ignominiously (as would be only proper, in the view of the dominant hierarchy), and were clearly calling into question, in ways that could ultimately be undone, the capricious nature of hierarchy itself. Carnivals were also sites of parody of other official and high-toned linguistic forms. As Bakhtin notes, "The influence of the carnival was irresistible: it made a man renounce his official state as monk, cleric, scholar, and perceive the world in its laughing aspect. Not only schoolmen and minor clerics, but hierarchs and learned theologians indulged in gay recreation as relaxation of pious seriousness" (13). He observes that these clerics produced texts that were parodies of learned treatises and sacred writings. Absent the fixed hierarchy of the serious world, the carnival was a laboratory of social, political, and ideological chaos.

As a mode of critique, the use of Bakhtinian carnival is particularly appropriate in readings of Flann O'Brien because, as Frank Farmer observes, "Not only does carnival place an enormous faith in popular forms of resistance, in the ability of the 'lowly' to travesty the high monologism of all things official, authoritative, and sacrosanct, it does so without patronizing or dismissing the folk and their potential for insurgent laughter" (194). I will discuss more fully in Chapter Four ways in which the carnival influence is strong in O'Brien and how such prominent scholars of the modern novel as Joseph Booker and José Lanters have analyzed it critically. However, Vivian Mercier, the pioneer in the analysis of Irish comedic depictions, preceded both Booker and Lanters. In the brief final chapter of his book, Mercier seeks to reconcile the idea of tradition with the idea of the comedic and concludes that, particularly in Ireland, even in the often-denigrated Irish Literary Revival of the early twentieth century, this is no contradiction (247). As Cahalan has observed, Mercier's book was written before Bakhtin's book on Rabelais—and much before its availability in translation. Thus, Cahalan argues, Mercier independently arrived at many of the same theoretical places as Bahktin regarding the carnivalesque, and, importantly, did so within the Irish comic tradition that Mercier argued had remained largely unbroken for a thousand years ("Mercier" 144). Consequently, any analysis of O'Brien that runs through Bahktinian carnival owes much to Mercier as well.

Ironically, it may be that Bonaparte's unwitting subversion of ideology comes as a result of his growing up without the powerful ideological presence of the father. It is clear from the outset that Bonaparte's father, Michelangelo, has little place in this world, whether he is a small landholder or not, because he disappears soon after Bonaparte's birth leaving the young boy to assume that his grandfather, the Old-Grey-Fellow, is his father. In *The Poor Mouth*, Michelangelo's imprisonment, which lasts many years and an understanding for which

Bonaparte only acquires when he meets his father departing prison when he enters it himself, puts the family in a hard economic spot. As David Popenoe points out in *Life Without Father*, despite the fact that patriarchal power had been significantly reduced from the Roman period, in pre-modern Europe economic production remained an important factor in the strength of fatherhood (85). That Michelangelo O'Coonassa effectively offers no such production suggests that his role as a powerful father is compromised. Indeed, the very role of father-as-producer is called into question. However, it is not merely the role of the father that is compromised since virtually no effective contribution of economic production is presented in the novel. Even the efforts by Bonaparte's mother to provide for him a clean place in which to grow up are undone by the Old-Grey-Fellow: "Woman, said he, it is a harmful and untimely work that you're at there and you may be sure that neither good nor fine instruction will come of it for the fellow who's there on his backside on the floor of our house." He continues, "It's an unnatural and unregulated training and rearing he'll have without any experience of the ashes. Therefore, woman, it's disgraceful for you not to leave the hob full of dirt and ashes just as the fire leaves it" (15-16). One might expect from the hearth scenes evoked by the artistic and literary portrayals of the nineteenth century a representation of order, control, and stability, but O'Brien turns everything completely and comically upside down, even indicating that it is the disorder and filth that will provide the desired regulation of the child's upbringing. This is Bakhtin's carnivalesque inversion at work.

In what is arguably a more overt effort to subvert the power that exists in his world, the narrator in *At Swim-Two-Birds* actively attempts to undermine his uncle, the surrogate for the absent father. Because he is dependent on the largesse of his uncle, the narrator must occasionally coo to his uncle's face while clawing at him behind his back. Yet he is also, at

times, sensitive to the plight of the uncle and the less-than-enviable position into which the narrator always places him. The narrator asks his benefactor:

> Could you give me five shillings to buy a book, please?
>
> Five shillings? Well, dear knows it must be a great book altogether that can cost five shillings. What do they call it?
>
> *Die Harzreise* by Heine, I answered. (28)

As the uncle relents and gives the narrator the money, we become aware of the narrator's ambivalent feelings toward this man who alternately oppresses him and provides for him: "The redness of his fingers as he handed out the coins, his occupation with feeding for the nourishment of his body, these were two things that revealed for an instant his equal humanity. I left him there, going quickly to the street in my grey coat" (28-29). We get the strong sense that the narrator is riven by guilt over the request, a guilt he would experience irrespective of whether, as we later learn, he does not buy the book or whether he ever intended to buy the book. O'Brien has captured the ways in which subversions of ideology hide within their outward glee a sullen restiveness borne out of dissatisfaction that these subversive acts are necessary at all.

We may get a better sense of O'Brien's view on this set of events when he includes in one of his columns collected in *The Best of Myles* a quite similar critique of the motives of the rural sons in college who are "ashamed to be seen out with their fathers and O no thanks, I'm not going to give *any* hand with the sowing, I have to attend to me studies, I've an exam in two months. And that reminds me, I want five pounds for books" (93). Here he seems much more conciliatory toward the father than the son, thereby complicating any notions that there are clear targets in O'Brien's sights.

Flann O'Brien's views of the ideological place of the family, as discussed in this chapter, and the Church and education in later chapters, appear to be a kind of cultural, albeit often bizarre, biography of Ireland in the post-Free-State and early-Republic period. The state itself had sought to shape the position of these cultural apparatuses through both its official legitimation of their identities in the 1937 Constitution and in the unofficial views reflected in a socially conservative society. These were the very positions that Flann O'Brien, as civil servant Brian O'Nolan, was expected to promote. O'Brien took these positions and, not always, but quite often, challenged them through his comic treatment of them. Appearing to bite the hand that fed him, O'Brien often used his own place in the civil service as a means to describe the ineffectualness of the official positions, and, I argue, of the state itself. In one of the posthumous collections of his collection of *Irish Times* columns, *The Hair of the Dogma*, he recounts the typical day of the typical civil servant. Here O'Brien describes the way the officer "attends" his office without actually entering it, how the "large mounds of documents," representing the "work" he does for the people, are "under review," "under consideration," even "under active consideration." These considerations may require for the officer ever more facts, which remain under "continuous and active review," though "[a]t the moment he finds himself unable to concur in any suggestion" relating to the matters, and this cycle is repeated daily (33). As such, O'Brien's subversion seems safe—it conforms to the ideology at times and critiques it at others.

James F. Kilroy offers a justification of fiction as a place to seek insights into the ideologies of the world of the author. He argues, "Fictional accounts are valuable to seeking to understand the past, but only as reflections of perceptions—of the author, of her or his intended readers, and of ourselves as readers" (21). And, as we have seen, comedy permits the writer to expose the emperor in all his oblivious (and obvious) nakedness. In O'Brien, comedic fictional

accounts there are aplenty. The nested narratives of *At Swim-Two-Birds* make the reader pause and wonder as to whose authorial perceptions are reflected. The novel's narrator is engaged in writing a novel of his own, one in which the main character is also an author writing a novel. With now three levels of perception available, O'Brien offers in the third-level novel-within-the-novel a relationship rare in his own work—a father and son.

Dermot Trellis, the novel-writing main character of the novel being written by the narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, begets a son, Orlick. Trellis's novel is "a salutary book on the consequences which follow wrong-doing" (59) and for which he has enlisted a cast of characters to play out his salacious tale. In deliciously satiric and subversive fashion, the characters who are to represent the wrongness of licentious behavior, Peggy and John Furriskey, fall in love and determine to live virtuously, while the ostensibly moralistic Trellis is so beguiled by the beauty of one of his other creations, Sheila Lamont, that he rapes her, thus engendering Orlick. We see in this situation the subversion of O'Brien's fictional subversion of family life. In a scene played out between John Furriskey and his wife, Peggy, along with their fictional friends, Paul Shanahan and Antony Lamont, the characters discuss the finer points of fiddle music and provide another version of the ever-present hearth scenes that are supposed to represent domestic bliss: "A sugar-bowl was passed deftly from hand to hand in the pause. Tea was stirred and bread was buttered swiftly and trisected; at the same time there were adjustments to a trouser crease, chair-stance and seat" (163). Again, O'Brien uses the hearth, this time displaying the behaviors that are more in keeping with the traditional nineteenth-century novels that Kilroy analyzes, but as a means of subverting the desires of the author of the novel-in-a-novel. These characters are Dermot Trellis's "sinners." Trellis had hoped to write an edifying and cautionary tale about the

wages of sin. But while he sleeps, the characters he cast as debauchees have taken back their lives and live out their petit-bourgeois existence in proper domestic happiness.

O'Brien further undoes even his parodic view of family life when the characters who no longer wish to be used by Dermot Trellis for his vain efforts at moralizing, convince his own son, Orlick, to assist them in un-writing the tale of their authorial master. This strategy recalls the Oedipal anxiety of paternal and authorial influence upon which Edward Said commented. The characters desire that Orlick construct a rapid end to Trellis, but the son's literary sensibilities are too powerful. He knows "You cannot drop a man unless you first lift him" (181). O'Brien has given readers one of his few father-son arrangements, but he promptly turns a paternal presence into a planned removal and absence, having first created the conditions for the son to be "born" out of violent transgression. This episode tells a good deal about the place of parental dominance, but it also comments directly on the sanctity of the marital relationship. The characters in the novel, at whichever level one might investigate, who are middle-class and genteel, who best fit the ideological expectations of the new Ireland and its Constitution, suffer marriage as an absence. The narrator's parents are absent, the uncle seems never to have been married, and Dermot Trellis brings forth both his fictional progeny (Furriskey, Peggy, Orlick's mother Sheila Lamont, her brother Antony, and Shanahan) and his bio-fictional progeny, Orlick, out of either artificial or illicit means. The Constitution of Ireland may declare that "The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensible to the welfare of the Nation and the State" and that "The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack" (Article 41, sections 1.2 and 3.1). But Flann O'Brien uses comedic situations and language to challenge the authority and necessary basis of family; he

all but ignores marriage as the necessary basis for social order, seeming to introduce it into his work primarily for the purpose of exposing it to attack.

Flann O'Brien's apparent personal uncertainties about marriage aside, in practice, as opposed to ideological expectation, marriage is an institution whose position is fraught with tensions. Davida Pines discusses an ambivalent attitude toward marriage that arises out of modernism's response to the changing roles of women and the emergence of feminism. She contends that even when critiques of marriage obtain, these critiques are elicited out of the very ideological frameworks of which they are apparently critical and are, therefore, equivocated in their observations (3-4). This notion is not inconsistent with O'Brien's approach in the way that he seems to critique the family and its constituent roles by either absenting them from the text, or by upending them, usually through some satiric or comedic strategy. Yet, in order for this combination of strategies to have their desired effects, there must be an ideological framework of "norms" already embedded in the consciousness of the society. An example of this strategy of erasure and subversion presents itself through the Myles na Gopaleen persona writing in the *Irish Times* column. In the collection of columns entitled *The Best of Myles*, Myles offers a joking comment on the relationship of marriage as one which is incapable of effective communication: "I have not, of course, seen Mr. Carroll's new play. 'The Wives Have Not Spoken.' But the title is good. Take myself. Had a fearful row with the wife about a fortnight ago—over Picasso, of course. Any word uttered in my house since then was uttered by the BBC announcer" (246).

The title of the play "The Wives Have Not Spoken" is both a literal and a metaphorical silencing of women in marriage, which the persona seems to believe a good thing, and the situation places into stark relief the idea of whether there really is a marriage at all. According to the column, the play's ending involves all of the characters going mad, one by one, and gives

Myles an idea for a play of his own, one in which the exact opposite takes place. One by one, the "twelve characters sunk in a frightfully celtic condition of rural lunacy" get better, responding to a combination of electroshock therapy and modern drugs. The stereotyped predictability of the plot, coupled with the happy ending, would suggest that Myles's play is a comedy in opposition to Mr. Carroll's tragedy. But Myles argues that his ending is tragic in its way (247). The happy ending is, after all, according to Eric Weitz, an artificial construct.

This scenario very directly represents what Nancy Scheper-Hughes describes in her book *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics: Mental Illness in Rural Ireland.* Myles's play and its twelve characters obliquely introduce an issue that Scheper-Hughes examines in her sociological study of the "celtic condition of rural lunacy." In her Chapter Four on marriage and celibacy, she describes the lack of personal intimacy in many rural marriages, indicating that many couples felt discomfort when they were alone with one another. Scheper-Hughes notes that many couples referred to their spouse as "himself" or "herself," and relates the story of a woman who claims that her husband never called her by her first name and that, because of their personal lack of intimate and emotional communication with one another, she could only bring herself to discuss this with him on his deathbed (190). While this may be an exaggeration remembered as truth, Myles's reference to his wife as "the wife," and the alleged subject of their row—Picasso, rather than something intimate and important—humorously proves the point.

In a similar way and collected in the same text, Myles indicates that the gaps in the language used to discuss and regulate marriage call marital relations into question. Long before the use of all capital letters in an electronic communication would be considered impolite, Myles complains of the "typographical shouting" used by bureaucrats on the tax form. He quips that the tax form's statement, "If you are a MARRIED MAN and your wife is living with you . . . "

implies that a man is likely, if married, to hide his wife in some remote locale because of her appearance or embarrassing conversation skills rather than to have her live with him. Further, if a man is in a position to hire what the form calls a "'housekeeper,'" the "inverted commas" used on the form suggest an impropriety in the relationship to which he takes umbrage (334-35). The literal readings that Myles applies to these ordinarily innocent locutions make it clear that language is a crucial determinant in the meaning of relationships, including marriage. He even descends into a stage Irish explanation of the relationship of the "housekeeper" as cook for the married man, harking perhaps to the "celtic condition of rural lunacy" of which the Irish must be cured: "The woman has a blameless character and makes that indigenous culinary complication, an Irish stew, that you would get up out off yoor bad en tha maddle off tha neight fur tay eet a wee bet off ut, d'yeh ondherstond me" (335). All of which is to say that marriage, in its real forms, is complicated and, therefore, not easily or comfortably made a part of a nation's constituted identity. Irrespective of the language that the Constitution may apply to the family, to marriage, and to the place of women in society, the truths that Flann O'Brien and Myles na Gopaleen illustrate in their satires of reality are both subversive of the ideology of cultural stability posited by the Constitution and are in need of change themselves. The difference may be that while the Constitution seeks to codify the culture it desires, O'Brien must be content to point out the flaws of lived social experience.

In Flann O'Brien's fiction, women in marriage are commonly presented as disruptive and are often silenced. The blissful scene between Furriskey and the others at his hearth described above is a relative exception, and, as I indicated, should be read as a subversion of the ideological moralizing that Dermot Trellis intended in his novel. The representation of women in marriage in O'Brien is decidedly not in line with the reified place they hold in the

Constitution. In effect, the silencing of women in marriage is the equivalent to the absence of fathers.

If we do not consider the marriage we imagine must have produced the narrator in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, nor the marriage we know about, but which produced with some uncertainty the narrator of *The Third Policeman* (and there may be a case made for these as well), the marriages O'Brien writes of in his most significant novelistic works are all unconventional. In *The Poor Mouth*, the characters identified as Bonaparte O'Coonassa's parents are not directly spoken of as husband and wife. Indeed, the virtual disappearance of Bonaparte's father, Michelangelo O'Coonassa, for the vast majority of the novel, and the relative absence of any known contact between Bonaparte's mother and father during his lifetime, suggests that the mystery of Bonaparte's birth may be explained on the basis of there being no marriage between the parents to legitimize and sanctify the birth. Bonaparte's mother lives with her son and the Old-Grey-Fellow, and this unit serves as family. The mistake that Bonaparte makes in initially identifying the Old-Grey-Fellow as his father is understandable given the ways that the old man functions as non-conjugal husband to Bonaparte's mother. The text is even quite ambiguous about whether the Old-Grey-Fellow is Bonaparte's grandfather on his mother's (most likely, considering his presence in the mother's household) or his father's side (certainly possible, in light of the Arensberg and Kimball research on rural Irish familism).

Bonaparte's mother adheres to the stereotyped and idyllic rural ideology when she defers to the Old-Grey-Fellow on the issue of Bonaparte's upbringing in the ashes noted above. She is also, like the unnamed mother in *The Hard Life*, portrayed principally through rather functional physical descriptions: "a decent, hefty, big-boned woman; a silent, cross, big-breasted woman . . . sensible, level-headed and well-fed" (14). She seems almost to be represented in bovine terms,

a quality that is reinforced by the Old-Grey-Fellow's treatment of her as though she were one of his livestock. Not only do the people acquire animal traits, but also, as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, animals acquire human traits. Indeed, there appears to be no distinction between humans and animals when a traveling school inspector, seeking a place to stay and finding that the Gaels have taken their animals into their homes for shelter, suggests that they "put up a little hut at the side of the yard." When the Gaels, as reported by the Old-Grey-Fellow, have erected the hut, the reader learns that "things are not what they seem to be! When I, my grandmother and two of my brothers had spent two nights in the hut, we were so cold and drenched wet that is a wonder that we did not die straight away and we couldn't get any relief until we went back to the house and were comfortable again among the cattle" (20). The Old-Grey-Fellow stubbornly retains a diseased and foul-smelling old hog in the house, refusing to evict it, while, in the same manner, he beats both the pig and his daughter, effectively equating them: "the Old-Fellow took a cudgel and drove the pig to the door—lifting him, beating him and pushing him with the weapon . . . . He then beat my mother and gave her beneficial advice while doing so" (25).

This trait is also consistent with the way that O'Brien describes other people in animalistic terms, as when he later depicts even Bonaparte's newborn son:

> One time when I returned from Galway in the black of night, what do you think I noticed but that we had acquired a new piglet in the end of the house. My wife was sleeping while the tiny little bright-skinned thing was squealing in the centre of the house. I took it carefully and allowed it to drop from my hand in amazement when I realised precisely what I had. It had a small bald head, a face as large as a duck egg and legs like my own. I had a baby-child. (86)

Both Bonaparte's mother and the "sleeping" wife are silent for most of the novel. They are vociferous only when they, according to O'Brien's parodic representation of them, fight with one another, as women competing for dominance in the rural household stereotypically must do (85). Indeed, Bonaparte might not have married at all were it not for the apparent cultural imperative to do so. He complains, "I had no wife and it seemed to me that no one had a whit of respect for me as a result" (78). A bit further on, he continues, "I'm two years waiting now without a wife and I don't think I'll ever do any good without one. I'm afraid the neighbours are mocking me" (79-80). The possibility that any wife that Bonaparte might acquire could bring with her a dowry shows the power of economics in the marital relationship. When the match is to be effected by the Old-Grey-Fellow and another man, named, not surprisingly, Jams O'Donnell, the emphasis is on tradition and on business rather than on affection. It is also clear that there is an absolute lack of voice allotted to the young Mabel as wife-to-be. Her place in the marriage will be that of silent partner and indicates another level of absence in the ideology of the family. This time, however, the woman's absence is one that is more in keeping with the policies of the post-1937 Constitution's worldview. Bonaparte reports that "there is no necessity for me to describe the stupid conversation carried on by the Old-Fellow and Jams when they were discussing the question of the match. All the talk is available in the books which I have mentioned previously. When we left Jams at the bright dawn of day, the girl was betrothed to me and the Old-Fellow was drunk" (81-84). The telling of the event is evocative of a man going to the market to purchase a brood mare and is, through its elision, expected to be understood without any effort to make it so. There is no need to explain because all understand without words. This also suggests that to the rural, idealized Gaelic-Irish sensibility, family, particularly

women, and livestock are, in O'Brien's satiric commentary, and perhaps in reality, one and the same.

The way that Bonaparte responds to the cultural imperative to marry is a subversion of the typical imperatives that would have existed. One of these imperatives is that to which Jane Austen refers when she opens her novel *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (1). The imperative Austen indicates applies to a man who wishes to marry well, almost certainly for social reasons, and who is the party with the fortune. While an argument can be made that Bonaparte wishes to marry for social reasons, he will not obtain his fortune until after the marriage into which he enters is already ended when his wife dies. The other cultural imperative to marry would have rested upon a woman who wanted or needed to marry. Davida Pines describes this imperative in her book *The Marriage Paradox*, noting that Virginia Woolf writes of how "women have historically devoted their energies to finding the 'right' husband simply because other ways of achieving self-fulfillment and financial security have been unavailable to them" (96). O'Brien subverts this version of the cultural imperative to marry by locating a very similar motive in the world of the man who, were he in Jane Austen's fictional oeuvre, would be the object of the search for self-fulfillment and security, rather than the seeker. Thus it is for Bonaparte as he seeks his mate.

In a similar way, O'Brien concludes his novel *The Hard Life* by making the young Finbarr an unwilling, and perhaps even unknowing, seeker of a fortune through marriage. When Collopy dies in Rome, the majority of his estate is left to his daughter Annie. O'Brien continues to complicate the family when he ends the novel with Finbarr's vomiting at Manus's suggestion that he marry Annie, because, as Manus points out, "a substantial house and three hundred a year

for life is no joke" (178) and "Annie is an industrious, well-built, quiet girl. There are not so many of them knocking about" (179). Annie's appeal as a wife is her moderate income and her quiet (read silent) industry. Although it may appear at first that Manus is suggesting a connubial match with his first cousin, we need to recall that Mr. Collopy is the boys' mother's half brother. But despite the "removal" of this impediment, that is only a portion of the complication. Irrespective of the fact that the family, as presented in the novel, has been at every turn disrupted, Finbarr is a mere sixteen years old at this point and Annie's role in his life has been substantially that of a mother. Only the economically-informed mind of Manus could arrive at a plan that solves Finbarr's problems in this rather Oedipal way. Joseph Brooker has suggested that the ambiguity of the ending, which simultaneously seeks to tie things together and, as indicated by Finbarr's bilious response, is disruptive, reinforces the incongruities that pervade the novel (78).

The ending may also be read as a different kind of subversion of the typical family structure that the Constitution and its dominant ideological institutions represent. Given the subordinated position that the Constitution accorded to women, specifically with regards to their roles as workers and, as such, as sources of income, for O'Brien to suggest Annie as the means of Finbarr's support runs counter not merely to the 1937 Constitution, but to nearly every conception of the economics of family relationships. O'Brien's subversion of ideology is present here, whether he intends it or not. Nancy Armstrong bases a substantial portion of her analysis in her classic *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* on a nineteenth-century text entitled *The Compleat Servant* (1825), a guide to effective management of the household's available resources. Armstrong points out that, while the marital arrangement might certainly be considered an economic and political one, the material quality of life that the marriage would permit was dependent on a formulation that illustrates the economic value of the

woman in the relationship as being located in her domestic work, leaving the man to be the supplier of the actual monetary income with which the wife would manage the domestic affairs (83-86). O'Brien's suggestion that Annie's "three hundred a year" would make her the supplier of income and that she would also provide the domestic elements—"[g]rub, laundry, socks and all that" (178)—would, in this case, make both of the traditional roles of the family fall completely within her realm. It may not be thus surprising that Finbarr responds to Manus's suggestion as he does.

This subversion is partly brought on through an association of marriage with disgust as indicated through the Bakhtinian grotesqueries of bodily functions. Marriage as a contract of economy is not unique to Ireland. Nor is the status of marriage as a union of two who love one another. This would actually appear to be the situation of Collopy and his second wife, Mrs. Crotty. Yet even her place in the novel is largely one of invisibility because of the "condition" with which she suffers—a condition that has given Collopy his *raison d'être*. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White identify the locus of discussions relating to "fear, disgust and [the] fascination" that define the grotesque, especially in the nineteenth century, as the reforming text. As they put it, "Indeed, the reformers were central in the construction of the urban geography of the bourgeois Imaginary. As the bourgeoisie produced new forms of regulation and prohibition governing their own bodies, they wrote ever more loquaciously of the body of the Other—of the city's 'scum'" (125-26). The grotesque as a mode of humor certainly has its traditional grounding in Ireland. Vivien Mercier's influential book *The Irish Comic Tradition* couples the grotesque with the macabre and theorizes both modes at some length. Drawing upon the origins of the grotesque as emanating out of the grotto, where exaggerated images of human genitalia intermixed with foliage, Mercier hypothesizes that grotesque humor in Ireland "*serves as a*

defence mechanism against the holy dread with which we face the mysteries of reproduction" (49; Mercier's emphasis). Continuing, he argues that the grotesque brings on laughter because it both elicits our sense of the ugliness of the excessive sexual image and, at the same time, allows for release of sexual repression. Ancient wake rituals typically included play of a sexually explicit nature and certain carved symbols represented a mixture of fertility totems and admonitions against lustful behavior. Ultimately, Mercier contends that the grotesque is often present where there is a conflation of sex and death (49-56). Mercier clearly links the laughter we experience with the seriousness of the underlying truths about our culture.

In *The Hard Life*, O'Brien recreates this image of Stallybrass and White's reformer in Mr. Collopy. Collopy's project, which remains unidentified through the majority of the novel, seeks to offer comfort to women—one of the manifold Others—relating to their need for public restroom facilities. Judith Flanders identifies the historical evidence for this unfulfilled need, even in so sophisticated a place as London. She claims that in the 1870s and 1880s, many of the locations in the city that had previously been deemed too dangerous for women and which were, therefore, off-limits to them had been colonized by shops. Especially popular among women were the tea shops. As she explains, "These ladies' tea shops were welcomed with enthusiasm not simply because they were safe environments for unaccompanied women when pubs, grille rooms and many restaurants were not, but because they had lavatories for their female customers. Previously, women could go out only for as long as they didn't have to 'go'" (400). Collopy's obliqueness in referring to these needs likely reflects O'Brien's own reticence on the subject, despite his statements on the possible economic value to be gained from any censorship the book's subject might bring upon itself. Even though Collopy sells his reform movement as one relating to equality, he fears the disgust that his listeners might express about his project,

irrespective of its altruistic outcome. After all, the project relates to the anatomy associated with the reproductive system, though, in Collopy's project, those parts of the body are clearly not being used for that purpose. O'Brien alludes to sexuality by inference, not by direct attention, leaving the reader to make the dirty joke for himself.

What this suggests about O'Brien's application of the mode of the grotesque is hard to say. Perhaps, for O'Brien, marriage is not primarily associated with sexuality—witness the number of births that take place in his writing with no apparent awareness of how they could have been produced. Yet marriage is not simply an economic arrangement. Finbarr vomits at the suggestion that he marry Annie for a combination of reasons, but one reason may be that he has felt desire in his earlier dealings with a young girl named Penelope and knows that desire is not what he feels for Annie. O'Brien may be suggesting that love and marriage may not even be about procreation, as appears to be the implication of the Constitution's aligning marriage and child-rearing. As I indicated earlier, Collopy and his wife Mrs. Crotty are married, seem to love one another, and yet, there is no sense that they have intimate sexual knowledge of each other. Mrs. Crotty is Collopy's wife, but no one's mother.

The near absence of any direct references to sexuality in Flann O'Brien accounts for the fact that his work was never banned. O'Brien seemed content to work with material that was potentially objectionable because of its associations with other bodily functions. In two letters written in 1961, he indicated that he was considering afflicting Father Fahrt with a skin disease of some sort and that his novel *The Hard Life* "contains a treatise on piss and vomit" (Hogan and Henderson 79). The name of the priest is clearly intended to diminish his character to the level of a humorous bodily function and thus, to equate him with empty, gaseous rhetoric. O'Brien's character Collopy seeks to define the content of the books his nephew Manus is attempting to

sell in such a way as to challenge the lines of acceptability. He speaks of them as "dirty books, lascivious peregrinations on the fringes of filthy indecency, cloacal spewing in the face of Providence, with pictures of prostitutes in their pelts" (71), as if he were creating their pornography out of whole cloth. As shadowy and light as the line may have been, Flann O'Brien never crossed it into forbidden references to sex, even those as oblique as the one in Kate O'Brien's *The Land of Spices* (1941). The Censorship of Publications Act censored Kate O'Brien's novel when one single sentence indicated the possibility of a homosexual encounter between the protagonist's father and a young musician (Cahalan, *Novel* 210). Flann O'Brien was direct in his anatomical and scatological references, but not in his sexual ones.

Collopy is also more than usually fascinated by the need for lavatory facilities for women. This fascination, in part, comes from the fact the condition specifically affects his wife, whose suffering and eventual death, caused, in his view, by the lack of public restroom facilities for women, deeply moves him. But his fascination is also evidenced by the continuous nature of his concern for the subject. He speaks of the issue with Fr. Fahrt, he reports his committee formation and their work to reform the City commission's stance on public restrooms for women, and meets his own death in Rome when he seeks audience with the Pope in hopes of getting His Holiness to act on his behalf, a scene upon which I will further elaborate in Chapter Four. In effect, this medical condition relating to the regulated functions of the body renders Collopy's wife absent, in essence invisible, both during her illness and, of course, after her death. There is little in the novel to suggest that this is a marriage that has resulted in the sort of procreative outcomes that the Irish state or even the Catholic Church would expect. In fact, its defining features are illness, discomfort, absence, and death. Thus, through the various levels of absence within it, the marriage fails to bring about the ideology of family in any demonstrable

way. Given the material realities of these institutions as O'Brien portrays them, the celebratory and platitudinous language that surrounds family and, specifically motherhood, in the Constitution, seems fodder for O'Brien's critique.

Tess Hurson comments on the relative lack of female characters in O'Brien and mourns in particular the fact that in all realistic novels, not merely O'Brien's, women are associated almost exclusively with romantic or domestic roles (127). I would suggest that this apparent conformity to the domestic is decidedly only part of the story in O'Brien. Instead, he depicts his female characters not merely as daughters or wives or mothers or sisters, but often as concubines or prostitutes, as in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, *The Hard Life*, *The Third Policeman*, and in the above passage from *The Best of Myles*. He also offers a glimpse of women in their role as the virgin whore in such characters as Peggy in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Mary in *The Dalkey Archive*, and Annie in *The Hard Life.* Virtually no father or husband, no mother or wife in O'Brien exists in a position that one might call traditional and certainly not one that would illustrate the impacts of the constitutional place for family and married life. Flann O'Brien does not tell us that women in Ireland are not wives or daughters or mothers or sisters. He merely tells us that women are more than the roles that the family ideology permits us to consider.

Clearly, when a political construct—formulated as a nation that imagines itself as "sovereign" or free of "divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic" control in the manner defined by Benedict Anderson (7)—presents itself to the world through a foundational document such as a Constitution, it is laying claim to a particular ideological and national identity. The 1937 Irish Constitution purports to claim for Ireland its particular social and ideological identity through several specific articles. The concern in this chapter has been Article 41, which seeks to establish and legitimate the Family because of what the Constitution considers the family's

natural moral indispensability and its foundation in the indissoluble institution of marriage. While Louis Althusser argues convincingly of the power that emanates out of cultural institutions such as the family because of the ways in which state ideology is transmitted through them, he does not address the family itself in great detail. Martine Segalen is more direct on this issue, effectively saying what Althusser means by his argument on the power of cultural apparatuses to reproduce the relations of production: "The power of the family is not simply passive. . . . Through its transmission of a material, cultural, social and symbolic heritage, it conserves social and cultural inequalities, lurks within them and perpetuates them. What in the case of the most-favoured classes is a 'power' turns against the least-favoured ones, who can reproduce only their own wretchedness" (293). The wretchedness of the family as represented by Flann O'Brien takes its shape in the form of the subverted norms of families. They are not, as represented in the idealized Victorian and post-Victorian depictions, comfortable, intact units gathering about the hearth, lending support to one another in an intergenerational model of morality. Much of their identity in O'Brien is represented by absence, as I have illustrated throughout this chapter. It must be noted that, as Derrida contends in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," there is no conception of absence without an awareness of presence (925). Therefore, while Flann O'Brien writes of the family in his terms of absence, he is also writing as a critic of that which, in the family of his time and place, is present.

In the next chapter, I turn to Flann O'Brien's treatment of the institution that Ireland looked to most directly as the keystone of its cultural edifice—the Church. In Chapter Four, I will address how the dominance of the Church's power makes it an effective apparatus of ideology, but that its very methods invite subversion of that ideology. This subversion takes its

shape in a number of comic devices all of which make important statements about Irish culture and identity in the immediate post-Constitution era.

CHAPTER 4

"THAT'S WHAT SUFFERING IS FOR": THE CHURCH AS APPARATUS OF IDEOLOGY

In one of the penultimate episodes of *The Hard Life*, Flann O'Brien captures the nature of the Catholic Church's relationship with the laity. In particular, he vests in the highest level of the quintessentially hierarchical institution, the Papacy of the Catholic Church, a mode of operation that defines it as an ideological apparatus of power. Mr. Collopy has travelled to the Vatican where he is granted an audience with the Pope. Collopy intends to use this occasion to request that the Holy Father intervene on behalf of all females to end their plight—a lack of public restrooms for women. As I previously addressed in Chapter Three, Collopy believes that this unfair and negligent situation has caused many women, including his own second wife, Mrs. Crotty, to suffer from late-life incontinence, a condition that led to her status as an invalid and her eventual death. The full action of the episode, which I will explore more fully later in this chapter, is reported to Mr. Collopy's nephew, Finbarr, and to the reader via a letter from Finbarr's brother, Manus. The letter is a gap-riddled narrative of Collopy's request to the Pope and the Pope's reply to that request, the boiled-down version of which, as Manus reports it, is that "the Pope told us all to go to hell" (152).

Joseph Brooker has commented on this scene in his study of Flann O'Brien. He cites Keith Hopper's observation that the critique of the Church fails because of O'Brien's "coyness, reticence and disorganization of resources" (78). Brooker insists that there is too much of a "remove" (78) in O'Brien's rendering of the Pope's indictment of Collopy's solution to the problem of public restrooms for women. The distant nature of the Pope's response, communicated to the reader at (at least) two levels of remove, through both a letter from Manus and in translation from the Italian, is precisely my point: the manner by which the Church

attempts to provide solutions to problems and its failures in providing those solutions are its principal flaws. The Church addresses the concerns of its flock (or fails to do so) in a circuitous way, through "officialdom" and institutional authority rather than in a way that humanizes the people involved. For all of his bloated rhetoric and bravura, Collopy's challenge to the Church through his lifelong effort, not only on behalf of his second wife who is presented to us as a kind of formality and who effectively disappears from the novel even before her death, but also in support of the general female population of Dublin in 1904, is O'Brien's way of subverting the ideological impassiveness of the Church.

The ideological power of the Church was a fact of life in the four hundred years between the Councils of Trent (1545-47, 1551-52, 1562-63) and the time when Flann O'Brien was writing. The political symbiosis between the governmental entities at work in Ireland, even before any sort of Home Rule or independence, and the Roman Church was nearly inextricable. Emmet Larkin argues that the longstanding political relationship between leader and party and the Church that was begun by the greatest Irish leader of the first half of the nineteenth century, "the Liberator" Daniel O'Connell; reinforced by the greatest leader of the second half of the nineteenth century, "the uncrowned king of Ireland," Charles Stewart Parnell; and continued even through the de Valera years, had the effect not only of making the Irish nation more certain and secure, but also of assisting it in controlling the most violent of the nation's tendencies as expounded by Young Ireland, Fenianism, and the republican strain of Sinn Féin. All of this had the final result of making the state, once it fully emerged, more Catholic than it might otherwise have been (122).

Larkin also points out that the official place that Catholicism possessed in Ireland was the result of one of the most potent political maneuvers that could have been staged. As he puts it:

> . . . the constitution, while exorcising the demon of the British Commonwealth in the person of its king, guaranteed all those civil and religious liberties that were the most significant part of its British inheritance. The most provocative and challenging feature of the new constitution was that it not only finally and explicitly recognized the "special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens," but it endorsed Catholic moral teaching in regard to the family, education, marriage, and private property . . . . The constitution, in fact, explicitly established a Catholic confessional state. ("Political Tradition" 115-16)

The Church's power, of course, is reinforced not merely by the Irish Constitution ratified in 1937, but also by the everyday lives of the ninety-five percent of the Irish people who were Catholic, of which number ninety percent attended Mass every Sunday (Lyons 689). This level of concentrated and homogenous religious identity makes for a cultural underpinning that is difficult to ignore. In his cogent analysis of ideology, Terry Eagleton notes Freud's views on the ideological influence of religion. Eagleton explains that religion, according to Freud,

> fulfils the role of reconciling men and women to the instinctual renunciations which civilization forces upon them. In compensating them for such sacrifices, it imbues an otherwise harsh, purposeless world with meaning. It is thus, one might claim, the very paradigm of ideology, providing an imaginary resolution of real contradictions; and were it not to do so, individuals might well rebel against a form of civilization which exacts so much from them. (177-78)

In other words, religion convinces frail, imperfect, sinful humans to accept the cruelties of the universe as being what they justly deserve. In exchange for acceptance of the squalor of

the hard life we have on earth, we are offered a reward in heaven, but only if we adhere to the teachings of the powerful entity that often does little to ameliorate suffering, and, indeed, quite frequently exacerbates it. Marx had critiqued this relationship between religion and its adherents in a famous statement: "Religion is the general theory of this world . . . its moral sanction, . . . its universal basis for consolation and justification. . . . Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances. It is the opium of the people" (71-72). This is precisely what happens in *The Hard Life.* Mrs. Crotty has endured the suffering of her condition, and Collopy has endured the hardships to his own life that have accompanied Mrs. Crotty's suffering, because they have become reconciled to the harsh realities of the world—a world that would rather "protect" a women's propriety than to acknowledge a biological imperative.

Although Mr. Collopy certainly regards his wife's condition with great seriousness, it appears that Flann O'Brien is comically appropriating a scene from Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, set in the very same 1900s Dublin, as the basis for the event. The suffering of women accounted for by a lack of public lavatories in Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century was also closely associated with the suffering of women due to lengthy labors and deliveries in James Joyce's *Ulysses.* In Chapter 8—"Lestrygonians"—Leopold Bloom has learned of the three-days-long labor that Mrs. Purefoy is enduring and, in his hypertextual thought-process, moves deftly from one idea to another: "He crossed under Tommy Moore's roguish finger. They did right to put him up over a urinal: meeting of the waters. Ought to be places for women. Running into cakeshops" (133). Joyce's scene itself is comical, both as commentary on the juxtaposition of the statue of Irish poet Thomas Moore and one of his famous poems "The Meeting of the Waters" with a public urinal, but also as fleeting social awareness, on the part of the sympathetic

Leopold Bloom, of the ways that women must remain private in all areas while men may take their public privilege for granted. In O'Brien, the Church would not intervene on behalf of women, because women need to be protected, presumably from their own weaknesses, and if they were to suffer here on earth, then their reward, by the Church's reckoning, would be greater in heaven.

Collopy, however, confronts Father Fahrt on this point. Father Fahrt—whose very name, as I noted in Chapter Three, O'Brien uses to render him ludicrous, and, with him, the Church's views which he represents—reminds Collopy that in this world, "We are here to suffer. We must sanctify ourselves." Collopy responds, "I am getting a bit sick in my intesteens at all this talk of yours about suffering. You seem to be very fond of suffering when other people do it" (31). The position of Father Fahrt, in which the Church and its ideological discourse are represented, is challenged by Collopy, and, indirectly at least, by O'Brien. Collopy's reference to his stomach—his gut-level, visceral life—introduces a carnivalesque theme that I will explore in more detail later in this chapter.

It is in these sorts of exchanges that we see the comical subversion of what would ordinarily be sacrosanct and inviolate. When Mrs. Crotty is on the verge of succumbing to her illness and requests to have her confession heard, Collopy placates himself with the Biblical verse that has become cliché for acceptance of imminent death: "We know not the day . . . nor the hour. All things come to him who waits." And Father Fahrt, her confessor, adds, "She is at peace. Her little harmless account is clear. Here we see God's grace working. She was smiling when I left her" (57-58). The ideology of the Church has insinuated itself into all of the parties in the scene and half-wittedly convinced them that "what is" is "what should be." Illness and suffering have been naturalized. Our only option is acceptance of fate, the ideology of faith in a

power higher, wiser, and greater than our own that the Church desires for us. And so Mrs. Crotty, Mr. Collopy, and Father Fahrt do exactly that. And it is not only illness that is naturalized by the Church's ideology. In *The Poor Mouth*, a novel that revels in the hard life that the other novel has appropriated as its title, poverty and salvation coincide in a uniquely Irish way: "it had always been said that accuracy of Gaelic (as well as holiness of spirit) grew in proportion to one's lack of worldly goods" (49). It should not be overlooked, therefore, that the lack of support that the Church provides for Collopy's cause on behalf of women is consistent with the level of control that Irish society wishes to impose on women in general. Constitutional statements concerning the place of mothers in the home have implications for the economic autonomy as well as the educational opportunities of women in Ireland during the early Republic, but also redound to the conditions depicted in O'Brien's turn-of-the-century novels.

In this chapter I will explore the ways in which Flann O'Brien represents the interactions between the ideological powers of the Church as it would wish to be viewed and the realities of the lives and circumstances of the characters O'Brien creates. I will illustrate that these interactions expose the effective false consciousness of the ideologies of religion, especially as indicated by the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. Flann O'Brien exposes the fundamental inconsistencies between the rhetoric and doctrine of this powerful cultural apparatus and the actual practices in which it engages. O'Brien uses a number of strategies in offering a critique of the Church, and because it is the Church, and because he is writing in Ireland, he must be oblique in his criticism. It is quite astonishing that Flann O'Brien was able to escape the work of the Censorship of Publications Act. In Chapter Three, I indicated that O'Brien's work was never banned for reasons of sexuality because he was not direct in his references on that subject, unlike the oblique, one-sentence reference to homosexuality that got Kate O'Brien's novel *The Land of*

Spices (1941), whose hero is the Mother Superior of an Irish convent, ludicrously and ironically banned. One may argue, perhaps, that one of the criticisms of the Church that comes through in O'Brien is in the very absence, indeed, even ignorance of sex that is presented in his work. The Church in Ireland wished to have the Irish people believe that sex did not exist except in the service of the family. As I show in Chapter Three, even within the family, sex often seems a mystery. Thus, the very aspect of O'Brien's fiction that saves him from censorship is also a way of indicating that sexual invisibility was part of the ideology of the Church. In this sense, O'Brien is also using gaps or ellipses to comment on ideas and practices that would be dangerous to comment upon directly. So it proves to be in his critiques of the Church.

These critiques have a long tradition in the literature of Ireland, particularly in its satirical literature. Vivian Mercier is, once again, the scholarly leader on this issue. Citing the powerful cultural influence of the Church on the lives of the Irish, Mercier observes that it is not surprising that satire would be directed at such an institution. Although Flann O'Brien occasionally targets Protestants or Catholic apostates, and specific members of the clergy as we shall see, principally his approach takes the third of Mercier's identified themes: attacks on specific Church beliefs or religion in general (171-77). Like Swift before him, O'Brien uses the strategies of Gaelic humor—the employment of fantasy, humor of the macabre and grotesque, and witty wordplay—to expose the folly of the Church. The humor, as will always be the case with the best satire, belies a serious critique of the ideological power that its target possesses.

I suggested in Chapter Two, in *The Cruiskeen Lawn* columns Myles na Gopaleen's seizure of the metaphor of the catechism to address the limited imagination of Irish language use could also be a way of calling attention to the inflexibility of the Church's teachings. The one-question / one-answer formula of both the catechism and the columns satirizing the catechism are

intended to lead the reader to but one conclusion. The passages, of course, also echo James Joyce's "Ithaca" episode in *Ulysses* in which the catechism structure serves a similar purpose. For example, in the *Best of Myles* collection of columns, two particulars will illustrate. Myles begins:

> What is Mr. Blank made after 109 years' of faithful service with the firm?
>
> The recipient of a clock and a handsome set of carvers.
>
> By whom?
>
> His friends and colleagues.
>
> And as what?
>
> A small token of their esteem.

This continues through the usual and predictable series of events of good wishes upon retirement and pleasant words from the retiree, culminating with this exchange: "What did the proceedings then do? Terminate" (204). Myles slyly links the use of the Church's teaching method to critique the interchangeability of workers with one another, focusing on the punch line of "terminate" to address both the end of the proceedings and the end of the job, as well as drawing a close association between unblinking service to the firm and death. O'Brien's deflation of the condition of exploitation depicted in the joke is a common strategy of understatement. It is the strategy of misdirection. This is not a direct criticism of the Church, but of its methods—methods that can lead to only one conclusion—suffering and dreariness in this life for those who believe.

Linking these ideas offered an ingenious way for Myles to suggest the banality and lack of human concern of the Church. In another example from the same collection, this time more directly and specifically, and thereby more comically, identified as "Catechism of Cliché,"

Myles takes on the Gas Company and the Electricity Supply Board. He asks, "Of what nature is the attitude of the Gas Company to say the least of it? High-handed and dictatorial in the extreme" (205-06). He suggests that the reason for this attitude is that the Gas Company, which ought to be a public trust, treats its customers as though it were a private holding. The ultimate outcome of such an attitude is harm to the children of Ireland who are "the men and women of tomorrow," echoing the sentiments of the Constitution regarding the importance of family. Again, this is not a direct assault on the Church. Yet, Myles's appropriation of the Church's catechetical method of questioning and answering closely draws the associations. One needs only recall the machinations that the government and the Church went through in the Mother and Child Scheme of 1951 to see the ways in which the Irish people are but pawns in the game and that much of the rhetoric of concern for their well-being is not actively considered by either the Church or the secular government.

When readers connect ideas and associate one area of critique with another by means, in this particular case, of a shared rhetorical strategy, they are working through Alan Sinfield's notion of textual faultlines. As Sinfield argues in *Faultlines*, cultural materialism's targets are the institutions of culture, such as family, the Church, and education. The objective of cultural materialist practice is to enable dissident readings of texts through the faultlines and breaking points that are present. The faultlines or gaps in texts are a result of the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in ideological systems that seek to represent no such inconsistencies. Sinfield notes, "It is the project of ideology to represent such relations [the uneven and changing relations between economic, political, military, and cultural power] as harmonious and coherent, so effacing contradiction and conflict; and the project of cultural materialists to draw attention to this" (9). As readers recognize these gaps, they begin to fill them in with positions that might

challenge the dominant culture and its ideological power. In a similar way, Henry A. Giroux writes of the role of the transformational critic as "identify[ing] the fissures in the ideologies of the dominant culture" (144). Flann O'Brien is fond of using language that suggests such gaps between the expected and the real. In the opening pages of *The Hard Life*, the young Finbarr, in vocabulary far-advanced beyond his age or education, identities a break in time between his parents' removal from his life and being taken into Mr. Collopy's home as "a sort of interregnum, lacuna or hiatus" (5). These words, suggestive of fissures, gaps in continuity, even faultlines, indicate O'Brien's invitation to this sort of reading, however unwitting. M. Keith Booker observes that gaps in language in the novel are also evident in Collopy's refusal to name the subject of his project. His conversations with Father Fahrt, coded to maintain the secrecy of the specific reform Collopy wishes to effect, are, therefore, critiques of Ireland in a more broad and general way (*Menippean* 89-92). By this strategy, Collopy is able to criticize the Church for not actively upholding the justice of his cause.

In addition to the identification and critique of gaps and contradictions that a cultural materialist reading will expose in the dominant ideological discourse, it should be noted that these fissures and faultlines are, to a certain degree, part of the strategy that dominant ideologies use to further their own power. Edward Stourton's book *Absolute Truth: The Struggle for Meaning in Today's Catholic Church*, offers a glimpse of the officialdom of the Church and the worldview the Church would have presented to Flann O'Brien. Stourton writes that the origin of modern Catholic inflexibility in the face of outside threats resides in the papacy of Pius IX. It is under the thirty-two-year reign (1846-1878) of Pius IX—*Pio Nono* to his flock—that the Church's inexorable divergence from the realities of the rest of the intellectual world came to a crisis point. Pius IX went from being a reform-minded liberal to a virtual prisoner in his office

as a result of the widespread 1848 revolutions in Europe. The threats of the revolutions he perceived as directed toward the Church and toward the authority of the papacy led him to call the first Vatican Council in 1869, a council that ultimately declared the dogma of Papal Infallibility (39-40). As cultural materialists would point out and as Edward Stourton illustrates in his book, dominant ideologies contain structural elements that invite and, within a measure of control, enable dissidence. When dissidence appears and begins to threaten the dominant ideologies, it presents opportunities for the dominant ideologies to exercise their powers against the dissidence with new, justifiable force. The Church is structured in such a way that its authority will inevitably be challenged. When it perceives a threat, the Church uses its structure to both identify the threat and fight against it, using the potentiality of the threat as the excuse it needs to quash the challenge by whatever means are necessary. For the Church, there can be little that would signify dissidence and threat to the dominant power more concretely than heresy.

Heresy, by definition, needs not be a belief at variance with Church doctrine alone. It may be any belief that is inconsistent with established views in history or philosophy or mathematics, among other fields. But it is the heresies against the Church that get the world's attention. In *Great Heresies and Church Councils*, a book published in 1965, one year before Flann O'Brien's death, Jean Guitton identifies and discusses seven great heresies—Judaism, gnosticism, Arianism, Islam, catharism, the Protestant Reformation, and atheist humanism. Guitton's book defines each of the heresies thus: Judaism is associated with the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah; gnosticism is the blending of learned pagan philosophies with Christianity; Arianism involves a central questioning of Jesus as being both man and God; Islam is the insistent belief in One God—just not the Christ as God; catharism is a rejection of human sin as

it is necessary to Christian salvation; the Reformation is the break with the unity of the Christian Church; atheist humanism is the disappearance of faith (19-23). Therefore, any discussion of heresy invites analysis of heterodox thinking and could easily involve the sort of parody to which Flann O'Brien was so prone. This is because when heterodoxies arise, orthodoxies are always in the story as well, and these orthodoxies become the subjects of the parody. Not all of Guitton's named heresies have application to what I see as Flann O'Brien's connections with heretical thinking, but where they do, I will provide further brief exposition of Guitton's analysis in discussing O'Brien.

In addition, analysis of heresy is a natural place for the contributions of Bakhtin's carnivalesque thinking. Clearly, for any who might be regarded as heretics in the serious world of the Church, associations with heterodoxy could mean only one outcome—excommunication and, likely, death. But Flann O'Brien treats the heterodox as the subject of laughter and satire, which is perhaps the only way one could treat such ideas. In *The Third Policeman*, O'Brien hints at one of the great sins of the Church throughout time—the selling of indulgences to attain salvation—when his narrator, dead as he is and roaming about the Irish countryside paying for his sins, considers "the commercial possibilities of eternity." The narrator asks his jailers to use their fantastical contraptions to produce for him "fifty cubes of solid gold each weighing one pound," and, just for fun, "a bottle of whiskey, precious stones to the value of £200,000, some bananas, a fountain pen and writing materials, and finally a serge suit of blue with silk linings. When all these things were on the floor, I remembered some other things I had overlooked and ordered underwear, shoes and banknotes, and a box of matches," all of which he intends to take with him (136-37). Instead of "buying" his way into eternity, the narrator intends to "steal" his way out of it.

Bakhtin helps us understand how laughter in the inverted world of the carnival is an emblem of the way that the unofficial world wrote back at the seriousness of the official world. Bakhtin writes in *Rabelais and His World* that laughter had been banished from the official sphere of ideology and other realms of high discourse. He points out that religious doctrine, in particular, placed a premium on seriousness and was intolerant of laughter going all the way back to its earliest days, even indicating, for example, that one of the accusations leveled against followers of Arianism was that they had introduced song and other forms of gaiety into worship (73). In effect, at least in this strain of challenge to orthodoxy, laughter is associated with the heretical.

If this is the case, then O'Brien's readers would have cause for concern, since it is difficult to imagine reading O'Brien without laughing, even on issues that border on blasphemy. For example, in *The Hard Life*, Finbarr has taken on the teachings of the Christian Brothers school so quickly that when he sees his brother Manus walking on a wire strung between the house and a tree, he "thought of Another who had walked on water" (23), but later reconsiders: Manus's act is less likely to be divine and more likely to be diabolical. He tells Manus, "it looked unnatural and if you are taking advantage of a power not of God, if you are dealing in godless things of darkness, I would strongly advise you to see Father Fahrt" (25). Later in that section, the brothers suffered through their homework, "cursing . . . Christian Doctrine and all similar scourges of youth" (30). Flann O'Brien's Irish readers, many of whom, like O'Brien himself, would have had Catholic school experiences similar to those of Finbarr and Manus, must have taken secret and slightly shameful pleasure at reading those words.

As I noted earlier, Vivian Mercier's work runs parallel to and, in many ways even anticipates Bakhtin's, so his ideas on the Irish comic tradition are valuable here. Irish tradition

made copious use of humor of the grotesque and the macabre, as Mercier elaborates in his chapter on the subject. In Chapter Three, I introduced Mercier's theme of sex and death associations that followed out of the grotesque. Specifically, he comments that the ancient Irish depicted the amalgam of sex and death that is at the heart of grotesque and macabre humor in the form of "Sheela-na-gigs"—Gaelic *Sílí-na-gig*. These totemic carvings, with their exaggerated genitalia and emaciated breasts, suggested both sex and death at the same time (53-56). This inversion is at the heart of both parody and the carnivalesque and is a good entry point for discussions of the lure of the heretical and the subversion of orthodoxy it implies.

There is a significant literary tradition in Ireland that has as its subject the idea of heresy and the heterodoxy within that heresy. It is often the case that heresy is associated with forbidden sexuality. In Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, heresy, particularly in the form of Lucifer's *non serviam*—I will not serve—is a theme that controls the retreat sermon of Chapter Three and is quite directly referred to in such passages as the following from Chapter Four. Recalling his licentious days, Stephen imagines a scene played out in the parlor of one of the prostitutes whom he used to visit. She begins:

> —You are a great stranger now.
>
> —Yes. I was born to be a monk.
>
> —I am afraid you are a heretic.
>
> —Are you much afraid?
>
> For answer she had danced away from him along the chains of hands, dancing lightly and discreetly, giving herself to none. The white spray nodded to her dancing and when she was in shadow the glow was deeper on her cheek.

> A monk! His own image started forth a profaner of the cloister, a heretic franciscan, willing and willing not to serve, spinning like Gherardino da Borgo San Donnino a lithe web of sophistry and whispering in her ear. (195)

In this passage, Joyce associates heretics and heresy with seduction and fornication, the sins of Stephen Dedalus during his days of debauchery. It is also the subject of the grotesque humor that O'Brien uses and about which Mercier has theorized. The passage continues with Joyce indicating that it is not merely Stephen in whom the girl is interested, but that she wished to "flirt with her priest, to toy with a church which was the scullerymaid of christendom" (196). Joyce himself appears to flirt, not with the Church, but with heresy.

Joyce continues to show his interest in and knowledge of heresy in *Ulysses.* The novel is in constant conversation with religions of all traditions, from Judaism and Islam, to Hinduism and Christianity. In addition to the obverted references to the Catholic Mass that Buck Mulligan sprinkles throughout the opening episode, references that have the effect of parodically questioning the Mass, *Ulysses* makes substantial early allusion to heresy and heretics. Don Gifford's impressive compendium of notes and allusions in *Ulysses* identifies three heretics from the second and third centuries—Arius, Valentine, and Sabellius—all fitting within the novel's reference to "the brood of mockers" (*Ulysses* 17-18) who challenged the Church's doctrinal teachings on the triune nature of the divine (Gifford 26). And indeed, all of the heretics mentioned in *Ulysses* are men of the church. In other words, the so-called heretics are not enemies of religion or of God, but men who sought reform, who wished to change the status quo. Therefore, one may conclude that those who control that which is being challenged are the persons who define heresy. Heresy is, thus, not so much a matter of truth as it is a matter of power. When O'Brien's characters challenge the power of the doctrines of the Church at any

point, they enact the role of heretics, even if they are not opposed to the fundamentals of the overall institution. Or, perhaps, it is very much the institutional trappings of the Church that are being critiqued, rather than the ideals. At the very least, O'Brien presents the idea of heresy in these instances as ambiguous, thereby challenging the very notion of heresy.

The juxtaposition of monks, real and imagined, with heresies, actual or not, emphasizes the tensions inherent in power systems. These tensions exist because real, historical ideological systems encounter real—that is, material—resistance. Contemporary Marxist theorist Göran Therborn explains this by proposing that ideologies must be seen as emanating out of historical conditions and that they must operate within a material matrix of affirmations and sanctions. As Therborn notes:

> The material matrix of any ideology can be analyzed as operating through affirmations and sanctions, such that ideologies become effective by being related to the one or the other. In an affirming practice, if an interpellated subject acts in accordance with the dictates of ideological discourse, then the outcome predicted by ideology occurs; while if the subject contravenes the dictates of ideological discourse, then he or she is sanctioned, through failure, unemployment, bankruptcy, imprisonment, death, or whatever. (34)

The Family, the Church, and education operate ideologically as historically-conditioned cultural practices that both affirm and sanction subjects. The dominant ideology would seem to prefer to bring about compliance in subjects through affirming their behaviors, but, in practice, there is more benefit to the dominant ideology to effect compliance through sanction.

The playing out of compliance through sanction manifests in Flann O'Brien's *The Hard Life* when the Pope threatens Father Fahrt with "silencing" should he not be able to rein in

Collopy. The italics in the following are reflective of the spoken words of the Pope being translated into English:

> *There seems to be a weakness of discipline in the Society of Jesus in Ireland. If Father provincial in Ireland does not move, we will silence Father Fahrt ourselves. . . . This man is suffering from serious delusions and obsessions and he is being encouraged in this disorder by Father Fahrt. . . . Perhaps a milder sentence will bring Father Fahrt to recollect himself and have true regard to his holy duties.* (156-58)

O'Brien may begin with the humorous idea of silencing the good [Father] Fahrt, but he also shows clearly the use of sanctions within the Church as a means of gaining cooperation. Even the apparent offer of a reduced sanction is intended merely to reinforce the power of the Church, as the hierarchy seems to be saying, "We can do this the hard way or the easy way, but we will do it our way." It is not sufficient for the Church to offer absolution as an affirmation of the penitent's desire to be reconciled to the good graces of the Faith. Instead, the Church's preferred way to maintain control is to continue to apply sanctions. As Therborn suggests, the Church will thereby be known as effecting its ideologies through sanction. And so it is in the Church of Flann O'Brien's world.

However, as I emphasize, Flann O'Brien is able to make very serious points about the place of family, Church, and education as cultural locations of the dominant ideology, and to do so in the context of his inimitable comedic style. And while heresy as an important thematic location of O'Brien's critique of Church ideology will be addressed more thoroughly later in this chapter, there are other strategies in O'Brien's arsenal. His first novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, a novel that clearly offers a parody of Joyce's *Portrait* through its primary protagonist, introduces

a number of both moral and religious topics, including the motive behind the deeply-embedded author Dermot Trellis's novelistic effort, "a book that would show the terrible cancer of sin in its true light and act as a clarion-call to torn humanity" (31). Already, of course, Flann O'Brien is satirizing this noble enterprise. His unnamed narrator-novelist creates the Trellis novelist character simply so he may undo Trellis's presumed desire to promote morality through his writing. He accomplishes this by showing Trellis to embody everything he had set out to write against. Trellis hoped to show that when "a man of great depravity and a woman of unprecedented virtue" (32) meet, that the woman would be corrupted and die in a back alley. Instead, as I showed in Chapter Three, these two characters fall in love and live as a blissful model of domesticity. Instead, Trellis, the moralizer, is himself guilty of corrupting a virtuous woman, raping her and impregnating her. And, instead, as one might expect if Trellis were to make his point about the cancer of sin and "require the expectant mother to make a violent end of herself and the trouble she was causing by the means of drinking a bottle of disinfectant fluid usually to be found in bathrooms" (156), ultimately, Trellis deprives her of life when she dies giving birth to his son—perhaps among the most predictable and mundane of causes.

The humor is not in the events so much as in the devices O'Brien uses. The "deceased" is not a real person, nor is she even a character in O'Brien's novel, but is in a novel about a novel embedded in the one that O'Brien writes, a character that O'Brien's characters have created by the artificial aestho-autogamy process, thereby fully fictionalizing the death. It is also humorous that O'Brien appears to be having his way with the Church's ideological expectation that immoral behaviors be punished here on earth. This is the ideological position that Dermot Trellis's novel purportedly intended to espouse. But here, too, O'Brien tickles the reader. Dermot Trellis is the exclusive "creation" of the protagonist of the novel, who, of course, is the

exclusive creation of O'Brien. But, to this point, either the protagonist or O'Brien could have allowed Trellis's agenda to go forward—write the "salutary book on the consequences which follow wrong-doing" (59)—and the Church's ideology would get played out. This is not what O'Brien does. Even though Dermot Trellis suffers much at the hands of the Pooka MacPhellimey as written into action by his son, Orlick Trellis, this suffering does not validate the sin-leads-to-punishment ideology. By the end of the novel, all of the pages that have described the torturous treatment Dermot Trellis has endured as punishment are blown out of the window of his room at the Red Swan Inn, thus providing for his escape from divine justice. Flann O'Brien cannot and will not write a novel that suggests that the Church is wrong in its ideological, sanction-employing view, but he does not write a novel that says the Church is right either. In this sense, it is both what O'Brien writes and does not write that is a response to the Church—a clever and comical way of writing back at the Church.

In Chapter Three, I indicated how Flann O'Brien used the ending of his novel *The Dalkey Archive* to invert the Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary from one of the iconic moments of religious faith into a comical announcement by a "virgin" named Mary to her new fiancé of her likely pregnancy—a pregnancy that ought to forever shake any faith the future husband may have in his bride-to-be. O'Brien does not challenge the Biblical story, but instead transplants it to the corner of a publican's house in a southern Dublin outpost. Then he asks us to imagine the way that the virgin-birth story would play out in our world. Indeed, in Chapter Three I addressed the conception of O'Brien's "virgin-births" in *The Poor Mouth* and *The Third Policeman* as commonplace. Sue Asbee notes that O'Brien's treatment of the issue is another in a series of references to Joyce in the novel. Asbee reminds us that Stephen Dedalus had questioned whether women were virgins or whores (107). O'Brien's character Hackett appears

to be telling Mick (and us, as readers) that Mary, like many other women, complicates this question: "One thing about Mary—she's alive. You never suspected that, or if you did, you kept the discovery secret" (201). There is great laughter in such scenes, provided they are not the reader's reality, and provided that they are not overtly seen as critiques of Church orthodoxy. But when there is the hint of a possibility that O'Brien may be suggesting that the real world doesn't correspond to the orthodoxy, or that the orthodoxy itself is due for question, then the laughter becomes potentially dangerous, especially when one remembers that the Church is very powerful and that the sanctions she has at her disposal are excommunication and everlasting hellfire. These are the hints, possibilities, and suggestions we see in Flann O'Brien.

However, O'Brien is nothing if not complicated. While in my reading above I contend that O'Brien has the Church's orthodox views of sin and punishment as well as one of its central and defining dogmatic teachings squarely in his sight, he is not an apostate. Maria LaMonaca, in her book *Masked Atheisms* (2008), argues that Victorian women writers, whether they were Catholic or vehemently anti-Catholic, were highly interested in Catholicism primarily as a means of illustrating their anxieties about the increased secularization in their world. Of particular interest were the Marian tropes, which, LaMonaca explains, were used by non-Catholic writers in transgressive ways owing to the fact that these writers felt no concerns about being perceived as blasphemous (2-4). O'Brien would have felt those concerns, so perhaps he is also writing back at the Victorians and their somewhat cavalier attitudes toward Catholic teaching. A new emphasis on Marianism was widespread in Ireland in the middle decades of the twentieth century. James S. Donnelly's analysis of this phenomenon points to several areas of focus in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s, including the impacts of the Spanish Civil War, rising

perceptions of threat from socialism and communism, and the general desire by many in Ireland to retain their "'moral purity' in the face of radically shifting social and sexual mores" (253).

Donnelly notes that moral threats, such as unregulated dance halls, Hollywood films, relaxed views on the mixing of the sexes in courtship, and leisure activities like sunbathing and mixed gender drinking establishments had numerous officials calling for increased levels of sanction, especially in the form of censorship (272-74). Flann O'Brien's *The Dalkey Archive*, in the view of most commentators a second-rate effort to revive the "lost" text of *The Third Policeman*, was written and set in the 1960s and would certainly have been produced in the wake of such social anxieties. This confluence of social activities and the Church's calls for restraint may explain why the protagonist Mick's encounters with the re-discovered James Joyce at a pub in Skerries are dominated by the Joyce character's denial of any of his earlier written work. The newly resurrected eighty-year-old Joyce says of his most notorious work, *Ulysses*, "I have heard more than enough about that dirty book, that collection of smut, but do not be heard saying I had anything to do with it" (174). Instead, he claims that his printed work has been "mostly pamphlets for the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland" and "a biographical piece on Saint Cyril, Apostle of the Slavs . . . under an assumed name, of course" (175). Mick questions whether this man is, in fact, Joyce or if he "masquerading." That is the sort of question that any other observer might rightfully ask of Brian O'Nolan / Brother Barnabas / Flann O'Brien / Myles na Gopaleen, since the question of assumed identities is better suited to his work.

I will discuss later the nature of the request Joyce makes of Mick and the outcome that follows, but here O'Brien is deconstructing the fictional reality of James Joyce that he has created—that Joyce is alive and well and living in Skerries—only to expose the legendary exiled writer to the doubts of Mick's mind. James Joyce, the famous writer of the *non serviam* of *A*

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church" has now, in O'Brien's deconstruction, chosen not to serve his earlier writing. Instead, his life's work is to honor the Church in "some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can" (218). Joyce goes on to explain that *Ulysses* was the work of various "Muck-rakers, obscene poets, carnal pimps, sodomous sycophants, pedlars of the coloured lusts of fallen humanity" promoted by Sylvia Beach and, when asked whether he was ever paid for the Church tracts, he asks "Why should they?" (176-77). O'Brien is pointing his critical eye not only at Joyce, but at Joyce's publisher, at the literary establishment whom Joyce decries—Ezra Pound seems to be implicated in some of the descriptions—as well as at the Church. In any event, O'Brien's fun comes at everyone's expense.

As Marcus Tanner points out, the Catholic Truth Society was one of the principal organizations which had set for itself the task of reading books in Ireland and recommending that they be banned. So for O'Brien's fictional Joyce—whose work would have been banned in Ireland had it appeared there—very specifically to repudiate his modernist masterpiece and join the other team, so to speak, is a comical inversion that gets at both Joyce and the Church. For, as Tanner also shows, there was a backlash against censorship that effectively elevated both the critical and financial success of those books that were banned (302). Joyce's *Ulysses* was, in essence, like the Jews of Mr. Deasy's unfunny racist joke in that novel: "Ireland, they say, has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the jews. . . . And do you know why? . . . Because she never let them in" (30). The most celebrated work of literature set in Dublin would only have been available to Dubliners like O'Brien by way of the unofficial market.

While it may be unclear whether Flann O'Brien is working his literary revenge on James Joyce (or whatever assumed name Joyce may have appropriated) in *The Dalkey Archive*, it is clear that the Church comes in for much of O'Brien's critique in ways that are somewhat straightforward in their satire. As I discussed in Chapter Two of this study, the period following the attainment of the Free State and well into the 1930s was a sort of renewal of Church power and influence. By comparison, the 1922 Constitution of the Free State was quite progressive and inclusive in what it said of religion: "Freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion are, subject to public order and morality, guaranteed to every citizen, and no law may be made directly or indirectly to endow any religion. . ." (Article 8). However, while the Constitution of 1937 did not declare the Roman Church to be the official state Church, stopping just short of that declaration, it specifically "recognizes the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of its citizens" (Article 44). As Emmet Larkin has shown, the 1937 Constitution came very close to declaring Catholicism the state religion in the effects of its later actions. The visibility of the Church in matters of policy such as the Mother and Child Scheme show the influence of those churchmen whom Tanner calls, in the title of one of the chapters of his book, "Soutaned Bullies of the Lord" (294).

This was the case in which Flann O'Brien, writing as Myles na Gopaleen in the *Irish Times*, made an enemy of Alfred O'Rahilly, brother to a prominent Celtic scholar and one of the defenders of the Church's role in the Scheme's failure and Minister of Health Noel Browne's resignation. O'Brien's role as the civil servant Brian O'Nolan and his role as the *provocateur* Myles na Gopaleen came together and, in a non-fictional way, took on the Church in a manner similar to the ways in which Flann O'Brien the writer does in his fiction. His attacks on Dr.

O'Rahilly took liberties with an authority figure and defender of the Church who was, according to Anthony Cronin's critical biography of Flann O'Brien, *No Laughing Matter*, "a soft target, . . . a member of the lunatic right and . . . an intellectual apologist for the now discredited Blueshirts" (178)—the moderate conservative party that had opposed the IRA in the 1930s and which had been associated with some fascist leanings (Lee 179-84). As Cronin points out, Myles was in control of the exchanges between himself and O'Rahilly from the start, easily using his wit and humor to disarm the position of his prestigious foe. So it is most often in O'Brien's critically humorous look at the Church in his writing.

O'Brien's novel *The Hard Life* (1961) seems determined to confront the staid hypocrisy of the Church, and even to flirt with the aforementioned censorship rather directly. It is filled with jabs at the Church, subtle and not-so-subtle, but always protected, as though under the auspices of the carnival, by humor. As early as the second chapter, when Mrs. Crotty is informed of the names of the two new residents of her home she exclaims, "I always heard that Saint Finbarr was a Protestant, Mrs. Crotty snapped. Dug with the other foot." But when hurling sticks are discovered in the boys' baggage, Mr. Collopy explains, "Cardinal Logue is a hurler and a native Irish speaker" (12). It seems that Collopy associates Catholicism with Irishness in Cardinal Logue, but the opposite association could obtain; because Cardinal Logue is Catholic, he is Irish. Either way, for all of the truth of Cardinal Logue's Catholic identity, there is no direct link to Finbarr, except that Saint Finbarr is one of three patron saints of Ireland and would, of course, have been Catholic. The humor of the *non sequitur* may not apply here because for Collopy the argument makes perfect sense—Finbarr is named after a saint, he is a hurler, Cardinal Logue is a hurler, he is Irish, Irish are Catholic, Finbarr is Irish. That the argument has a logic, tortured as it may be, is the source of the humor and also the source of the critique, for

the text suggests that young Finbarr resides in limbo religiously—Catholic because he is Irish, yet suspected of the "heresy" of Protestantism, despite having the same qualification of hurling for Irishness as Cardinal Logue. Note Finbarr's later use of the words "interregnum, lacuna, hiatus" as evocative of his liminal position in Irish society. The reader must try to either bridge or expose these gaps. It is in these passages that O'Brien asks critical readers to locate fissures, prying into them in order to conduct the very serious work of revealing central contradictions about the Church and its role in Irish culture.

O'Brien continues to poke at the Church and, once again, that archetype of the rejection of Irish Catholicism, James Joyce. When Finbarr is about to be trotted off to the Christian Brothers School, he tells us, "That night the brother said in bed, not without glee, that somehow he thought I would soon be master of Latin and Shakespeare and that Brother Cruppy would shower heavenly bread on me with his class in Christian Doctrine and give me some idea of what the early Christians went through in the arena by thrashing the life out of me. Unhappy was the eye I closed that night" (17). And the next day, at the school, which resembles to Finbarr a jail, he and Collopy are told by Brother Gaskett, "We will give him a thorough grounding in the Faith and, with God's help, if one day he should feel like joining the Order, there will always be a place for him in this humble establishment. After he has been trained, of course" (19). Finbarr recalls, "That is how I entered the sinister portals of Synge Street School. Soon I was to get to know the instrument known as 'the leather'" (20). Certainly one is reminded in Finbarr of the sleeplessness experienced by Stephen Dedalus as he awaits damnation after the spiritual retreat in *A Portrait.* And, like Stephen, Finbarr is being prepared for the recruitment into Holy Orders that often accompanied success in one of the Jesuit or Christian Brothers schools. O'Brien is quick to insert his associations of hell, in the word "sinister,' with the Christian Brothers school

in a way that upends the orthodox expectations, and which, as I pointed out earlier, seem to echo his own Christian Brothers experiences. "The leather" can be none other than the cousin to Joyce's pandy-bat in the earliest chapter of *A Portrait*. As O'Brien had done in the scene wherein the oar interpellated ideology into young Bonaparte O'Coonassa's skull in *The Poor Mouth*, he treats this application of punishment with matter-of-fact gallows humor, in contrast to the seriousness of Joyce's text. Yet the serious points do not disappear.

Flann O'Brien has created an episode of satiric double-genius in these several pages. First, he invokes the fear and terror that is another example of the sanctioning that awaits those who, in Göran Therborn's words, contravene the dictates of the ideological discourse of the Church. O'Brien also critiques the "humble establishment" which is the school managed by religious orders, suggesting that if a student were to be "trained" in the ideology of the institution, he could join in its endeavors to perpetuate that discourse of ideology—an ideology of earthly mortification in exchange for heavenly reward. Brother Gaskett learns from Collopy the name of his future student and replies upon hearing it, "That is a beautiful name, one that is honoured by the Church" (19). This is another challenge to Mrs. Crotty's earlier indictment of Finbarr as a Protestant. Were Finbarr to be called to the priesthood, this would fall within the parameters of Althusser's ideological interpellation—a calling by the Church into its communion of subjects (177-81). Alan Sinfield also comments on the doctrine of calling, but he places it within the heretical domain of Protestantism, in particular, of Puritanism. Sinfield explains that in the egalitarian ideology of the Puritan, each member knew his place, but that some members might believe themselves among the elect and would, therefore, have a "conviction of their distinctive value to society and to God" (169). He further argues that the doctrine of calling, thus, had a "contradictory effect." Those who stayed in the place that had been set for them were

obedient to the doctrine, but the doctrine also seemed to "legitimate the efforts of the more determined" (170). So it is, even in the non-heretical Catholic Church. Those who would or could be trained into the Church's priestly calling would enjoy a reward here on earth.

Next, O'Brien's young protagonist confers upon the school a completely opposing character to the one it seeks to project, describing it as "sinister" and thereby associating it, not with God, but with the very devil that the school and Church fight against. All this is presented within the confines of a carnivalesque satire whose speaker is an innocent naïf speaking truth to powerful experience. High discourse is supplanted by low; the teacher by the student; the priest by the sinner. Finally, O'Brien neutralizes some of this critique of the Church by writing it as a parody of an earlier critique of the Church. Mary Power argues that in *The Hard Life* O'Brien employs a classical satire inspired by Juvenal and that his primary object is Joyce (89-90). So, while O'Brien satirizes and critiques the Church in this episode, indeed, in the whole novel, he also critiques and satirizes one of the primary critics of the Church. In so doing, he accomplishes both critiques without implicating himself negatively in either one. O'Brien writes back at both the Church and at James Joyce.

What makes this approach so interesting is that O'Brien clearly had fond places in his heart for both Joyce and the Church. James M. Cahalan indicates in *The Irish Novel* that, despite the fact that Joyce's powerful influence may have quashed some of O'Brien's potential, O'Brien "loved and admired" Joyce's work and reserved some of his bitterest critiques for the fawning Joyceans who sought to make of the genius a treasure trove to plunder (238-39). In a collection entitled *Myles Away from Dublin*, O'Brien himself, under the significant name of George Knowall (a perfect name for a scholar), wrote the following in a column for *The Nationalist and Leinster Times* in Carlow:

> It is true that *Ulysses* contains those four-letter words but it is indeed far from being a bad book. The author was human enough to produce patches of poor and arid writing, and one large gallop of it shows he was capable of giving himself airs by producing (as he thought) the styles of many writers who went before him. For all that, I believe *Ulysses* is a great book.
>
> Its many distinctions have been imitated often enough to prove that. (126-27)

O'Brien was not entirely fond of Joyce, of course, as I will address later in this chapter. Additionally, as Cahalan recounts it, a fair body of scholarship can be amassed on the subject of the Gaelic-language expert O'Brien's lack of patience with Joyce's linguistic libertinism. In particular, in *The Irish Novel*, Cahalan cites a story of O'Brien's multiple unsuccessful efforts to read Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. "O'Brien asked: 'What would you think of a man who entered a restaurant, sat down, suddenly whipped up the tablecloth and blew his nose in it? You would not like it—not if you owned the restaurant. That is what Joyce did with our beloved tongue that Shakespeare and Milton spoke'" (239). Even the intent of this comment may be suspect when one realizes that the "beloved tongue" Joyce has defiled is, of course, English and not Irish. Regarding the Church and his relationship with it, Flann O'Brien's biographer, Anthony Cronin, observes that O'Brien was born a Catholic and remained so until his death. And, while O'Brien's particular brand of Catholicism may have had a slightly heretical Manichean influence, that influence merely served what Cronin calls "the innate nihilism of the comic vision" (*Laughing* 105). There is good evidence that Flann O'Brien was capable of taking an ambivalent view of even those persons and institutions that he liked and with which he aligned himself.

Thus, the Church also takes O'Brien's beating on an issue of social and gender justice. As the Mother and Child Scheme showed, Catholic hierarchy had declared itself, through its support of the Constitutional protections of the family and the place of mothers within families, to be supportive of the moral health of Ireland. What it also showed was that it was prepared to invoke the Constitution to make the claim that the plan to provide healthcare for mothers and children in the manner outlined by Dr. Noel Browne was a violation of the family's right to determine its outcomes for itself. Perhaps an issue less widespread and, certainly, less highly publicized—the concern for proper public lavatory facilities for women in Dublin in the earliest years of the twentieth century—receives no more support from the Church in O'Brien's novel, and that lack of support no less critique from the novel's main proponent. I discussed in Chapter Two how the Church entered into political activity on a somewhat selective basis, choosing the issues that would seem to benefit its power structure, supporting Daniel O'Connell in his fight for Catholic Emancipation, but withholding their support from his campaign for repeal of the Act of Union. This apparent capriciousness had at its root a wish to grant power to O'Connell up to, but not beyond, the point where his folk-heroic status could be used for the Church's benefit. Ferdinand Collopy is no Daniel O'Connell. Yet, owing to a set of somewhat mysterious circumstances, Collopy is granted an audience with the Pope—Pius X, based on dates that the novel provides—during which he eventually broaches the subject near to his heart.

The episode is O'Brien's grimy window into the opacity of the Church and its operation. In ways similar to the nested narratives of the many authors and novels in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, O'Brien shrouds the story of what happens in the Vatican in indirection. The reader is prepared for the encounter with the information that the Pope has an Irish-born stenographer for his audiences, a man "whose job it is to take down all remarks and observations made by the Holy

Father in the course of an audience. He translates the supplications of pilgrims orally but takes down only the replies" (146). In a rare reversal of the surveillance state, the Church seems not interested in observing and recording the faithful flock that has been graced with the presence of the Pope, but only the Pope himself. However, as the words of the Pontiff are now a matter of written record, they take on the power of the Church in more permanent ways. As has been the pattern in the novel, the comings and goings of Collopy in Rome are related via Manus's letters, thus adding to the reports the power of written language, but undoing that power through the indirect discourse that is part of the epistolary form.

When O'Brien combines these two forms of indirect discourse—the stenographer's record of only the Pope's words and the letter form of reporting Collopy's actions—with the problem of language differences during Collopy's audience with Pius X, the cloud of uncertainty and the increasingly evident ideology of the Church make for both hilarity and sardonic resignation to that imposing ideology. Manus reports to Finbarr that there was "a frightful, awful row;" that "As a matter of fact, the Pope told us all to go to hell" (151-52). As the rest of the letter illustrates, at no time does the Pope make this statement, but O'Brien makes certain that readers know that what the Pope says possesses the power of fact. Additionally, the responses of the Pope, direct or indirect as they may be, have the effect of a sanction against any contravention of the ideological discourse of the Church. Manus proceeds to report on the audience, which was initially dominated by small-talk, including a strange contradictory statement by Father Fahrt in which he characterizes the Irish as "a bit indolent" yet with "perhaps the strongest" faith in the Christian world (154).

Then O'Brien provides a textual anomaly that leads to a strange lengthy passage. The passage is a combination of the Pope's responses in Italian followed by a translation of these

responses provided by the stenographer. In the beginning of this passage, Manus apparently sets off from the rest of the letter a brief parenthetical note. The parenthesis serves to further embed the text, which is already reported by letter, thus indirectly, and which is hidden from the reader by virtue of its being partially in Italian, and which is incomplete because it does not include what Collopy, the suppliant, says. This strategy of embeddedness, one that O'Brien uses with great frequency—*At Swim-Two Birds'* novels within novels, *The Third Policeman's* circular repeated hell and digressive pseudo-scholarly footnotes, among others—is really an example of *mise en abyme.* Christian Moraru, in his book *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning,* surveys the numerous such strategies used by authors to effect a rewriting of already-existing texts. The purpose of these strategies is to write back at the originals, telling their tales but subverting them as well (33). This O'Brien does with a vengeance.

Manus himself does not hear the words spoken by Collopy despite the fact that he shares the room with him: "After a little more desultory conversation, Mr. Collopy said something in a low voice which I did not catch" (154). Thereafter, we are informed of when Collopy speaks, but are not told what he is saying. But we do know what he is saying. The Pope's responses cue us in, in the same way that we could deduce what is said when one party of a telephone conversation is absent. The Pope's responses all revolve around the suggestion that Collopy has lost his mind: "*What is this child trying to say? . . . Is this child in his senses? . . . We would not say that his head is working properly*" (154-55). And we know that Collopy can only speak of one thing—the lack of women's public lavatories in Dublin. Clearly, both the Pope's responses and Collopy's monomaniacal entreaties are suggestive of a temporary loss of the proper order of the world, not unlike that which we may associate with the Bakhtinian carnival. In this way,

O'Brien can both hide from the reader and reveal to the reader the conversation that results in Manus's assessment that the Pope tells them all to go to hell. In much the same way that absence of fathers in the family provides an important presence, Collopy's absent speech in the Papal office lies at the heart of the humor in this novel. We laugh at what we are not supposed to know because, in fact, we know it. Again, O'Brien can critique the Church and wink at the reader for seeing through the smoke. The scene between Collopy and the Pope is one that invites two distinctly different interpretative possibilities depending on whether one reads from the side of the institutional power of the Church or from the human/folk side of Collopy. It seems clear from which side O'Brien has asked us to read.

The Church, in the person of the Pope, is confronted with a challenge to its discourse. The Cardinal who arranged the Papal audience had told the party that, in contrast to the late Leo, "The man you are going to meet is the Pope of the poor and the humble. In any way that he can help them, he always does" (152). This is the ideological message of the Church. Interestingly, the Cardinal correctly ascribes to Leo the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, a manifesto that upheld the rights to private property, but which also sought fair wages and other aids to working people. *Rerum Novarum* is, in essence, a document intended to be in the interest of social justice (Kelly 312). However, as Göran Therborn explains in *Between Sex and Power*, the encyclical also went a long way toward reaffirming the Church's position on patriarchal power (25-26). Therefore, between the Cardinal's insistence that it is the desire of the current Pope to help the downtrodden and the Pope's later out-of-hand rejection of Collopy's requests, unheard by Manus as they may have been, there can be little to actually support the Cardinal's claims that the Pope will be helpful to Collopy's cause. It may even be that the Pope's refusal to give credence to the request is a commentary on the Church's position on the rights of women, as Therborn contends is an

outcome of *Rerum Novarum*. Collopy's project benefits women, and perhaps the Pope does not see women as deserving the "help" he could provide. In any event, Collopy seeks social justice from the Pope as head of the Church and is denied with threat of sanctions, whether we read the Pope's "Go to Hell" remarks as literal, or figurative, or as hilariously inappropriate. It well may be that the association of the Pope with the Church and his speaking in Italian suggests that the Church itself desires not to be understood. Certainly the Church appears to revel in its inscrutability.

The unspoken words of Mr. Collopy are one of the many gaps in the text that open places wherein to cleave the ideology of the Church. The subject of Collopy's request corresponds to Bakhtin's description of the focus of much of the carnival. As Bakhtin explains in *Rabelais and His World*, the domain of the material body is the source of both the humor of the carnival life but the celebration as well, because the body, particularly the lower stratum—the bowels and the reproductive organs—relate to "acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth" (21). Speaking about the miseries of incontinence and the smell of urine were common practices for Collopy, but these subjects fully shocked the Pope, juxtaposing the sacred and the profane in his view. Collopy engages in what Bakhtin calls degradation—a pull to the earth—in direct opposition to the Church's ideological call to heaven. As Bakhtin also argues, the carnival is predominantly a celebration of the dualistic and binary oppositions. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin identifies several of these binaries: "birth and death (the image of pregnant death), blessing and curse, . . . praise and abuse, youth and old age, top and bottom, face and backside, stupidity and wisdom" (126). These binaries are also part of Vivian Mercier's insights into the humor of the grotesque, which inverts sex and death (48-49). In one of the great hidden jokes of *The Hard Life,* Mr. Collopy is afflicted with a tremendous weight gain, which is

masked by no corresponding increase in mass. The source of the problem is his having been overdosed with a patent medicine called Gravid Water. Since the word "gravid" is a synonym for pregnant, when Collopy's great weight causes his fall and eventual death he quite literally evinces Bakhtin's idea of pregnant death. This preposterous idea allows O'Brien to reinforce the cycle of death and rebirth that is at the heart of the carnivalesque world.

There are numerous other ways that O'Brien may be read from a Bakhtinian viewpoint. Both M. Keith Booker and José Lanters have written substantial studies in which they read Flann O'Brien with Menippean satire as a framework. Booker contends that O'Brien's outlook is not limited to what is characterized as the "fundamentally dark vision" of such satires, suggesting instead that O'Brien's "exuberant energy" may be read "both as a consistent evocation of the theme of futility and as a parody of such evocations" (*Menippean* 6). Lanters, writing on the Menippean tradition in Irish literature, notes that O'Brien and others use the form and its ambiguities to critique the culture without implicating themselves in such a critique. As Lanters puts it, the form "creates a double vision in which the satirist both *is* and *is not* satirizing the present conditions in his country" (6; emphasis in original). Booker and Lanters emphasize the Bakhtinian exploration of Menippean satire while I maintain that carnival is an equally useful template for analysis.

As such, in the action of O'Brien's elevating Collopy to his audience with the Pope, we may observe what Bakhtin describes as the mock crowning and decrowning of the carnival king. By no normal means could this event take place—papal audiences are a quite rare privilege for Catholics. Thus, the episode in the novel reproduces the carnival and the carnival's emphasis on free and familiar contact among members of society who would be "separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers" (*Problems* 123). Placing into juxtaposition these normally separated

classes of people means that the laughter of the carnival, Bakhtin's laughter of ambivalence, is directed at the authority whose dominant place has been, temporarily, subverted (127). In this way, the Pope is the object of humor even more than is Collopy. It is the Pope whose place is undone, whose composure is unraveled, and whose ideological position of aiding the common man is exposed as a ruse. Of course, as in the carnival festival, Collopy is ultimately himself debased and decrowned, gaining not his request and losing both his hope and his life.

Finally in this scene, O'Brien injects a moment of potential heresy. Collopy is well aware of how he sees heresy at work and most of the time he equates it with Jesuits. In one of his many argumentative conversations with Father Fahrt, in a passage that some commentaries critique for being too pedantic and historical (Clissmann 272), Collopy details how the Jesuits were at doctrinal odds with Franciscans and Dominicans: "A lot of pious and intelligent men thought the Jesuits were heretics or schismatics. Faith now and there was no smoke without fire—hell-fire, maybe" (86). He later elaborates that the main objection to the Jesuits was that they were mixing missionary work with trade: "The Order was some class of an East India Company," Collopy asserted. "It was heavenly imperialism with plenty of money in the bank" (88). While Father Fahrt insists that the Pope's suppression of the Society of Jesus was not a matter of "faith and morals in the universal church" (87), the fact that the Pope threatened to silence Father Fahrt during the fateful audience brings the earlier heretical associations of the Jesuits into a level of agreement with the Pope's condemnation of Collopy and his party.

Indeed, Jesuits make out rather badly in general throughout O'Brien's work. Even when his critique is relatively benign, Jesuits are the targets. In a collection of newspaper columns entitled *The Hair of the Dogma*, O'Brien, in his manifestation as Myles na Gopaleen, points out that pubs are suited to a particular clientele; he claims that the "true pub *makes* its own

customers." He goes on: "The nearest parallel I can think of is that of the religious orders: they are all very meritorious in themselves, but they earnestly dislike and despise each other. Did you ever see a Jesuit speaking to a Christian Brother? Right. Nor me" (160). Innocent enough on its face, this remark seems about pubs, but, of course, it is playing on the famed elitism of the Society of Jesus. In my comment earlier in this chapter on the place of suffering, the line seems clearly drawn between the lives of the average Dubliner and that of the Jesuits. O'Brien's novel *The Dalkey Archive* also alludes to this division. Mick observes the Jesuit priest with whom he is meeting pay for a round of whiskies with a ten-shilling note:

> Mick was a bit surprised. The internal mechanics of the Jesuit Order (or Society, as they called themselves) was a mystery to him. . . . How could mendicants live in the grandiose palaces and colleges which the Jesuits customarily inhabit? The answer seemed to be that every Jesuit Father . . . is personally a mendicant inasmuch as he is personally forbidden to have any means or goods whatsoever. . . . It appeared that the Order was very wealthy, its members utterly indigent. He had heard that the Fathers lived and ate well in their princely abodes. (110-11)

With no necessity of fictional alteration, Flann O'Brien is able to pinpoint the orthodox separation between the Church and its people. In this way, he is able to critique the power held by the institution without a false or cruel word.

This famed Jesuit elitism is particularly evident in a later scene in *The Dalkey Archive.* The apparently reclaimed former exile, former artist of the obscene as a young man, James Joyce, who maintains that he has become a writer of pamphlets for the Catholic Truth Society, asks his new friend Mick if he will intervene on his behalf. He wishes to be considered a candidate for entry into the Society, a presumptuously comic request given the presumed age of

the Joyce character. Mick's best advice to the old Joyce is to play into an apparent weakness of the Society—their desire for material riches. When Mick informs Joyce that he is due £8000 from the sales of *Ulysses*, Joyce and Mick have this exchange:

> —But I tell you I don't want or need money.
>
> —Maybe you do. The Jesuits have a wide choice. It may be that they are not particularly fond of paupers.
>
> The silence which followed possibly meant that Joyce was acknowledging a quite new idea. He spoke at last.
>
> —All right. If £8000 was in fact earned by that horrible book you mentioned, and can be lawfully got, every penny of it will go to the Jesuits except five pounds, which I will devote to the Holy Souls. (186)

Whether Mick knows conclusively that the bribe will sway the Jesuits to take old Joyce as a candidate, O'Brien's introduction of simony—the selling of pardons, ecclesiastical offices, or indulgences, and a favorite theme of Joyce's in *Dubliners*—may be read as both a critique of the Church and of Joyce. Joyce even makes the difference between the seemingly acquisitive Society of Jesus and an apparently less so order. Indeed, when Mick abruptly leaves the meeting between the Jesuit priest, Father Cobble, and Joyce, leaving Joyce to explain his offer on his own, he asks himself, "Had he cynically made a fool of Joyce" (196). For answer to Mick's fictional question, perhaps only O'Brien's own words will suffice. He had written in one of his letters on the novel that, regarding Joyce, "I've had it in for that bugger for a long time and I think this is the time" (Hogan and Henderson 80).

When Joyce meets with the Jesuits, there is never even a true consideration of his request. To add insult to the situation, the only position for which the old Joyce is suitable, according to

Father Cobble, S. J., is to repair the underclothes of the priests. The language that O'Brien uses in this scene is brilliant in its juxtaposed imagery. Throughout the scene, Mick and Joyce are characterized as "incoherent," "embarrassed," "perplexed," and "clouded with some despair." They are baffled by the actions of these elite servants of God. In contrast, on the one hand, Father Cobble studies "his delicate hands," and, in answer to the suggestion that the mothers and sisters of the college students might take on the task of repair, he says "The Society of Jesus . . . has also its dignity" (192; 194). Opposing this, Father Cobble describes his semmet, a type of undergarment, as "[f]ull of holes," and, associating his occupation with hard work, he says, "If we only knew . . . why sweat is so corrosive, we would be perhaps getting somewhere. Upon my word my semmet is *rotted*" (193-94). The dignified and delicate order of the Society of Jesus is quite unable to overcome the human indignity and indelicacy of those decimating sources of rot that lie below the evident surface. This metaphor speaks much to the contradictory nature of the actions of these men of the Church, and O'Brien does not need to implicate himself in exposing the contradiction. In a bit of social theory that seems an echo of the Constitution's preferred place for women in Ireland, the good priest observes that "the Almighty distributed certain skills and crafts as between the sexes. The plain fact is that knitting and sewing and needlework are uniquely the accomplishments of women" (193). Father Cobble's suggestion that Joyce would be suited to this particular kind of work speaks both to the restricted role allotted to women in the country and to the quasi-feminized place Joyce would occupy in the house of the Jesuits.

In an odd contemporary twist, evidence has come to light only recently that the Irish government was complicit in the long-standing abuse, bordering on enslavement, of women at the hands of the Catholic Church, operators of the Magdalene Laundries well into the late twentieth century. These laundries were run by the Catholic nuns and "employed"

approximately 30,000 young women, most of whom were held in "de facto detention" because they were "unmarried mothers, orphans, or regarded as somehow morally wayward" (McDonald). The actions of the Church in imposing its ideology of suffering on earth as well as the actions of the government in providing lucrative contracts to the laundries are contemporary parallels to the state's constitutional privileging of the Church as manifested in O'Brien and to the symbiotic relationship enjoyed by this nearly theocratic society.

In O'Brien's fiction, the most evident Jesuit is Father Kurt Fahrt, S. J., Mr. Collopy's whisky partner and main ear in *The Hard Life.* Throughout the novel, he thrusts and parries with Collopy on the finer points of theology. Often, as the price to be paid for glass after glass of the contents of Collopy's crock, he must endure full-throated criticism of the Jesuit order. Such incidents present in the novel are too numerous to fully account for, but this scene will represent them well. Collopy challenges Father Fahrt to account for how he would handle a life of suffering. The priest replies, "I would do what my Superior instructs me to do. My Order is really an army. We are under orders" (32). The linguistic emphasis on military rhetoric and metaphors within the Church in general and Jesuits in particular suggest an institution that is perhaps akin to a repressive, rather than an ideological, state apparatus. The Church provides order and at the same time gives orders. To illustrate his point, Collopy invokes the Inquisition as proof of the Jesuits' uses of force. He creates a line of interrogation: "'Do you believe in the true faith?' 'No.' 'Very well. Eight hundred lashes'" (35). When Father Fahrt reminds Collopy that he belongs to the same "true fold" and that his talk is "scandalous," Collopy continues: "They called decent men heretics and the remedy was to put a match to them. To say nothing of a lot of crooked Popes with their armies and their papal states, putting duchesses and nuns up the pole and having all Italy littered with their bastards" (36). This episode ends with Father Fahrt

reaffirming that the Reformation was "a doctrinal revolt, inspired I have no doubt by Satan." He calls Martin Luther a heretic. Indeed, according to Father Fahrt, Luther is a "heresiarch" (37).

The emphasis throughout the passage has been on heresy and the idea that the Church defines as heresy anything that challenges Church orthodoxy. The orthodoxy of the Church, as presented by Father Fahrt, would contend that suffering has a place as a sanctifying force, that the people of the Church do as they are instructed, that "Procreation is the *right* of a married man" (32), that Jesuits were under the authority of the Suprema in Madrid during the Inquisition, an office directed to maintain Catholic orthodoxy. All of this is complicated by the composure and control exhibited by Father Fahrt in the face of these attacks. Anne Clissmann indicates that Father Fahrt's casuistry belies the appearance of composure and control; she argues that he is, despite our expectations of precise and careful thinking, more likely to explain subtleties with clichés (280-81). This is one of the ways that O'Brien critiques the held orthodoxy. He presents it as doctrine, but does so in a way that is mechanical and without true conviction. O'Brien's defender of the Faith appears to be going through the motions as part of a theological-political game at the pub.

In later episodes Collopy accuses the Jesuits of fomenting doubt among the laity as a means of controlling them. This Church strategy would be consistent with Edward Stourton's idea discussed above in which the Church's use of sanctions against its people is justified by the ways that these people do not adhere to the Church's teachings. The men contend over the history of the Jesuits and the impression that Collopy has that the Society places itself above the rest of the Church. He accuses the Jesuits of starting several wars and of flouting the rules of the Church by tacitly permitting marriage among themselves. "Bedamn but I don't know that I can trust you men at all," Collopy exclaims. "Ye are forever trimming and adjudicating yourselves

to the new winds that do blow. In case of doubt, send for a Jesuit. For your one doubt he will give you twenty new ones and always full of 'ifs' and 'buts,' rawmaish and pseudo-theology" (81-82). More problematically, in a comical elevation of the mundane over the significant, Collopy accuses the Jesuits of appearing to be a mendicant order while at the same time enjoying epicurean creature comforts such as red wine and roasted meats: "[Y]ou are for ever double-thinking and double-talking" (82). This is one of the many ways that O'Brien's texts invite further associations with Bakhtinian carnival and the ambiguities inherent in it. Among these associations are additional inversions of the Church.

While Collopy's indictment of the Jesuits digs deep into their history, the inclusion of King Sweeny in *At Swim-Two-Birds* digs into Ireland's legendary past. Sweeny, an Irish king who has committed a grievous sin against a man of the Church, is the subject of one of the many-layered tales in the novel. Finn MacCool is one of the ready-made characters that Dermot Trellis has secured for his own tale, but Finn, in turn, tells the woeful tale of Sweeny's madness, the tale that was immortalized as *Buile Shuibne*, a classic of Old Irish literature that was later revived in a series of poems by Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney. Vivian Mercier indicates that Finn is one of several fantastical characters in the novel, all residing outside of the Christian tradition in Ireland (39). Yet, in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the legendary Finn tells the story of Saint Ronan's injury at the hands of Sweeny:

> Now when 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. He made a great run out of the house without a cloth-stitch to the sheltering of his naked nudity . . . and he did not rest till he had snatched the beauteous light-lined psalter from the cleric and put it in the lake, at the bottom

. . . . (64)

When the call to battle interrupts Sweeny's desire to place the saint at the bottom of the lake next to his beloved psalter, the cleric is spared and curses the sacrilegious Sweeny to a mad existence in the trees. Yet the revenge of Ronan becomes the redemption of Sweeny.

Within a couple of pages of Sweeny's exile into the trees, the Christic comparisons with Sweeny begin. O'Brien's narrator of this story, Finn, tells how Sweeny lay in agony in the midst of the tree, with "every twist that he would turn sending showers of hawy thorns into his flesh," and "thick-thorned briars" and "blackthorns" tormenting him. Eventually, Sweeny is slammed from the trees to the ground, with "not one inch of him from toe to crown that was not red-prickled and blood-gashed, the skin to his body being ragged and flapping and thorned, the tattered cloak of his perished skin. He arose death-weak from the ground . . ." (67). The scourging and whipping and crowning with thorns that Christ endured before his death on the cross—his "hanging from a tree"—is invoked in O'Brien's imagery. After his fall, Sweeny, like Christ, "arose," and sang his lay, wherein the parallels are strong: "The thorntop that is not gentle / has reduced me, has pierced me, / it has brought me near death / the brown thorn-bush" (67-68). The torment of Sweeny and the passion of Christ intertwine in these lays that, according to Anne Clissmann, O'Brien himself translated from the medieval Gaelic (128). O'Brien's treatment of Sweeny nears its conclusion when Sweeny's lay reinforces the Christ comparisons: "Grey branches have hurt me / they have pierced my calves, / I hang here in the yew-tree above, / without chessman, no womantryst" (134). Even though there are clear differences in the conditions of the Crucifixion and Sweeny's cursed punishment, the similarities haunt the reader.

In his typical fashion, however, even as the images of Sweeny's suffering align him with redemption, O'Brien cannot resist comically inverting his inversion. First, the entire cast of Trellis's novel has stumbled upon Sweeny in his agony and each has an opinion on the subject of their find. When the Pooka MacPhellimy, "a member of the devil class" (1), finally identifies the poor sufferer, he advises, "There is only one remedy for a bleeding hole in a man's side—moss. Pack him with moss the way he will not bleed to death" (135), advice that is roundly greeted with approval. And, prior to that moment, lest the reader feel too sympathetic to Finn's story about Sweeny—who, despite his affront to the Church is drawn into relief with the Church's Lamb—one of the listeners in the novel, Shanahan, interrupts Finn to tell of their own poets. Unlike Finn or Sweeny, heroes of Irish lore, Shanahan is a common hireling, brought into Trellis's novel to do scutwork. Finn threatens his heckler with punishment very similar to that to which Sweeny has been subjected: "In the yesterday, said Finn, the man who mixed his utterance with the honeywords of Finn was the first day put naked into the tree of Coill Boirche with nothing to his bare hand but a stick of hazel" (73). Yet Shanahan persists, insisting on the praise that should redound to his man, the people's poet, Jem Casey. Shanahan shares his favorite Casey poem with his appreciative audience:

> When things go wrong and will not come right,
> Though you do the best you can,
> When life looks black as the hour of night—
> A PINT OF PLAIN IS YOUR ONLY MAN.
>
> By God there's a lilt in that, said Lamont.
>
> Very good indeed, said Furriskey. Very nice.
>
> I'm telling you it's the business, said Shanahan. Listen now. (78)

O'Brien has burrowed deeper yet into his *mise en abyme.* Within his nested novel within a novel within a novel, O'Brien has introduced a tale within a tale within a tale, further pulling us away from the business at hand. Yet, at the same time, he is calling attention to both the original novelist in his book—the young student protagonist—and to himself as storyteller of the people. His strategy subverts the novel, but it also subverts the authority of the various forms that his stories have taken. The psalter of Saint Ronan is a book of holy verses and its defilement by Sweeny is what enrages the cleric. The story told by Finn is Irish legend and its disruption in the service of doggerel raises Finn's wrath. The lays of Sweeny themselves are seemingly sacred texts, albeit also plaintively comic ones. Anne Clissmann observes that O'Brien provided them to the reader in a mixture of careful literal translation and comedic parody (122-32), all of which was possible because of his scholarly expertise in the Old Irish Gaelic he had studied and upon which he had written his M. A. thesis. While Kimberly Bowman-Kalaja argues that the title of the novel and its reference to one of the places that Sweeny visited in his flights is a sort of game-like diversion (58), O'Brien's own letters reinforce the centrality of the Sweeny passages in the novel. A letter to William Saroyan dated 14 February, 1940 indicates that it was his early desire to call the book *Sweeney in the Trees* (Hogan and Henderson 72). In this ambivalent mixture of presentation styles, O'Brien accomplishes several things.

First, O'Brien's inversions continuously call into question who is speaking and by so doing, he challenges the speakers' and the storytellers' authority. Such inversions are an essential part of the carnivalesque, even if those challenges are unofficial and temporary. Next, the speakers and the texts are also imbued with associations of the sacred, whether they are holy texts from a religious or a folkloric perspective. As he interrupts them, corrupts them, and subverts them, O'Brien challenges their sanctity. Why is any one text more authoritative than

the next, he may be asking. After all, in one of the most often-cited passages in the novel, this question seems at the heart of the enterprise of storytelling: "The novel, in the hands of an unscrupulous writer, could be despotic. In reply to an inquiry, it was explained that a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity. . . ." The passage continues, "The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo . . . The modern novel should be largely a work of reference" (19-20). In the final analysis, as O'Brien represents to the reader a theory of storytelling as subversive of the authority of the storyteller, so he allows an act against the sacred word to lead to the redemptive apotheosis of the heretic by way of his close associations with the very emblem of the sacred, Jesus Christ. Authority is challenged in all its forms.

Finally, in *Rabelais and His World,* Bakhtin's comments on Rabelais's critical judgment of the "Chronicles" in *Gargantua* are quite similar in their approach to holy texts. He argues that Rabelais's narrator heaps unquestioning praise on the "Chronicles," and contends that any who disagree with that assessment are to be cursed as "poisoners and seducers of the people" (163). This curse is even more applicable to those he regards as heretics. Because the author compares the "Chronicles" to the Bible and the Gospels, he is able to revile critics of the "Chronicles" just as the Church spurns and punishes heretics. The author's parodic praise of the "Chronicles," aligned as they are with the Gospels, and his condemnation of their critics is actually, argues Bakhtin, a critique of the Church and its intolerance. When Sweeny attacks the saint and his psalter and is severely cursed for it, Sweeny's redemption could well be a way for O'Brien to offer the same critique. But, just as Bakhtin indicates is the case in Rabelais, "the dangerous parody is offered in the form of laughter" (164)—laughter invoked by O'Brien in the clownish interruptions by the loutish characters Trellis has borrowed from other texts. In O'Brien's world,

this would be the only way one could expose the idealized and reified view of the Church in Ireland.

However, in some of his later work, Flann O'Brien appears to take on the Church a bit more directly through his incorporation of certain Church fathers into his fictions. Two of his letters, in particular, border on the sacrilegious in his references to Saint Augustine. On September 21, 1962, as he was laying out the cast for his novel *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), O'Brien wrote:

> Augustine is a wonderful man, if he ever existed. Probably the most abandoned young man of his day, immersed in thievery and graft and determined to get up on every woman or girl that he meets, he reaches a point of satiation and meekly turns to bestiality and buggery. (His Confessions are the dirtiest book on earth.) When he had become saintly, he was a terrible blister in the side of organized Christianity because he angrily held (and he was one of the Fathers of the Church) that there was no such place as Purgatory. (Hogan and Henderson 80)

In another letter dated two months later, O'Brien takes on Augustine even more crudely: "There is no doubt that St. Augustine was one of the greatest comics of the Christian era. He was preposterously conceited and, Bishop of Hippo, achieved astonishing feats in the sphere of hippocracy. He was an African (Numidia) and what I have yet failed to be certain about is whether he was a nigger. I hope he was or at least some class of a coon" (81). Perhaps O'Brien felt at liberty to flout convention and to poke fun at the sins of the saint in letters in ways he would not in his professional writing. Perhaps; except that his professional writing appears to perform these tasks as well. Perhaps he is able to do so because of the occasional uncertainty the

Church showed over Augustine's doctrines and because of the racialized debate about Augustine's African origins.

About this same time, Flann O'Brien, as Myles na Gopaleen, had put out a feeler on the Augustine topic. Keith Donohue cites a November 20, 1962 "Cruiskeen Lawn" column featuring his famous punsters, Keats and Chapman, that anticipates an episode from *The Dalkey Archive.* When Chapman tells Keats that the Descartes dictum *cogito ergo sum* was actually stolen from Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Keats explains the problem by telling Chapman that commentators were guilty of "putting Descartes before the Horse" (*Irish Anatomist* 192). In *The Dalkey Archive*, O'Brien uses the figure of Augustine to suggest some rather controversial ideas, many pertaining to the nature of religion. But he also uses for this purpose the ethically compromised and, as the reader later learns, madly dangerous De Selby who serves as interlocutor in the interview of Augustine that spans nearly a dozen pages in the novel's Chapter Four. The interview takes place in an underwater cave during what may be described as a suspension of natural laws—the participants are able to breathe, but not to speak. In this episode, O'Brien uses inversions and carnivalesque strategies to write back at orthodoxy.

Just as he had subverted the texts of the story Finn MacCool was telling, in this episode, the text of Augustine's most famous work is introduced by O'Brien only to be undone by him as well. O'Brien evokes Saint Augustine's document of conversion, the *Confessions*, in the underwater interview. Augustine biographer James J. O'Donnell describes the book as a narrative of the fall and rise of the seeker, a narrative that shows the Churchman's failures in meeting the triune temptations that Christ successfully overcame—"hankerings of the flesh, and the hankerings of the eyes and worldly ambition" (66). There is much in the *Confessions* that might remind one of the book Dermot Trellis was intending in *At Swim-Two-Birds*—a salutary

book whose purpose was to caution the reader of the wages of sin. In *The Dalkey Archive*, however, Augustine attempts to distance himself from his former sinful life. Indeed, he attempts to distance himself from his own text, claiming the "invented obscene feats" of Book Two of *Confessions* were "all shocking exaggeration" (35). In this sense, the effort Augustine makes to deny his own writing presages the denials of *Ulysses* that James Joyce will make later in the novel and which I discussed earlier in this chapter. Like other holy texts represented in O'Brien, then, the authority of *Confessions* is challenged, even by the very author of the texts himself.

The challenge to the authority of the text is rivaled only by the challenge to the holiness of Augustine, as readers may judge from his performance in the episode. O'Brien's Augustine is common, an aspect indicated by "the Dublin accent" with which he speaks. But it is not merely the accent that denotes commonness. O'Brien's Augustine is profane, calling his father a "proper gobshite" (34), describing the outcome of the heretical Church Father Origen's self-castration as leaving him "with no knackers on him" (36), and complaining of Heaven's surfeit of saints named Patrick: "We have *four* of the buggers in our place and they'd make you sick with their shamrocks and shenanigans and bullshit" (37). And O'Brien's Augustine is petty. Augustine's berating of Francis Xavier and Ignatius Loyola has the sound of a defensive child and echoes many of O'Brien's other critiques of Jesuits: "And Loyola? You talk about me but a lot of that chap's saintliness was next to bedliness. . . . Didn't Pope Clement XIV suppress the Order for its addiction to commerce, and for political wire-pulling? Jesuits are the wiliest, cutest and most mendacious ruffians who ever lay in wait for simple Christians." Augustine seems positively juvenile in his jealousy of Descartes' fame, accusing Descartes of stealing from him and of spending "far too much time in bed subject to the persistent hallucination that he was thinking" (36). In suggesting that bed was the place where Descartes formulated his work,

O'Brien indulges in a bit of self-reference to his protagonist in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and his protagonist's creation, Dermot Trellis*,* along with, as Fintan O'Toole notes, the de Selby of O'Brien's *The Third Policeman.* In fact, the trope of being abed as a marker of sloth or extreme ennui or escape is not unique to O'Brien, as O'Toole explains in his review of the collected novels. O'Toole invokes Russian novelist Ivan Goncharov's title character Oblomov to suggest the plight of Ireland as a "small, impoverished nation, culturally philistine and sexually repressed."

It is a neat variation on Bakhtin that O'Brien inverts the hierarchy of the Church by representing the venerable Augustine to be common, profane, and petty and to accomplish that inversion via the encorpified Augustine himself. The effect of the challenge to officialdom is more profound in this double-attack. But, O'Brien also employs the scurrilous mad scientist De Selby to further undercut the Church. Clearly well-informed on the *Confessions*, De Selby challenges Augustine to explain his conversion and questions him on the place of Saints Peter and Paul. Peter, claims Augustine, is "just out to show off the keys," and is tormented by the "lads in our place . . . [who] can't resist taking a rise out of him . . . with cackles of a rooster, cock-adoodle-doo" (37). Paul, whom Augustine needs to occasionally put in his place, also gets credit for assisting him in his turn away from the drunken sins of the flesh (39). De Selby's parting shot at Augustine is over his race. He contends that Augustine's name is a Roman disguise and that he is a "descendent of Noah's son Ham;" that all "true Africans . . . are to some extent niggers" (43). In this way, through De Selby's denigration of one of the premier Church fathers, Flann O'Brien is able to undo the ideological authority of the Church without appearing to do so himself. He has permitted both a critic of the Church and a Father of the Church to handle the task.

As *The Dalkey Archive* wends its way forward, Saint Augustine's *Confessions* are present in a different way. It is now neither Christ nor Augustine who must deal with the hankerings of the flesh, and the eyes, and worldly ambition, but the protagonist, Mick, who must face these temptations. Mick's tepid relationship with Mary is proof that he has been the master of his fleshly passions, at least in the sexless world of O'Brien's fiction. What Augustine called "hankerings of the eyes," is explained by James J. O'Donnell as curiosity about things one ought not to know, particularly in the realms of the spiritual and the supernatural (66). On this count, Mick displays more difficulty, especially once he is introduced to De Selby. In fact, it is Mick's determination to save the world from the sinister potential of De Selby's world-destroying substance, DMP, that not only shows his failure in resisting this temptation, but it also leads him to the life-altering decision that he should join the Church as a priest. The third temptation, the presence of worldly ambition, is clearly indicated here: "But Mick noted that his own function and standing had risen remarkably. He was *supervising* men of indeterminate caliber, of sanity that was more than suspect. Clearly enough his task had been assigned to him by Almighty God, and this gave him somewhat the status of a priest" (143; emphasis in original). Not only are the temptations of Christ and Augustine visited upon Mick in a comical substitution, but the view that Mick has of being chosen by God for his role as a sort of savior works to promote the fool to a king in the manner of the carnivalesque.

Mick will not be content to take the usual route to his newly-considered calling, for to do so would entail years of study at Maynooth, followed by, he was certain, a common parish assignment. This approach would leave him no better than the other Catholic Curates—"ignorant men, possibly schooled in the mechanics of ordinary theology but quite unacquainted with the arts, not familiar with the great classical writers in Latin and Greek, immersed in a

swamp of tastelessness" (144). He must bind himself to a closed order, perhaps even one that held its members to a vow of silence. His delusional *tour de force* goes on, culminating with his sad conclusion that "Remote indeed was his prospect of ever becoming Pope" (145).

It is no great surprise that Mick would project his ambitions in this far-flung manner. As the Irish state has been operating, it has taken on with the rest of the developed and developing world a view of society that Henry Giroux describes as technocratic rationality. This form of rationality, Giroux claims, increasingly privileges the claims to progress that technology and science make and renders human agency all the more unlikely (*Teachers* 78). Mick's own job with the civil service is one that would represent such a rationality. Mick later explains to his friend Hackett that the life he has been living is "futile and, indeed, laughable" (164) and later still, with direct reference to his work, he considers, "What of the dozens of people of both sexes he knew in the civil service? They were pathetic, futile nobodies, faceless creatures, and—worse—they were bores. Perhaps other people found himself a bore" (198). Mick seeks in his new identity a way to feel the salvific power he experienced as the man who has thwarted De Selby's plan to destroy the earth. He views his new place as one more inclined to allow him to feel free than it is to constrain him. In the process, O'Brien's parodic inversion of salvation, one that places Mick, the Irish "Mick" Shaughnessy, as Father of the Church, as Messiah, is a scathing observation on the ideological power of the institution of the Church, because, as he shows later in the novel, the Church is not likely to provide the desired freedom.

The Church's literal *bête noir* since the Biblical story of creation has been Satan, Beelzebub, Lucifer, and other iterations of the Devil. From a literary standpoint, with the possible exception of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and its heroic Lucifer, no demonic figure stands out as Mephistopheles has in the Faust legend. Flann O'Brien's version of this legend takes shape in

a play he attributes to Myles na Gopaleen, *Faustus Kelly* (1943). Councilman Kelly, a pragmatic, yet philosophical politician, serves as Chair of his little urban council, yet aspires to the office of T. D., member of the Irish Parliament, the Dáil Éireann. To ensure success in this goal, he has signed a pact with Mr. Strange, whose impeccable qualifications for the post he seeks—rate collector for District Two, a position not far removed from the position held by O'Brien's father, Michael O'Nolan—include graduating from University College, Dublin, winning a silver cup in the long jump, fluency in the Irish language, and courtesy in dealing with others (140). Mr. Strange, who is clearly the Devil, is Irish to the core. He is a Catholic, a nationalist, a native speaker, and a charmer. O'Brien has written a farcical play about petty local-level politics where the chief fights center around whether Reilly, Kelly's main antagonist, will see his niece, the council typist, receive a 5 shilling increase in pay; where regional prejudices cause members of the council to berate the Town Clerk for having the audacity to be a Corkman. Kelly, to be fair, questions whether he will be able to accomplish any good were he to be elected T. D. He blames human nature, not democratic politics, for the patronage system that makes everyone serve their own interests. One gets the sense that it is not the desire for political office that has him dealing with the devil, but love of country.

It seems quite apparent by the end of the play that government has made its deal with the Devil, who stands in place of the Church by their close association. O'Brien's careful but clear connection here is important because he is suggesting that one of the principal impediments to government doing the work of the people is that government is often doing the work of special interests, including the Church. Another member of the council, a man named Shawn Kilshaughraun, had previously been a member of Dáil Éireann, and when he is asked why he lost his seat, he cryptically explains, "I'll tell you, boy. Instid . . . of getting work on the roads for

strong farmers . . . and instid of getting young farmers' sons into the Electricity Supply Board . . . and instid of getting the old-age pinshin for men with big fortunes that weren't the age . . . phwat was I at only planting little fir trees on the mountains that I love above meself" (125-26). When Mr. Strange's rate collector position is put in jeopardy because of his inability to be sanctioned by the Department, no doubt there are laughs from the audience that the Devil has been caught in his own web of deception. He appears to be completely undone by the glitch that prevents his victory, and he flails about like a fish on a hook: "But I have to stay here for a while. I must have a job. I MUST HAVE A JOB. Surely you can fix me up for a few weeks, Mr. Kelly? I can't be fired out like this without warning. It isn't fair" (189).

O'Brien does not make clear whether Kelly has planned the technical breach that defeats the Devil, but Kelly, on a like technicality, is not assured his desired goal. Kelly's election to the post of T. D., secured through the diabolical intrigues of Mr. Strange, is in question—the last two boxes of votes contained only ashes. A petition for invalidation is to be issued. Feeling himself cheated, Kelly's populist views dominate his angry and determined fight for his post:

> Ashes? . . . A Petition? . . . To the Devil with their petition! TO THE DEVIL WITH THEIR PETITION! Simply because I choose to make a few Christian principles the basis of my scheme of life, they hate me—they *loathe* me—they seek to fling me aside . . . TO RUN ME OUT OF PUBLIC LIFE! But they will not succeed . . . . And no contemptible conspiracy, no insidious intrigue, no treachery or trickery shall stand between me and my rightful place in the free parliament of the sovereign Irish people. IN . . . THAT . . . NATIONAL . . . ASSEMBLY I will lift a *fearless and unfettered voice* to lash and castigate the knaves and worse than knaves who have sold out the old land on the altar of

> mammon, I will assail without mercy the gombeen men, the time-servers, the place-hunters, the fools and flunkeys and godless money-changers—I'll outwit them all and destroy them . . . FINALLY. . . . (195-96)

This screed results in the Devil's return with the original contract, which he tears to pieces, and in his declaration that he wants neither Kelly nor any of the other Irish to be in his eternal company and that he is through with Irish public life (197). Vivian Mercier points out several ways that the Devil appertains in the literature of Ireland, ranging from procreative partners of witches in a black Sabbath (60) to progenitor of evil figures in political satire (167). But it is unlikely that any writers have used the Devil to signify the Church in an effort to condemn cronyism in civil government. Whether one views O'Brien's presentation of Kelly's views at the end of the play as serious on their face or as part of the farce, may be immaterial. The Devil does not, in this ending, get his due because O'Brien undoes the normal power of the Devil's pact. If we read the Church into this equation, the normal relationship between Church and government is also called out and subverted.

There may be any number of reasons why Flann O'Brien felt some level of impunity in his criticism of the Church. In some cases it may have been because he wrote in Irish, as he did particularly in *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth*). To make fun of the false relationship between purity of Gaelicism and its attendant poverty with the likelihood that one would be holy and suited for salvation was an easier task when only a small number of readers could clearly decipher that critique. The sheer comedy of the writing also appears to have given O'Brien some latitude. A bit of criticism of those in power can be accepted if it appears as though the laughs are in good fun. This may be especially true when the power is critiqued through the humorous actions of weak and morally compromised characters such as *At Swim-Two-Birds'* Sweeny or

The Dalkey Archive's Mick or Collopy in *The Hard Life.* I argue as well that the critique of the Church may not have been O'Brien's principle objective; that a reading of the cracks and fissures of the texts is more revealing than a reading where the object of satire is evident. As had been the case with O'Brien's subversive portrayals of the family that I discussed in Chapter Three, and, as I will continue to illustrate in Chapter Five concerning the cultural power of the dominant representations of education, the ideology of the Church comes in for a satirical assessment in substantial sections of Flann O'Brien's writing.

CHAPTER 5

"IT'S NOW THE END OF MY LEARNING": EDUCATION AS APPARATUS OF IDEOLOGY

Michael W. Apple begins the preface to the 1995 edition of his book *Education and Power* with an anecdote recounting the new state standard in Wisconsin requiring all future teachers to take an undergraduate course entitled "Education for Employment." It seems logical that in the contemporary environment one might wish to be educated, just as it seems logical that one might wish to be employed. It even seems logical that the former might contribute to the improved prospects of the latter. However, connecting education and employment in this manner appears to make one the *raison d'être* for the other. Apple somewhat facetiously asks, "Education is simply the supplier of 'human capital,' isn't it?" (vii). Yet clearly, Apple's consternation about the problems inherent in viewing education as the locus of job-training, and little else, is justified. As Apple goes on to explain, the ideological factions who seek an educational agenda that equates education almost solely with preparation for employment are less interested in "increasing the life chances of women, people of color, or labor." Instead, they hope to "provide the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing our international competitiveness, profit, and discipline and for returning us to a romanticized past of the 'ideal' home, family, and school" (ix).

In Chapters Three and Four, I illustrated that cultural apparatuses such as the family and the Catholic Church in Ireland are powerful producers of ideological discourse. While the Irish Constitution of 1937 reifies these entities, bestowing upon them a place of privilege codified within the very foundational documents of the state, Flann O'Brien achieves his rare brand of comedic subversion of the family through his exposure of their absent elements, and of the

Church through his exposure of its powerful self-interest. In this chapter, I extend my analysis of O'Brien's treatment of what I called in Chapter Two "an unholy Trinity" of institutional constructs by focusing my attention on education in his work. In this chapter I will focus primarily on O'Brien's novels *At Swim-Two-Birds, The Poor Mouth* (*An Beal Bocht*), *The Hard Life*, and *The Third Policeman.* Additionally, I will explore select columns from "Cruiskeen Lawn" that were published initially in the *Irish Times* and later re-issued in collections. As I will point out and explain, it is precisely in the romanticized, ideally-envisioned past of the family, Church, and education that material conditions expose the shortfalls of these institutions, and it is here that Flann O'Brien's satire makes that material critique possible.

Flann O'Brien takes on the ideological discourse of education and, as he does in his commentaries on family and the Church, he seems to recognize that this task is complex. Indeed, education as a part of the ideological landscape of Ireland goes back several hundred years. Citing David Beers Quinn's book *The Elizabethans and the Irish*, Andrew Hadfield indicates that in the sixteenth century, it was common for both the New English (Protestant) and Old English (Catholic) to "see the native, 'wild' or 'meere' Irish in identical ways. It was often taken as fact that the Irish were a barbarous or savage people—dirty, nomadic, treacherous, lecherous, and wanting all stabilizing social customs—who lacked the ability to pass above their pastoral mode of living to a 'higher' form of civilization" (78). Hadfield reports that the Jesuit missionary Edmund Campion claimed that education was the key to remedying this problem in Ireland, illustrating one of the many ways that the powerful institution of education was tied early on with the ideology of the Church in Ireland.

The presence of ideological power and the discourses that emanate out of institutions of power are more likely to be covert rather than overt. In Flann O'Brien's Ireland, however, this

statement requires some qualification. The Constitution of 1937, as I have previously argued, privileges each of the cultural institutions I am examining in this study. The Family's role as "the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society" and the place of women in their "life within the home" cannot be ignored as a direct ideological statement. Likewise, the Constitution's bestowing of the "special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith" was not merely a de facto establishment clause; the privileges the Church enjoyed were so universally accepted that the amendment removing the "special position" of the Church was not enacted until 1973. Regarding Education, the Constitution seems less direct in its ideology, except to tie education to both family rights and the role of the Church in providing educational opportunities. But in so tying the policies of education to those relating to both the family and the Church, the Constitution of 1937 very much directs the ideology of education to that which is consistent with the rural, idyllic, and hierarchical discourse of the dominant culture.

In any effort to address the ideological discourse of the dominant power, a society's system of education may be regarded as both the problem and the solution, for as Nicholas Burbules puts it "Power is latent in structures of ideology, authority, and organization . . . . Educational institutions . . . are (as usual) both culprits in creating and perpetuating the problem and, potentially, channels for revealing and criticizing the nature and origins of power and hence for giving us an opportunity to transform its bases" (95). Michael Apple has a more forceful way of positing this idea:

> It has become increasingly obvious . . . that our educational institutions may serve less as the engines of democracy and equality than many of us would like. In many ways this criticism has been healthy since it has increased our sensitivity to

> the important role schools—and the overt and covert knowledge within them—play in reproducing a stratified social order that remains strikingly unequal . . . . [T]he educational and cultural system is an exceptionally important element in the maintenance of existing relations of domination and exploitation in . . . societies. (9)

In Flann O'Brien's fictive world, the dominant positions of the ideologies of education are prominently represented. In O'Brien's first novel, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, after enduring the jabs of his uncle for most of the novel—jabs aimed at his apparent lack of effort in and acquiescence to the demands of school—the protagonist takes his examinations and proves himself highly capable of meeting those demands. Once the news of this success is out, the uncle praises his nephew and, together with one of his cronies, bestows upon him a second-hand watch. The uncle says, "We hope that you will accept it and that you will wear it to remind you when you have gone from us of two friends that watched over you—a bit strictly perhaps—and wished you well" (234). The nephew's high marks on the examination appear to have effectively turned the tide on the power relations, not only between the school and the student, but between the uncle and his nephew as well. The implication is that, because of the nephew's success in navigating the drudgery of education, he has freed himself ("when you have gone from us") from that drudgery. Yet, the "watch" pun is a reminder that there will still be a controlling, panoptic gaze in his life.

I indicated in Chapter Three that the nephew occasionally recognized the humanity of his uncle and that he sometimes understood his uncle's genuine interest in his success. Here once more, the ambivalent relationship that the nephew has with his uncle—alternately tormenting him and feeling tormented by him, resenting him and feeling resented by him—illustrates the

complexities that carving out one's place in the Ireland of the new Constitution might present. Early in the novel the narrator described his uncle as "Rat-brained, cunning, concerned-that-he-should-be-well-thought-of. Abounding in pretence, deceit. Holder of Guinness clerkship the third class" (25). By the end of the novel, the tone has changed dramatically: "*Description of my uncle*: Simple, well-intentioned; pathetic in humility; responsible member of large commercial concern" (236). Paralleling the structure of the previous, perhaps unfair indictment, this later identification seems to reflect the influence of the ideology of school that expects its students to obtain certain tractable and amenable behaviors. While the narrator saw himself as a subversive writer of novels, he felt the need to attack all authority. When he realizes that his work may instead lie in a place not unlike that of his uncle—as was the case with O'Brien himself in following his father into the civil service—his view of that authority is dramatically softened. This may not be the direct thinking of either the narrator or of Flann O'Brien, but the differences are most clearly present.

Thus, before the freedom that education provides can be brought to effect, it appears that the protagonist must withstand the strict watchfulness of the dominant ideological discourse. Louis Althusser's analysis of Ideological State Apparatuses and the system of calling—interpellation—that they employ explains the process. Althusser contends that ideology sets into motion practices that perpetuate themselves through the accepted belief that the practices are natural. He concludes:

> Result: caught in this quadruple system of interpellation as subjects, of subjection to the Subject, of universal recognition and of absolute guarantee, the subjects "work," they "work by themselves" in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of the "bad subjects" who on occasion provoke the intervention of one

> of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus. But the vast majority of (good) subjects work all right "all by themselves," i.e. by ideology (whose concrete forms are realized in the Ideological State Apparatuses). (181)

O'Brien's protagonist in *At Swim-Two-Birds* is made to accept the rightness of the ideology of educational accomplishment, but only after he experiences the threats of the repressive uncle and his glowering gaze, and after he submits himself to the judgment of the educational apparatus.

This acceptance is also reflective, in part, of what Michel Foucault describes as the examination, which "combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement." The examination is a power strategy that is "highly ritualized," and is intended to measure the subject against a culturally- and ideologically-established set of norms for the purpose of "qualify[ing] . . . classify[ing] and . . . punish[ing]" the subject (*Discipline* 184). The narrator in *At Swim-Two-Birds* is examined on two levels. First, his uncle examines him and classifies him as lazy, an attribute for which he must be punished, either by the uncle's ill-treatment of him while he is under his uncle's surveillance, or by the educational system. Then, the narrator is examined by the system in a more "ritualized" manner, and in this case, he is deemed qualified by that system and is, in turn lauded both by the system and by his uncle who had initially examined him.

In naturalized ideological conceptions of education, there is an implicit belief that the protagonist's success, indeed, anyone's success, is a function of the democratic and egalitarian nature of schools, that schools are meritocracies that reward participants on the basis of their abilities. But, as Nicholas Burbules argues, "[a] person's acquiescence in hegemonic, authoritarian, or bureaucratic directives tends to reinforce and legitimate them, in the minds of both those issuing them and those directed by them. . . . Meritocracy preserves and exacerbates

power relations by convincing both the successful and the failed that their destiny is deserved" (109-10). This is almost a textbook definition of false consciousness. The views of the powerful authorities that define success become the only views that are acceptable, because to challenge the power or authority is to risk running afoul of their bestowal of success. Our protagonist's uncle is mostly right in his early assessments of his nephew's lack of diligence in his studies when, on two early occasions, he queries "Do you ever open a book at all" (2; 4). The uncle clearly presumes he knows the truth about his nephew in the early part of the novel—that his nephew is a no-account slacker. But there is also a gap between what he believes about his nephew at the end of the novel—that he is a dutiful student—and the truth as it exists. In each case, the presumption and the reality are, at best, halves of a whole story.

Antonio Gramsci in *Prison Notebooks* expresses the relationship between education and power in a culture in definite terms: "Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship" (350). Joseph A. Buttigieg offers considerable commentary on Gramsci's statement, a statement that relates to the Italian system of vocational education put into place by minister of education Giovanni Gentile. Buttigieg writes, "Gramsci thought the new system was discriminatory; it perpetuated the exclusion of the majority of peasant and working-class children from the influential upper rungs of the social hierarchy by channeling them at an early age into vocational tracks" (70). Nicholas Burbules expounds on the idea of hegemony as well when he claims that hegemony pervades both the power of educational decisions and the power of educational agenda-setting. Citing Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, he speaks of a type of power construct in which those in power make decisions that impact others but also set the agenda such that the only topics discussed are those that redound to the powerful and their interests (102). Finally, Burbules connects hegemony to ideology by

contending that "Ideologies are rarely *imposed* on people . . . . Rather they are insinuated by, for example, schools, public speakers, or the media; interpreted and understood with varying degrees of internal consistency by an audience; then elaborated and promulgated as part of 'common-sense'" (106). Thus, those who control systems and make the rules are moved by their self-interests to perpetuate those systems and convince all others to accept both the systems and their rules as the nature of things.

Education in O'Brien often is portrayed in this very manner. It is not a matter, for example, of whether a character will attend school—the protagonist in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the unnamed narrator in *The Third Policeman*, Bonaparte O'Coonassa in *The Poor Mouth*, or young Finbarr in *The Hard Life* all attend some sort of school, even if that tenure is sometimes brief—but, instead what will be the means by which school interpellates the dominant ideology into that character. Ideology is interpellated into Bonaparte O'Coonassa in his encounter with school in *The Poor Mouth* in an extremely violent way. In Chapter Three I discussed this episode to make the point that familial lineage is called into question as a part of authentic identity. This is partly because of the absence of Bonaparte's father, an absence that leaves him scrambling at nearly every turn in an effort to latch on to who he is. That the episode is located in school is, to a certain degree, immaterial to the Chapter Three point of the familial quest. But it does take place at school and continues a long series of comical events that are clearly related to O'Brien's portrayal of education in the Gaeltacht specific to the issue of language.

O'Brien's only Irish language novel, *The Poor Mouth* is set in a somewhat indeterminate time and place, but is intended to evoke the great Irish language memoirs of Tomás Ó Criomhthainn, and the Irish language novels of "Maíre" (Séamas Ó Grianna), and Peig Sayers (Kiberd 503). The novel is also set against a dizzying uncertainty with regards to Irish language

policy, especially in schools. The indefatigable F. S. L. Lyons pointed out that prior to the institution of the Irish Free State in 1922, a period that would have included the setting of O'Brien's novel, Irish language education in schools was complicated by a desire on the part of many to teach the language as a means to distinguish education for Irish students from that of their English counterparts. But at the same time, there were the economic imperatives that clearly rewarded, as Lyons puts it, "mastering the tongue of the foreigner" (88). Declan Kiberd aptly describes the situation in the 1920s and 1930s—and Flann O'Brien's education overlaps with this period—during which a nationalistic revival of Irish language education often resulted in students failing their entire block of state exams for having failed the Irish language test: "Whereas in the nineteenth century many had been caned for speaking Irish, many were now punished for not speaking it properly or for not speaking it at all. Generations of children came to see it not as a gift but as a threat" (265). This is precisely the situation depicted in *The Poor Mouth,* except that O'Brien uses the punishment that the British system meted out as a reverse example of the new Irish educational system's approach to the teaching of the Irish language. This reversal enabled O'Brien to ostensibly critique the British colonials when indeed his target was the Irish educational system.

Flann O'Brien wrote about the Sisyphean task that Irish language instruction had become in the Irish Free State. In a series of columns written under the name George Knowall—another of O'Brien's numerous literary pseudonyms—for *The Nationalist and Leinster Times*, Carlow, and collected under the title *Myles Away from Dublin*, he begins, "All the trouble, agitation and work to revive the use of the Irish language is about 100 years old. In 1860 there were over a million native speakers in the country, many in communities as far east as Tipperary and

Roscommon, and at Omagh and Antrim. I do not suppose that there are 200,000 left who speak Irish 'from the cradle.'" He continues:

> It is impossible to assess the extent or value of teaching Irish in all the schools since the foundation of the State but it is a fair guess that the language learnt, even well learnt, is not true Irish. Scarcely ever anywhere is an acquired tongue the true thing and that holds even where a transposed person is in an environment where nothing but the other tongue is spoken. In fact, as languages go, Irish is a very difficult language, totally alien to the European mould. (34)

Of course, Flann O'Brien, or Brian O'Nolan in his school days, spoke and wrote Irish fluently; it was the family's home language, acquired there and not in school. In that sense, Bonaparte O'Coonassa resembles O'Brien. However, speaking the Irish language in schools in the Gaeltacht of the novel runs counter to the dominant ideology. In three separate, yet, I contend, related episodes, O'Brien's subversion of that ideology dominates the early chapters of *The Poor Mouth*. Over the next several pages, I will explore these subversive strategies and relate them to historical and cultural influences in O'Brien's Ireland.

In the first episode, when Bonaparte returns to his home from the beating he had received at the hands of the schoolmaster (see my Chapter Three), his mother enlightens him: "It was always said and written that every Gaelic youngster is hit on his first school day because he doesn't understand English and the foreign form of his name and that no one has any respect for him because he is Gaelic to the marrow. There's no other business going on in school that day but punishment and revenge and the same fooling about *Jams O'Donnell*" (34). There is an almost formulaic association between Gaelicism and violence in school, illustrating, no doubt,

Kiberd's observation about caning. This condition leads the young Bonaparte to declare that he does not intend to "ever go back to that school but it's now the end of my learning" (34).

Bonaparte's syntax may be intended to reflect the Irish turn of phrase, but its ambiguity also suggests that he either believes that the end of school equals the end of learning, or that he has learned from that first violent day what he needs to know to survive his Gaelicism. Bonaparte's youth and innocence, along with his mother's comment that he is shrewd, makes both meanings possible. Bonaparte's comment also permits the reader to see part of Flann O'Brien's challenge to the Irish system of education. The idea of the Irish language as spoken by native speakers is an important one pertaining to the relationship between power and education. Note, in particular, that Bonaparte is specifically punished for speaking Irish in school, especially since the principal notion he is trying to convey is his name—his identity. The imprisonment of his father and later of Bonaparte himself because they cannot defend themselves in an English-speaking legal proceeding, according to the notes that accompany the novel, has precedence in Irish history (128). Indeed, the tensions between the role of education as a liberating force and the expectations that the English will use education as a form of control are not new. Vivian Mercier comments on a tradition in Irish literature that tends toward belittling education and its effects. Mercier provides the example of Thomas Moore's novel *Memoirs of Captain Rock* (1824). The Rocks are a family of outlaws whose business is resisting the English dating back to the twelfth century. The Rock family fears that any commitment that the English might make to providing good and fair government will deprive the family of its livelihood. Mercier cites the novel's reassurance that this is unlikely: "As Property and Education are the best securities against discontent and violence, the Government, in its zeal for

advancement of our family, took especial care that we should be as little as possible encumbered with either" (197-98).

Henry A. Giroux comments that "ideology is dissolved within the concept of objective knowledge, that the relationship between the hidden curriculum and social control are [*sic*] discarded for a preoccupation with designing objectives, and finally, the relationship between socialization and reproduction of class, gender, and racial inequalities are [*sic*] ignored for an overriding concern for finding ways to teach knowledge that is largely predefined" (*Theory* 74). He points out that, viewed within this framework, schools are sites of instruction and that their role as sites of culture are ignored. It seems that both young Bonaparte and his mother are in tune to the school as both an instructional site and a cultural site. Clearly the traditional first-day lesson of identity that each Gaelic child has to endure is one where the "knowledge" is predefined. The ritualized renaming strategy not only is the epitome of objective knowledge as there is only one "correct" name, but it is obviously laden with the ideology of the dominant cultural group, in this case the English through their Irish puppet schoolmaster.

O'Brien's biographer, Anthony Cronin, observes that, as young Brian O'Nolan, the first school that he and his brothers attended was the Christian Brothers School in Synge Street, Dublin. Cronin characterizes the Brothers as "notorious crammers, adept at forcing recalcitrant pupils through the various levels of the examination system and not averse to using violence in the process" (*Laughing* 24). In addition to the school experiences that Cronin presents, experiences I discussed in Chapter Two, Cronin goes on to suggest that the O'Nolan boys were ill-suited for the Synge Street school. Citing Brian's brother Ciarán's memoir, he says that the price they paid for the relative freedom they enjoyed in their earlier non-school days was hardly worth it. They were the targets of some of the rougher elements at the school, but, even then,

there was "something baleful beyond the ordinary" in Brian's way with the aggressors that rarely made it necessary for him to engage in a violent exchange (Cronin, *Laughing* 25-26). Perhaps this was a portent of O'Brien's future dealings with actions and ideas with which he did not agree. Young Brian O'Nolan became Flann O'Brien, who fought his battles with words and cleverness, a lesson he well may have come by in his first school days.

While punishing Irish children for speaking the language of the Gaeltacht was more common in the nineteenth century, by the twentieth century, playing upon the incentives that speaking the "tongue of the foreigner"—English—might have for the Irish had taken its place. Often, these incentives were economic and material in form. In fact, as late as the 1920s, despite the official policy of the Department of Education which determined that teaching the Irish language would, as William Cosgrave, the Taoiseach of Ireland during 1922-1932, put it, "make our nation separate and distinct," there was a view that "the people of the Gaeltacht think that Irish and poverty, Irish and social inferiority are inextricably connected." Cosgrave held this view because, as a memorandum from the Department of Education argued, all the other governmental agencies operating in the Gaeltacht were "some of the most powerful agents of anglicisation" (quoted in Lee 132-33). Education's ideological function is, therefore, among others such as career preparation, a normative one. When the power of the state was British, the language of the state must be English. When that power went into the hands of the Irish themselves, the norm changed. And so did the emphasis on the Irish language.

The language question was, according to the historian of Irish education, Donald H. Akenson, one of intuition, because the language itself was viewed as a "panacea." In *A Mirror to Kathleen's Face: Education in Independent Ireland, 1922-1960*, Akenson illustrates the normative expectations that had been placed on the teaching of the Irish language in schools

when he writes, “the common thread binding almost all the Irish language revivalists was an equation of national identity with the ethnic language” (36). Akenson identifies the panoply of Irish political leaders, in addition to William Cosgrave, who aligned the primacy of the language with existential national identity. These leaders blamed the National School system, developed by the British, for serving to reinforce British norms and attacking the Irish language. They believed, therefore, that a commensurate effort by Irish schools could undo the damage (37-39).

Martine Segalen points out the transition that had taken place in the nineteenth century as the school became the locus of education and, thus, of cultural norming. Segalen argues that the family’s control over education was given over to the school, thereby reversing the roles of each apparatus. What had previously been the school’s role—extending the educational priorities of the family—was replaced by the school’s assumption of control over the educational agenda, leaving the family to the task of seeing to it that the school’s agenda was not undone at home: “The child became a kind of hostage, an excuse for visits to the home whose real aim was to ensure that educative relationships were of a normal kind” (289). Indeed, combining these two ideas, Declan Kiberd quotes from an account by Oscar Wilde’s father, Sir William Wilde. This account makes it seem likely that the use of the notorious “tally stick”—a device on which marks were scored when a child spoke Irish in the schools rather than English, and which eventually led to the child receiving some sort of punishment—was “devised for the schoolroom by Irish people themselves” (143). The material incentives for speaking English, both of the corporal and of the economic variety, were reinforced in the schools. This idea lies at the heart of Louis Althusser’s contention that the school is the most powerful ideological state apparatus in modern times.

Althusser’s work has influenced contemporary educational commentator Henry Giroux’s observations on the reproduction of the means of production that is brought about in schools.

Giroux attempts to challenge the ideological influence of schools by exposing and dismantling the authority that institutions assert over human subjects. He indicates that the dominant culture's justification for control in schools resides in its position that the skills and the values that students learn in such institutions is enabling to them—that they are, thereafter, better equipped to exhibit the behaviors that the dominant culture prizes. These might include obedience, loyalty to the workplace, and, by extension, a continuation of the process of values-acculturation. For Giroux, providing an alternative "canon" of skills and values should be the goal of truly liberatory education (*Teacher* 149).

The educational norm in *The Poor Mouth*, as seen in the actions of the schoolmaster O'Loonassa that I cited earlier, was to orient the student to the dominant culture's expectations, in this case as regards language. It was also to impose the fear that comes from the threat of physical violence—violence that was very much a part of educational realities in Ireland. The incentives for learning the language could often be made to seem more attractive, however, than those presented by the episode about the schoolmaster in the novel. In the second episode focused on Irish Gaelic, for example, the metaphor of hostage-taking may apply when the Old-Grey-Fellow announces that the English government is "fixed to pay the likes of us two pounds a skull for every child of ours that speaks English instead of this thieving Gaelic." Learning that there is a school inspector making his way through the Gaeltacht to reward the Gaels for teaching their children English, he continues:

> Trying to separate us from the Gaelic they are, praise be to them sempiternally! I don't think they'll ever be good conditions for the Gaels while having small houses in the corner of the glen, going about in the dirty ashes, constantly fishing

> in the constant storm, telling stories at night about the hardships and hard times of the Gaels in the sweet words of Gaelic is natural to them. (35)

The Old-Grey-Fellow uses O'Brien's stated motifs of the Gaeltacht—such as the small houses, the dirty ashes, the constant fishing, and the story-telling—to establish the traditional norms of the Gaels against which the norms of the English seek to make inroads, perhaps even to abolish them. The Gaelic culture is being held hostage by the greater material power of the British.

Indeed, the Old-Grey-Fellow appears to have identified one of the key dilemmas facing the Gaels in the early years of the twentieth century. If, as he suggests, the Gaels will never have "good conditions" as long as they retain their traditional, albeit stereotyped way of life and language, then are the Gaels compelled to change those ways? And if they are compelled to change, must those changes be made to follow the mode of the British educational agenda, including giving up the "sweet words of Gaelic"? The sweet words of Gaelic are replaced in this episode by the "smell" that might have allowed a "blind man . . . [to] know of [the pig's] presence" in the house. But the inspector "had much experience of the habitations of the true Gaels," so he was not dissuaded from interrogating the "children." This smell was accompanied by the "squealing, rooting, grunting and snoring" of the family's young pigs—that is, "children"—dressed in the grey woolen trousers that they have been provided, grunts that the "old and feeble" English school inspector believed to be the Gaelic-inflected sounds of English as spoken by Irish children beyond the Pale. The proof that these smelly grunts are, in fact, English as spoken by Gaels lies in Bonaparte's response to the question put to him by the inspector: "Phwat is yer nam? said he." "Jams O'Donnell, sor!" replied Bonaparte (36-38). Bonaparte has learned his ideologically-interpellated lesson well. Thus, to this ancient, weak representative of English dominance, even pig grunts, if believed to be English, are more

valuable than actual Gaelic and bring "good conditions" to the Gael since each of the twelve new "English-speaking" pigs pays two pounds. By this method, the Irish seem to fool the British into believing that they are conforming to the expected cultural norms.

Colonial cultural overlap is a bit more complicated than that, however. Speaking of the demographic changes brought about by the colonial reality and its resultant diaspora and exile, Homi K. Bhabha writes, "It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond that I have drawn out. 'Always . . . the bridge *gathers* as a passage that crosses'" (7). Here Bhabha alludes to the indeterminate new position that derives out of the bringing together of cultures and the creation of a "liminal," or threshold, identity. This bridge, or interstice, allows for *hybridity,* Bhabha's term for what he calls the condition that is not one identity or the other. This is itself problematic because of what Tracey Teets Schwarze describes as a strategy in the colonizer's hegemonic practice in Ireland. Schwarze argues in "Silencing Stephen: Colonial Pathologies on Victorian Dublin" that colonizers wish to acculturate the colonized, to get them to assimilate to the master's culture just to that point where they approach sameness, but can never achieve it. This place of hybridity would serve to make the subjugated other "acceptable" but not "accepted" (255).

Of course, the better choice for the Irish was to establish their own nation, with its own self-determined agenda. In *The Poor Mouth,* and again in *The Hard Life*, Flann O'Brien writes of a time before the establishment of the Free State with the full knowledge that the goals of the Free State, and even of the nascent republic, are often grounded in the idyllic vision of a stereotyped, legendary past. O'Brien even takes on this impossibly idyllic vision when he conflates all the various, and utterly distinct, geographical entities of the Gaeltacht. Far from a

monolithic and self-contained region, the Gaeltacht extends over several hundred kilometres, from Cork and Kerry in the Munster province of the south and southwest, through Galway in the Connaught province of the west, and even into Donegal in the western part of Ulster province, Ireland's northernmost province. Like Sarah Palin claiming that she could see Russia from her house, the novel's narrator Bonaparte claims to be able to see from his home's windows and door nearly the entirety of the region: "Looking out from the right-hand window, there below was the bare hungry countryside of the Rosses and Gweedore; Bloody Foreland yonder and Tory Island far away out." From the door he claimed to see "the West of County Galway with a good portion of the rocks of Connemara, Aranmore in the ocean." And from the left window, he could see "the Great Blasket; . . . over yonder was Dingle with its houses close together" (21). While this view is quite impossible, O'Brien makes it seem as if all of the major Gaeltacht areas were the same and visible from one single vantage point—despite the fact that each of them was a hundred or more miles from the others and had a dialect distinctly different from those of the others—because that impossibility is what is projected upon the rural and idealized Gaeltacht by the dominant ideology. However one may wish for a singular, pre-British Irish identity, it is one that exists only in the never-was past of the Celtic twilight. This impossibility, funny as it reads to the Irish audience, is the reality that emerges from O'Brien's subversive text.

It is this dilemma that permeates the critique embodied in his satire. That Ireland would seek to perpetuate the past in its educational policies is not at all surprising. Donald Akenson points out in *A Mirror to Kathleen's Face*, the follow-up to his landmark study on the Irish National School system, that "in most matters of public policy the Irish revolution was less a revolution than a change in management and in no area was the essential conservatism of the revolution more clearly exemplified than in the refusal of the new government to change

fundamentally the school systems inherited from the imperial administration" (25). As I illustrated in Chapter Two, the Constitution of 1937 was, itself, a socially conservative document, intended to lay the groundwork for what politicians like Éamon de Valera believed would be the inevitable unification of the entire Republic, a unification that O'Brien parodically "brings about" when he shows the entire Gaeltacht in one sweeping vista.

In the third episode, we see the inversion of the second episode when one of the pigs goes missing for several weeks. O'Brien's inventive reversal of his earlier critique—that Gaelic is the mark of misfortune and that speaking English will pay the Irish families—comes about when the wayward pig returns with several bits of treasure in his trouser pockets:

> The Old-Fellow found a pipe with a good jot of tobacco in one pocket. In another he found a shilling and a small bottle of spirits.
>
> —Upon me soul, said he, if 'tis hardship that's always in store for the Gaels, it's not that way with this creature. Look, said he, directing his attention to the pig, where did you get these articles, sir?
>
> The pig threw a sharp glance out of his two little eyes at the Old-fellow but did not reply.
>
> —Leave the breeches on him, said my mother. How do we know but that he'll be coming to us every week and wonderful precious things in his pockets—pearls, necklaces, snuff and maybe a money-note . . . . (42)

The source of the treasure is unknown to Bonaparte's family initially, until they learn of a gentleman scholar who is a collector of spoken Gaelic. This scholar had been recording, via gramophone, the utterances of the men of the valley and when the prodigal pig enters one of their homes and grunts—grunts that had been earlier taken for English by the traveling school

inspector—the sounds are mistaken for Gaelic "so good, so poetic and so obscure" that there is no fear that Gaelic will ever disappear from the land (45). In addition to reversing the payoff of the earlier episode so that this time speaking Gaelic is rewarded, O'Brien elevates the status of the language, but he does so in a manner that indicates the continued interpellation of the ideology of the dominant into the material world of the oppressed. Because the gentleman who recorded the pig is awarded a prestigious academic degree, O'Brien appears also to be suggesting the duality of both the desire to extinguish Gaelic in favor of English and the desire to perpetuate it as a sort of curiosity. The ridiculous has become the sublime.

It is worth noting that the Irish language is much more highly regarded as an artifact recorded by a gramophone than it is as a living entity. In this way, the Gaels are not more than objects either to be converted to the English language or to be studied and documented like beasts—in a continued identification of the Gaels with their animals—for the purpose of exoticization. Ironically, this identification-with-livestock trope is also ascribed to the Gaels themselves in *The Poor Mouth.* In an episode that I introduced in Chapter Three, the earliest encounter with an Englishman that Bonaparte recounts involves yet another school inspector seeking lodging from the Old-Grey-Fellow when that old man was a youth. The inspector notes what a "shameful, improper and very bad thing" it is for the humans and the animals to be "stuck together in the one bed." He advises they build a lean-to shed outside to provide extra shelter. When the shelter was built, the Old-Grey-Fellow caps the joke: "When I, my grandmother and two of my brothers had spent two nights in the hut, we were so cold and drenched wet that it is a wonder that we did not die straight away" (20). Once again, this episode serves two purposes. In the discussion of family, the point was that the idealized Ireland appeared to conflate human and animal members as though all were family. Here we see another point. In *Imperial Leather:*

Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest, Anne McClintock discusses the racialization of the Irish in terms of English views of Irish people's "domestic barbarism" (52-53). The competing idea of the Irish as idyllic Gaels in their agrarian settings set against the idea of them as wild and untamable relegated them in the English imagination to mere objects to be exhibited. Equating the people of Corkadoragha with their animals certainly constitutes an instance of this subjugating objectification.

O'Brien's use of humor in his critiques, especially in his critiques of education, serve a twofold function. Certainly, as I have already addressed, the blows of criticism that the traditional norms of family and the Church receive from Flann O'Brien are tempered by the comedy that accompanies those criticisms—when the object of the critique does not take itself quite so seriously, there is less direct sting. However, education functions, in part, to acculturate students into a mode of seriousness that prepares them to be more useful to the system of production. One of the ways that education brings into effect this mode of seriousness is through its expectation that all involved will use "high" language. As I pointed out in my introduction, a scholar must think and write in a serious manner even about the humor of a satirist. Nancy Walker cites the mid-nineteenth-century humorist Frances Whitcher who noted that it was "a very serious thing to be a funny woman" (xii), a phrase that Walker uses as the title of her important book on women's humor. One may only imagine that Walker, in agreement with Whitcher, sees no inherent contradiction in the use of humor to address concerns of great seriousness. In essence, the subversive effects of the humor not only attempt to expose the ills of society, but show them also to be ridiculous.

Allon White argues in *Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing* that education plays a central role in institutionalizing serious, highly prestigious language and the values that this serious language

embodies, values that are crucial to the maintenance of power structures. The use of satire, humor, and other forms of the "not serious" is, therefore, an important mechanism of assault on hegemony. "The social reproduction of seriousness," White observes, "is a key process in education. It has often been pointed out that in school what a child learns most thoroughly is not a given set of 'subjects' (French, mathematics, etc.) but subordination to a timetable and a work regime" (131). When Flann O'Brien writes humorously, particularly about education and its shortcomings, he clearly seeks to subvert the hegemony of the ideologies promoted by education. But, since education is so thoroughly devoted to the promulgation of seriousness *qua* seriousness, because of the implications of seriousness for the preparation of productive workers, the result is a double subversion.

In one of his columns for the *Irish Times* and collected in *The Best of Myles,* Myles na Gopaleen makes the point in a joke on education that aligns it with maiming, high-flown language:

> Education—greedy eggs pair toe—is (using the term in its real sense) . . . what makes me sneer at money, reject the physical "beauty" of the world as meretricious and seek the community of quiet minds in disputation on the Greek style of this or that departed heresiarch—knowing well that terrestrial time cannot be better spent. It is not, I protest, the cynical arrangement which contemplates timely regurgitation in the summer examination hall of gargantuan scholastic gluttonies supervised in winter by men with whips and clubs . . . . (234)

Note that the phonetic spelling of "crede expert," meaning "trust me" or "believe the one who has experience in the matter," as "greedy eggs pair toe" is a way of poking fun both at education and at the "seriousness" of false education.

Additionally, in much the same way that Flann O'Brien humorously contorts the language of the characters of Sergeant Fottrell in *The Dalkey Archive* and Sergeant Pluck in *The Third Policeman*, this passage uses inflated language to make a claim about what education "is" and what it "is not." In *The Dalkey Archive*, when Sergeant Fottrell sees that Mick and his friend Hackett have been swimming, he says, "I see you have been to the water . . . for far-from-simple cavortings in the brine," and "I recede portentously from the sea . . . except for a fastidious little wade for the good of my spawgs," (49) when he might say more directly "I see that you have been swimming" and "I avoid the water except when my feet are hot." And in *The Third Policeman*, Sergeant Pluck shows the unnamed narrator a mysterious map of the region that has taken form on the ceiling of one of the rooms. Rather than say, "This is an amazing and unexplainable thing," he exclaims, "You will agree . . . that it is a fascinating pancake and a conundrum of great incontinence, a phenomenon of the first rarity" (123). The humor that results from the officers' verbose locutions and occasional applications of non sequiturs hides the idea that these characters use the more serious and, sometimes, impenetrable expressions to effect an air of authority. It is an authority, in the case of each of these largely ineffectual lawmen, which must be "put on" rather than one that has been earned.

The subversion of the educational enterprise and of the seriousness that it contains runs throughout O'Brien's treatment of schools and students. Most definitely, O'Brien mocks the seriousness of the protagonist's uncle in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and, as I argue above in this chapter, the student protagonist subverts both his uncle's attitude about "open[ing] a book" and the pride that the uncle feels at the end of the novel when he believes that the protagonist has followed his advice all along. In addition to this, the novel's brief glimpses of school invoke traditional ideological expectations and then, almost as quickly, dash them with O'Brien's satiric

humor. The first scene that reveals the school that the protagonist attends—presumed to be University College, Dublin—betrays this tension:

> The hallway is composed in large black and white squares arranged in the orthodox chessboard pattern, and the surrounding walls, done in an unpretentious cream wash, bear three rough smudges caused by the heels, buttocks and shoulders of the students.
>
> The hall was crowded by students, some of them deporting themselves in a quiet civil manner. Modest girls bearing books filed in and out in the channels formed by the groups of boys. There was a hum of converse and much bustle and activity. A liveried attendant came out of a small office in the wall and pealed a shrill bell. This caused some dispersal, many of the boys extinguishing their cigarettes by manual manipulation and going up a circular stairway to the lecture halls in a brave, arrogant way, some stopping on the stairs to call back to those still below a message of facetious or obscene import. (29)

O'Brien contrasts the orthodoxy of the floor pattern and the serious lack of pretentiousness of the wall color with the materiality of the smudges and the crowded bustle of the students. The activities of the students range from the civil and the studious to the arrogant and the obscene. The anachronism of the liveried attendant runs counter to the coeducational and modern make-up of the student populace. And, of course, all of the tomfoolery is located outside of the lecture halls, certainly not within them. As Allon White points out, the binary of the serious and the comic is played out as well in the separation of the schoolhouse from the playground, thus reinforcing the importance of "serious" "work" in the classroom and "comic" unproductive play outside (132). Education as an apparatus supports the dominant capitalist

ideology through its system of rewards and denigrations, reproducing the mode of production in a manner not unlike the way that the Church rewards or sanctions certain actions. White continues, "The 'seriousness' of the high language in this respect is anything but a neutral aspect of the material taught, it is not an intrinsic epistemological requirement. It is a power-category which endows the high language with the authority to exclude or to stigmatize low languages as disruptive, partisan, 'funny,' one-sided, 'not-to-be-taken-seriously'" (134). O'Brien depicts this encoding of power through his diction. Students do not put out their cigarettes; they "extinguish" them by "manual manipulation." They do not joke or swear; they "call back . . . message[s] of facetious or obscene import." O'Brien thus subverts the assumed ideological privilege enjoyed by the serious school by elevating the low language and the comic action to align with the seriousness of the location.

O'Brien accomplishes a similar outcome far more comically in his schoolhouse scene in *The Poor Mouth.* In the Gaeltacht, as opposed to University College Dublin, the school is a "small unlovely hut where the rain ran down the walls and everything was soft and damp" (29-30). O'Brien's description of the schoolroom is only a slightly more romantic version of the original from Tomás O'Crohan's *The Islandman* (*An tOileánach*), in which O'Crohan writes, "I didn't take long to cast my eyes all round the house. I saw books and papers in little heaps on every side. A blackboard was hanging on the wall with white marks all over it . . ." (15). Where O'Brien out-Gaels O'Crohan's memoir is in the description of the children who attend the school. O'Crohan goes to his first day of school with his sisters, Nora and Eileen, and there they sit with the likes of Pats Micky, whom young Tom calls the "King over us," and where they are led by a schoolmistress who bestows upon Tom a fine apple for his first day (15-16). In *The Poor Mouth*, just as Bonaparte O'Coonassa claims that the view from the little house

encompasses the whole of the Gaeltacht, so too the students are from far-flung Gaelic locales: "Many were from Dingle, some from Gweedore, another group floated in from Aran. All of us were strong and hearty on our first school day. A sod of turf was under the armpit of each one of us. Hearty and strong were we!" (29).

Once again the orthodox reality of small, insular, family-driven school populations in the outpost schools is rendered idyllic by the heroic efforts accorded to the schoolchildren in O'Brien's satire, with the brilliantly poetic chiasmus of "strong and hearty . . . Hearty and strong" applied for extra measure. After the ritualistic renaming meted out by the schoolmaster and his oar, many of the strong and hearty children were "unable to walk by the afternoon and were transported home by relatives. It was a pitiable thing for those who had to swim back to Aran that evening . . ." (31). The ideological romanticism of the Gaeltacht has given way to the broken-backed reality of the identity project in all its oppressive glory.

Given the character and tone of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, it is no great surprise that much of the protagonist's education act takes place at the local pub and at the movie house. O'Brien continues to use elevated language to discuss quotidian events. The protagonist describes himself and his two friends as though they were dons at Oxford, recalling "our three voices interplaying in scholarly disputations, our faded overcoats finely open in the glint of the winter sun." And in his opinion of the choice of his beverage, replying to his friend Donaghy's assessment that wine "is more grateful to the intestines, the digestive viscera," he applies a pun disguised as a rhetorical fact: "If that conclusion is the result of a mental syllogism, it is fallacious, being based on licensed premises" (43-44). O'Brien once again conflates and, in so doing, inverts the school with the "licensed premises" of the pub, punning, in the word "premises," on one part of a logical statement with the location of the drinking establishment.

The bill for both the drinks and the movie is paid by the third in the party, Brinsley, who is at school on a stipend provided by County Meath. Thus, the "education" that the young men receive in the pub and movie hall is subsidized by the state: "*The ultimate emptors*: Meath County Council, rural rating authority" (44). This view and origin of education is not addressed at all in the Constitution's article on education, yet it is a view that has its material roots deeply planted in the Irish reality. O'Brien parodic treatment of education here, in which he posits the expectations of school within the realm of the ideal so that he may undo them, and in which he elevates the language associated with "alternate sites of education," challenges the expectations of both sites—the college and the pub.

Christy L. Burns offers a discussion of this function of parody in *Gestural Politics: Stereotype and Parody in Joyce*. Drawing upon Derrida, Burns indicates, "parody might be defined as an unstable representation that itself never fully masters any law or object. Like the pun, it announces the impossibility of definitive interpretation" (10). As O'Brien conflates the orthodox chessboard floors and the disordered smudgy walls, the quiet civility of some students with the facetious obscenity of others, and the college and the pub through his linguistic links, it becomes difficult to delineate the established institution and its subverted image from one another. Inversions of the established educational institution resulting in a humorous send-up of that institution are plentiful in O'Brien.

In one such instance, from an *Irish Times* column collected in *Further Cuttings From Cruiskeen Lawn*, O'Brien writes as Myles na Gopaleen and assumes one of his several masks as a self-appointed expert. Recounting the educational propositions offered by the leader of the "Grammar School of Drogheda, County Lout" (84), O'Brien constantly inverts the established order with the comical and the serious with the parodic. He begins by identifying the school's

leader as its "Editor" who has written to the "Headmaster" of the newspaper, thus equating the educational institution—one with a centuries-old reputation and which has educated such luminaries as the Irish nationalist Henry Grattan and the writer Richard Lovell Edgeworth—with the non-educational one. His presentation of the county name as "Lout" takes advantage of the common Irish pronunciation that would substitute the terminal "th" with a "t" sound, thereby humorously diminishing this fine school's status with a low-dialect pronunciation and the implication of loutishness. O'Brien's Myles character is also offended that "the entire correspondence was destitute of that uranial tabernacle of authority, my imprimatom" (84). The comical implications of such mock-umbrage are enhanced by the word "uranial"—a fabricated variation on "uranic," meaning celestial—because the word sounds like urinal, and thereby subverts even his own "authority," encased as it is in a similar nonsensical variation on the word "imprimatur."

But O'Brien's true interest is in the "curriculum"—in this case, the language curriculum. Once again, the languages in question include, among several others, English and Irish, and, due to the "burden" placed on boys to learn multiple languages, the Headmaster has proposed exempting boys from the study of Irish. As the Headmaster's letter to the newspaper has it: "We would, of course, eliminate Latin . . . . We are not, however, prepared to sacrifice any pupils on the altar of compulsory Irish" (85)—a phrase Myles later puns as "comb pull (sorry) Irish" (86). As the column moves on, it is difficult to determine whether Myles's disagreement with the proposal of the Headmaster is meant in earnest or in fun. And, if in earnest, is the comedic tone of the general column and the particular subject to be regarded seriously or does Myles / Flann intend the comedy to undo the apparent criticism of the Headmaster? Does O'Brien argue for compulsory ("comb pull sorry") Irish language instruction or not? If the comments he

provides in the guise of George Knowall regarding the lack of genuineness of Irish among speakers who are not "from the cradle" are any indication, then the answer is probably not.

O'Brien even infuses a specific judgment on education into his famous episode in *The Poor Mouth*, an Irish-language novel that he would not permit to be translated during his lifetime. Translation was an issue, according to Anne Clissmann, very much at the heart of his satire in *The Poor Mouth*. Flann O'Brien's academic background for his M. A. was Gaelic poetry and he was a fond admirer of Standish Hayes O'Grady and his approach to translation of Old Irish texts. Clissmann writes, "What O'Brien objected to in translators of early Irish, Myles objected to in translators of modern Irish. The end product of 'literal' translations which were unenlivened by 'humour and imagination' was a colorless, unnecessarily complex and, accidentally comic prose" (235). The Gaelic *feis* that the Old-Grey-Fellow hosts on the family plot is designed to reverse a trend in which the increasing numbers of Gaeligores—newly-come speakers of Gaelic who journey to the Gaeltacht to harvest the language and the ways of the people in exchange for a small bit of economic infusion—have taken to extracting from the Gaels their cultural wealth while leaving none of their material wealth. The ultimate objective of the *feis* was to fund a college in the area and

> that the college was built finally on the Old-Grey-Fellow's land was no wonder; land which was extremely high-priced when it was bought from him! The feis itself was held in his own field and he received two days' rent for the little plot where the platform stood. If pennies are falling, he often said, see to it that they fall into your own pocket; you won't sin by covetousness if you have all the money in your own possession. (50-51)

Clearly, as this episode savagely suggests, the end (or objective) of education is not in its created knowledge but in its economic impact. The final lines in the chapter on the *feis* reveal that, after the last day of the event, the Old-Grey-Fellow is in possession of a gold watch. Thus, in addition to the sale of land upon which the college that the area lacks is to be built, and the rental of space for the event whose goal is to raise money for the college, the Old-Grey-Fellow has either taken money to buy the watch or has outright stolen it during the *feis*. One of the ways that Myles had critiqued the teaching of multiple languages at the Grammar School in Drogheda was to say that English and French were not so much languages as they were "mercantile codes" (*Cuttings* 86), yet, the ideological imperative to profit from others is not absent in the Irish themselves. O'Brien's novel, written in Irish, critical as it is of the English efforts to force their language on the Irish-speakers of the Gaeltacht, is also critical of the Gaeligores who seek to mine the Gaels for their language and who, for their efforts, are undone by the very Irish-speakers they would appear desirous to join.

The Gaelic scholar Alan Titley characterizes Flann O'Brien's Irish language education, in which he read most of the available literature in Irish by age 11, as "anarchic and wayward" (179), thus reinforcing the subversive nature of O'Brien's general outlook. O'Brien's sentiments on the Gaeligores in *The Poor Mouth* leave little doubt as to his disdain of those for whom speaking Irish was a symbol of some acquired identity rather than an innate part of that identity. Richard T. Murphy's review of the critical commentary on the novel clearly shows the consensus that O'Brien had little regard for the Gaelic Revival that was taking place in the early days of the republic (68). For example, O'Brien appears to critique the appropriation of an Irish identity in describing the Gaeligores by whose appearance "the advent of spring was . . . judged . . . by the first Gaeligore seen on the roads" (49). These "gentlemen," returned to the Gaeltacht annually as

did the swallows and were seen "addressing the poor Gaels in awkward unintelligible Gaelic and delaying them on their way to the field. The gentlemen had fluent English from birth but they never practiced this noble tongue in the presence of the Gaels lest, it seemed, the Gaels might pick up an odd word of it as a protection from the difficulties of life" (48).

Reality and romantic idealism are often intertwined in the consciousness of even many non-Western Irish people. "The Gaeltacht, although a real place inhabited by real people in real poverty," Titley points out, "also became a place of the mind for urban Irish speakers" (178). For non-Irish speakers, this idea made it seem that all Irish speakers were from the western islands, such as the famous Blasket Islands. When Bonaparte is arrested for murder and meets his father coming out of jail while he is entering, the fact that both men speak Irish elicits a strong admonition from the police. "*Kum along blashketman!* said the peeler" (124). Since O'Brien's characters associate true Gaelicism with suffering, and since even the imposition of the English language in schools caused suffering, there appears no other outcome for the Gael but to suffer.

The mercantile codes associated with education motivate the unnamed narrator in O'Brien's second novel, *The Third Policeman*—a novel rejected by his Longmans in 1940, but which appeared posthumously in 1967—to participate in a murder. The narrator's experience in school has introduced him to the manic genius de Selby, to whose work he has devoted his life. Thus, the narrator has prepared the "De Selby Index," a compendium of "the views of all known commentators on every aspect of the savant and his work." This text, important to the narrator as a corrective to what he regards to be misreadings of de Selby, is characterized by the narrator's companion, a man named John Divney, as the book that "might make your name in the

world and your golden fortune in copyrights" (14). It is not so much that the narrator's time in school led to crime, but that he views the product of school as a commodity to be marketed.

School as a locus of entrepreneurship is also reinforced in the activities of "the brother," Manus, in *The Hard Life.* The Brother is a recurring character in the O'Brien canon and, invariably, he is a shady one. As a stock comic character, the invention of The Brother provides Flann O'Brien with a relationship that permits him to say almost anything. He may call upon a level of intimate knowledge of the situation that the brother is embroiled in, yet is afforded the distance of not being embroiled in the situation himself. In *The Best of Myles*, for example, The Brother can, through the narrator, propose that the solution to the wartime rationing that besieges Ireland is for the entire nation to stay in bed one week a month. How is that? Such a plan would "save clothes, shoes, rubber, petrol, coal, turf, timber and everything we're short of. And food, too, remember. Because tell me this—what makes you hungry? It's work that makes you hungry" (46). In The Brother's world, all things are possible. Therefore, if the young and innocent Finbarr's sensibilities are represented in the novel, they are, by contrast, also intended to spotlight the more mature and worldly machinations of Manus. Nearly from the beginning of the novel, Manus is depicted as determined to make school pay. This chapter opens with Michael Apple's apprehensions concerning the role of school as the preparer of well-qualified human capital. Manus shares none of these apprehensions.

Manus's guardian, Collopy, had enrolled him in the Christian Brothers' school and, when he returned having left Manus in the keeping of the school, announced, "By God's will, he explained, Manus's foot has been placed today on the first rung of the ladder of learning and achievement, and on yonder pinnacle beckons the lone star" (16). It is apparent that Collopy intended that Manus be prepared for some manner of occupation, but, no doubt, he has in his

own mind what that occupation might be; it will not be left to Manus to decide for himself. The planning of Manus's future is in the hands of Collopy and the Church, both in the guise of the religious order that manages the school and, as Collopy announced it, by "God's will." In this way, the very ideas embodied in the Constitution's admixture of family, Church, and education as the cultural institutions that serve to give Ireland its identity come together. The symbiotic relationship between family, Church, and education has been carefully traced by Donald Akenson's comprehensive study *The Irish Education Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century.* Akenson points out that the original 1831 non-denominational character of the system had given way, by 1851, to a denominational one. Though the legal footing for the system meant that none of the three major religions in Ireland—the official Church of Ireland, the Scottish Presbyterian Church, and, of course, the Roman Catholic Church—were to control the schools, through a series of manipulations, that is exactly what came to pass (4). Therefore, whether an Irish family sent its children to the National School or to one of the schools that were officially run by various religious orders, the influence of religion was present.

Manus shamelessly uses the benefits that schools promise to promote his own interests beginning with his appropriation of the name "General Georama Gymnasium" as the entity from which he will make available to his "students" the secrets of wire-walking. Flann O'Brien spent a total of several months in Germany, a fortnight or so at a time, during the period from 1933 to 1939. According to Peter Costello and Pater van de Kamp's biography of O'Brien, he went to Germany as a student of the German language after having read it while studying the classics of German literature at University College, Dublin (46). Surely, he takes advantage of that knowledge in calling his school a "gymnasium"—the word for an academic high school in

Germany. On the one hand, Manus wishes to escape the strictures of school and strike out on his own, claiming, in *The Hard Life*, to be serving as "only a bookseller" (46). Yet, on the other hand, he clearly wishes to impute his work with that of a school to call upon the ideological advantages that schools have to offer. And, as has been the case throughout my analysis, I maintain that O'Brien subverts that dominant ideological capital by associating with Manus's school an element that fails to live up to the standard for the imparting of knowledge that schools claim to hold. Manus invents a school, calls himself a director of that school, sells lessons for an activity rarely regarded as one worthy of schools, attributes the lessons to a retired circus performer whom he dubs "Professor," and all the while seeks to leave school himself.

Manus's business is nearly always associated with schools and has appropriated names for ideas suggesting height or accomplishment: "Excelsior" (higher) and "Zenith"—the top of a trajectory (60). Nicholas Burbules observes that often the authority of specific persons who possess power in a particular setting is less a product of their expertise than it is a function of the institutional trappings of privilege such as judges' robes, teachers' rituals relating to procedure (grading, roll calls), physical configurations such as the judge's elevated bench and the centrality of the teacher's desk. He concludes that "when authority begins to appeal to tradition as part of its justification, this is usually a sign that its maintenance has outlived its worthiness" (107).

Manus is unwittingly guilty of the crime of ostensibly shedding himself of the trappings of authority in his desire to leave school and strike out on his own, believing that he is, by these actions, carving for himself, being his own man. At the same time, of course, he is asking others—his "students," who are really his customers—to capitulate to and be influenced by the very authority he believes he has undermined. He does this by actually taking on the trappings of educational authority. This "education as commodity" model contributes to the features-and-

benefits approach that students in contemporary schools have come to expect. In *Politics of Knowledge: The Commercialization of the University, the Professions, and Print Culture,* Richard Ohmann explains that the university effectively contracts with students and that, in exchange for a fee, students will achieve a programmatic set of outcomes with which they can expect to market *themselves*. This deadly cycle of student as prospective client-cum-walking-billboard for future prospective clients can only be justified in an educational world in which balanced books are more important than balanced living. Ohmann observes that the language of the business world is pervasive in recent publications aimed at university administrators as they are urged to consider "client feedback," measure "output," exercise "project management," and control "marginal costs" while they promote and protect their "brand" (138).

Manus has learned this strategy through a hegemonic process that is not overt, but which has been presented to him and all others in schools as natural and right. As we have already seen, both Antonio Gramsci and Nicholas Burbules have shown that the imposing power structures as well as the subjects of the powerful structures are complicit in the perpetuation of hegemony, in part because these subjects do not know of a way to subvert the power they are expected to accept, and, in some cases, are not even aware that it has them in its thrall. Manus's use of the educational pamphlet and his appropriation of the cultural capital of the National Library perpetuates the dominance of the ideologies embodied there. He uses the high language forms of the Library as well as the prestige of the concept of school that he creates to reproduce the capitalist project despite the fact that there is no real value in his product. These actions speak to the willingness with which nearly all people receive authority and the desire most have for some modicum of the stability they believe this authority affords. Nicholas Burbules suggests that "[h]egemony, in the sense of enfranchised and inflexible assumptions in belief or

value, must be distinguished from ideologies that in particular circumstances and for particular purposes can disclose new possibilities and enlarge the scope of social and political discourse" (114). Perhaps with no real malice in his heart, Manus seeks to move from his oppressed status to that of the liberator, only to fall readily into the role of oppressor.

The ease with which this undesired reversion to the role of oppressor happens is articulated most clearly by Paolo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Here Freire argues that in the process of moving from a position of being oppressed toward liberation, a common intermediate step is present—the step of assuming the strategies of the oppressors. While it is obvious to Freire that the oppressed are most aware of the effects of oppression, he recognizes that it is human to fall into line with what one has experienced and to emulate it. He remarks, "But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors.' The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men, but for them, to be men is to be oppressors" (45). Manus desires his independence and, if his fulfillment of that desire serves to make others less independent, it appears that is a price he is willing to pay.

O'Brien's invocation of the power of school to appeal to the capitalist yearnings of Manus is also a variation on the simulacrum. Manus creates the illusion of a school in his effort to similarly appeal to those whom he believes are influenced by the goals of school, even though his creation of that school is emblematic of the truth that he does not desire those goals. So it is in Jean Baudrillard's theory on the simulacrum, when he suggests that the simulation of reality is a "question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (343). Baudrillard indicates that the problem of simulation resides not in the apparent attempt of the simulated to substitute for

the real, but that the simulation calls into question the very idea of reality. Thus, when Manus departs home, moves to London, and persists in his simulation of school for the selling of educational products that range—according to the list running down the side of the notepaper he is using—from the ancient classics and elocution to boxing and the prevention and treatment of boils, he has stretched the essentialist limits of what it means to be educated. Or, perhaps more accurately, Manus challenges what it means to be schooled. He is even quite sanguine about his activities, while at the same time he seems to realize that what he is up to is an act of redefinition. He writes to Finbarr: "When I get things more advanced you must come over and give me a hand because I know this industry I'm entering on is only in its infancy, there's bags of money in it if the business is properly run . . . . Information and help can be got on any subject or person under the sun for a quid . . . ." Manus continues,

> Do not pay too much attention to the list of subjects in the margin. I don't see why we shouldn't deal with them and plenty more as well, e.g. Religious Vocations, but I am not yet publicly using this notepaper. You could regard the list in the margin as a manifesto, a statement of what we intend to do. We really aim at the mass production of knowledge, human accomplishment and civilization. We plan the world of the future . . . . (111-12)

O'Brien makes it clear that, to the students to whom Manus represents his work, the institution is a school—the London University Academy—but that Manus himself is under no illusions about that designation. In addition to the curiously non-academic variety of subjects his school covers, there is the ubiquitous language of the capitalist. Manus speaks of industry, business, and mass production. And, although O'Brien is surely being ironic, Manus speaks without irony of knowledge, accomplishment, and civilization. In his simulation of school,

which is really the factory, Manus effects the reproduction of the means of production that schools are charged with in the orthodox ideology of education. Manus has, in a less than cognizant move, made the factory-as-school thus reproductive of the dominant expectation of schools—that they will produce obedient and tractable parts of the overall culture.

Flann O'Brien had been interested in the commercialized school even in his own schooldays. A collection of some of O'Brien's early writing is assembled under the title *Myles Before Myles*, within which one may find contributions he made to *Comhthrom Féinne*, the literary magazine of University College, Dublin. One of the pieces appears to be an early version of a fake advertisement for the sort of courses upon which Manus has staked his reputation. The advertisement asks, "Do you tremble at the knees when you are lecturing or when your name is called at lecture? Do you titter nervously? *We* can make a man of you." The course, offered by "The Principal, C. F. Institute of Practical Psychology, University College, Dublin" promises nearly every imaginable positive trait a man could desire including an additional "four inches to your chest and three inches to your biceps." The course can "abolish scurf and dandruff, cure falling hair and prevent baldness" (54). The *coup de grâce* to this hilarious send-up of the false promises that educational charlatans make is the included form letter one may use to order the course, in which the student admits to being an "Idiot Boy / a Boob / a Yes-man / a Spineless Waster / a Wreck / an Aumadhaun / a Flat Tyre" who is in pressing need of the course and who is so utterly unworthy that "should the Principal consider that [the] case is hopeless, he shall be in nowise compelled to accept [the] application or [any] money" (55). The very definition of hegemony is the oppression that results in a belief within the oppressed that they are deserving of all manner of hardships. O'Brien resurrects this idea again and again in his comments on commodified education.

The products of school, like the products of a factory, will accomplish the very goals that Michael Apple bemoaned in the opening of this chapter: competitiveness, profit, and discipline. Flann O'Brien makes Manus's mockery of education and its approaches and its outcomes seem humorous, and, of course, it is. The pretentious authority that Manus projects in his commercialized "school" is both potentially convincing to his students and transparently shabby to Finbarr, perhaps, even to Manus himself. And it is also a very powerful exposing of the cynical view that many had of the practical realities of early twentieth-century Ireland.

Indeed, much of the character of Flann O'Brien's representation of school is suggestive of limitation, even of imprisonment. It goes almost without saying, based on my earlier analyses of the school in *The Poor Mouth*, that school for Bonaparte is far from liberating and even functions in the opposite manner. Every young Irish child is appropriated within the identity-creating ideology that has been passed down by way of the school for generations, resulting in a stultifying cycle of subjugation. This sanctioned subjugation of the Irish and their traditional identity even results in quite literal imprisonment initially for Bonaparte's father and eventually for Bonaparte himself. That every boy and man is called *Jams O'Donnell* indicates a repeated pattern that is an echo of O'Brien's already-written, but not-yet-published novel, *The Third Policeman*, and its cycles of hell and punishment.

Nearly all of the early depictions of school in *The Hard Life* evoke images of this sort. As Manus preps Finbarr for his first day of school, The Brother hints that Finbarr will learn "some idea of what the early Christians went through in the arena" (17). Manus thereby equates the young student with the persecuted martyrs from centuries past. When Finbarr is actually in the Christian Brothers' school the next day, the place is twice compared to a jail. First, when Finbarr is informed that the Brothers are not permitted to receive their mothers in the "holy

house," but must meet them secretly in a nearby hotel, he suggests that the Brothers should implement a system "like they do in jails when there is a warder present." Mr. Collopy follows up on the detention imagery when he acknowledges the aptness of Finbarr's comparison: "Indeed, this house may be a jail of a kind but the chains are of purest eighteen-carat finest gold" (18). The juxtaposition of jail with gold is consistent with the idea articulated by Nicholas Burbules above that education is both the problem and the potential solution for that problem of power and oppression. Finbarr later sits down to the "loathsome homework" (72) and characterizes school as a waste of time. He finds he is "indolently toying with school exercises, sometimes pausing to reflect on the possibility of getting a job. I was really sick of the waste of time known as study, a futile messing about with things which did not concern me " (75).

It is quite evident that the protagonist of *At Swim-Two-Birds* also views himself as one serving a sentence. However, it is not merely the physical space of the school itself that the protagonist finds oppressive, but the circumstance that he finds he must accept in order that he may attend school; that is, his tenancy with his uncle. Earlier in this chapter, I addressed the presence of the watchful gaze presented by the uncle. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault has theorized extensively on the disciplinary functions of the entire carceral project. He includes among the apparatuses that bring about this project the prison, the asylum, the hospital, and the school. Foucault describes the offenses that are unacceptable to the disciplinary project:

> The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micro-penality of time (latenesses, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body ("incorrect" attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency). (178)

Foucault's litany of punishable behaviors reads like a diary of the protagonist's sins in the early episodes of the novel. He is an offender in the arenas of time and activity relating to his approach to both school and home. A habitual denizen of his bed, the protagonist rarely makes his way to the school and is continuously reminded not only of negligence about his schoolwork, but also on his chores at home. His uncle asks him if he has pressed the uncle's Sunday trousers and he claims that he has forgotten to do so. The protagonist has taken to showing his disregard for his uncle through insolent speech and gesture. He is unclean: "I rarely undressed and my inexpensive suit was not better for the use I gave it, but I found that a brisk application of a coarse brush before going out would redeem it somewhat without quite dispelling the curious bedroom smell which clung to my person" (3). He even discovers that he has become lice-ridden (41). There are numerous passages depicting his drunkenness in the pubs. And, of course, the protagonist's uncle believes he has solved the mystery of what goes on behind the closed doors of the bedroom in which he spends so much time: "I know the studying you do in your bedroom, said my uncle. Damn the studying you do in your bedroom." He follows this accusation with a reaffirmed, "Oh, I know the game you are at above in your bedroom. I am not as stupid as I look, I'll warrant you that" (4). Michael Cronin argues that this "game" is a game of a literary and linguistic nature, ultimately resulting in a text whose ludic or playful qualities reside in the liberal borrowing of styles that O'Brien employs (47-49). This reading clarifies O'Brien's strategy for readers but does little to suggest that the uncle is aware of any such games, since he does not know of his nephew's literary exploits. Instead, we might read the uncle's accusations as prurient—he is convinced that in repressed and repressive Ireland, his nephew is reduced to sexual self-gratification, for which he will be punished.

Foucault also describes the approaches that such disciplinary apparatuses use to bring about their desired outcomes:

> At the same time, by way of punishment, a whole series of subtle procedures was used, from light physical punishment to minor deprivations and petty humiliations. It was a question both of making the slightest departures from correct behaviour subject to punishment, and of giving a punitive function to the apparently indifferent elements of the disciplinary apparatus: so that, if necessary, everything might serve to punish the slightest thing; each subject find himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality. (178)

The uncle greets each of the protagonist's wayward behaviors with condemnations great and small. When the protagonist admits to not pressing his uncle's trousers, the uncle derides him: "Well that is very nice, he called, very nice indeed. Oh, trust you to forget. God look down on us and pity us this night and day. Will you forget again to-day?" (4). Further examples of authoritarian beratings range from the uncle's typical disapproving questioning of whether the nephew opens up a book "at all," to an attitude of "severity" when he enters the protagonist's bedroom, followed by one of faux-indulgence toward the protagonist's friend, Brinsley. The uncle intends to shame the protagonist by contrasting his nephew's indolence with what he believes to be Brinsley's ambition when he learns of Brinsley's intention to be a teacher: "It is a grand and a noble life, he said, teaching the young and the sick and nursing them back to their God-given health. It is, faith. There is a special crown for those that give themselves up to that work" (23). A moment later, with a phrase that virtually echoes Althusser's notions of interpellation, an idea which has been threaded through much of O'Brien's writing, the narrator himself joins in the conversation, suggesting that "[n]ot everybody is called." Whether it is what

he believes or it is something he says to put the narrator in his place, we cannot be certain, but the uncle agrees: "Not everybody is called . . . perfectly true. Only a small and select band" (25). The intent to shame the narrator is evident.

The protagonist's uncle even enlists the added grave assistance of one of his cronies, Mr. Corcoran, to browbeat the protagonist. Mr. Corcoran's own son appears to share many of the protagonist's habits, yet, according to the boy's father, he was able to make the father proud by bringing home an accomplishment: "First in Christian doctrine if you please." The uncle wastes no time in pointing out that there have been no prizes from his housemate: "Now Mister-my-friend, he said, when are we going to hear from you? When are you going to bring home a prize?" And, when the protagonist sardonically replies that, like Mr. Corcoran's son, he knows his catechism, the uncle persists: "Aye, but do you, said my uncle quickly, do you, that's the question. . . . Name the seven deadly sins. Name the one that begins with S" (97-98). His uncle implies the sin of "sloth." For all of the protagonist's faults, it appears he is also on the receiving end of a goodly measure of rather vindictive moralizing from the uncle. The comedic effect of these episodes belies a strong critique of the behaviors of both nephew and uncle. The disciplinary project that is located in family and school appears to be exaggerated for laughs, but it is thoroughly grounded in cultural theory.

For this reason, the protagonist is always about the business of escape, an escape that takes the various forms of lounging and smoking in his bed for hours or foraging through the "forty buckskin volumes comprising a *Conspectus of the Arts and Natural Sciences* . . . [that] retained in their interior the kindly seed of knowledge intact and without decay" (3-4). As I have indicated above, the pub is a popular place of escape. Because the protagonist's primary occupation during the novel is the writing of his own novel, that activity offers the most

thorough of escapes. In an exchange that takes place in the sanctuary of the protagonist's bedroom, his friend Brinsley remarks, "There are two ways to make big money . . . to write a book or to make a book." Brinsley is cajoling the protagonist for his apparent involvement in a horse betting solicitation at the same time that he is cajoling him for his literary pastime. Once more, O'Brien uses the pun as a means of commenting on the objects of his humor, adding to the value of the pun by having it originate with one of the characters. Here the conflation of writing with illicit gambling puts the activity of learning on an equal footing with criminality. The protagonist continues:

> It happened that this remark provoked between us a discussion on the subject of Literature—great authors living and dead, the character of modern poetry, the predilections of publishers and the importance of being at all times occupied with literary activities of a spare-time or recreative character. My dim room rang with the iron of fine words and the names of great Russian masters were articulated with fastidious intonation. Witticisms were canvassed, depending for their utility on a knowledge of the French language as spoken in the medieval times. (19)

I suggest that O'Brien is deliberately heavy-handed with his ecstatic and ebullient language on the subject of literature. Yet, the enthusiasm of the protagonist on writing and literature betrays a genuine opportunity for him to show what does matter to him, beyond the books he does not buy and the classes he does not attend and the coursework he does not do. This is the liberatory moment for the protagonist in his education—and in the education of Flann O'Brien. The passage immediately precedes O'Brien's oft-quoted comments on the intertextuality of literature: "[A] satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity." He continues, "The modern novel

should be largely a work of reference. . . . A wealth of references to existing works would acquaint the reader instantaneously with the nature of each character, would obviate tiresome explanations and would effectively preclude mountebanks, upstarts, thimbleriggers and persons of inferior education from an understanding of contemporary literature" (19-20).

As we saw above in connection to the spoken Irish language, the issue of language is an important one to the relationship between power and education. Once again, Allon White is instructive in analyzing O'Brien's self-conscious use of inflated language. In relation to his analysis of Bakhtin and the issue of power and language, White writes:

> Every [linguistic] register is typification, a style, the bearer of specific socio-cultural intentions; at the same time register is the bearer of self-referential identity which we recognize as such. Registers cannot help advertising themselves. We recognize them as pertaining to certain groups and certain social activities, hence as the registration of historical and social distinctions—not least power relations and hierarchies. Registers are thus not only a form of stratification, they are simultaneously language-images of stratification. (136)

Both the protagonist and O'Brien wish to convey something seminal about themselves and their place in the stratified, power-endowed world of the educated and one of the ways that they simultaneously accomplish this feat is through their inflated language. The language is a comic hyper-presentation of the high register perceived to be the currency of the educated class. Allon White observes that there is no objective sense in which the high language is any more serious than the low (130).

Indeed, in this dissertation I have illustrated that the presentation of the comic can bear much serious fruit. In their book *Theory, (Post)Modernity, Opposition*, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and

Donald Morton outline the differences between what they call interpretation and what they call critique. "A critique—not to be confused with criticism—is an investigation of the enabling conditions of social discursive practices." Critique, as Zavarzadeh and Morton indicate, "subjects the grounds of knowledge of the seemingly self-evident discourse to inspection and reveals that what appears to be natural and universal is actually a situated discourse. It is a construct positioned in the historical coordinates of a cultural institution, even though in blindness to it own situationality, it presents itself as a panhistorical practice" (169). In other words, while the framers of the Irish Constitution of 1937 wanted it to be viewed as a self-evident blueprint for the Irish culture, it is has been exposed as a historically–positioned document that is informed by all the fears and desires, traditions and ideals that come from the more than seven-hundred-year-old colonial relationship between Ireland and Britain. Flann O'Brien, living and writing in this milieu, must either merely reflect that constituted blueprint, or he must critique it. I argue that he did the latter.

O'Brien illustrates this idea, effectively suggesting that the use of high language is not a guarantee that the subject is serious. Thus he specifically employs high language to introduce and describe subjects that are low and comical. It is nearly impossible to take seriously the way that the novel's protagonist rhapsodizes not just on literature, but the act of taking a drink in the pub, on the solicitations he gets from the bookie who wants him to bet the ponies, and even on his crude bodily functions: "More by accident than by any mastery of the body, I here expressed my doubts on the proposal by the means of a noise. *Title of noise, the Greek version: πορδη*" (34). The protagonist refers to "perdomai"—the Greek work for "fart."

The pub is the carnivalesque inversion of the school, and O'Brien continuously juxtaposes the two through his consistent use of high language in discussing both. He uses high

language to describe the school, even those actions that take place in school but which are not academic. Note my comments above on the protagonist's schoolmates who do not put out their cigarettes, but, instead, "extinguish" them, and who do not shout and swear, but, rather "call out . . . messages of . . . obscene import." All of the activities of school are portrayed with the high language one would expect to be present in school, even those activities that subvert the objectives of school, such as smoking and cursing. Thus it is in the pub. Even flatulence gets elevated treatment, not simply through the euphemism "expressed my doubts . . . by the means of a noise," but by further applying the learned handling of its Greek name. In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin writes that the carnival's celebration of the material body's lower stratum accomplishes the dual task of reducing to the laughable those subjects that are commonly taken too seriously and, at the same moment, of giving proper due to those elements of the body's material realities that are the usual subjects of disgust. This inversion, Bakhtin maintains, asks the reader to consider how the old world gives way to the new, resulting in a form of freedom from fear. As he summarizes, "The liberating process is applied to the seriousness of petty human preoccupations, to cupidity and practical life, to the didactic gloom of moralists and bigots; it is applied to that great seriousness of fear that is reflected in the dark picture of the end of the world, that last judgment and hell . . ." (380).

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's important work on cultural capital, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, explores the role of education with regards to what Bourdieu and Passeron refer to as the "inculcation" of the habits of those who will reproduce the ideological expectations of the dominant culture. As families pass on genetic capital that partially determines success in a child, so schools serve the function of passing on cultural capital—a type of non-financial asset that equips subjects for social mobility (32). John

Guillory writes in his book *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon-Formation* that the one social institution that most regulates language and, consequently, most stifles "linguistic change" is "primarily, if not exclusively, the school" (67). Sean Latham's fascinating book *Am I a Snob? Modernism and the Novel*, builds on Bourdieu and Passeron's concepts and suggests that much of what passes as cultural capital is, in fact, counterfeit. Describing the actions of characters in novels such as *Vanity Fair, Pride and Prejudice,* and *Jane Eyre*, Latham notes that some of these characters embody the "struggle to distinguish the proper signs of distinction from crafty imitations designed to win advantage for the undeserving." These undeserving characters use their counterfeit capital "to finance access to those social networks of mutual obligation and credit that Bourdieu calls social capital" (12).

Flann O'Brien's work is filled with the caustically witty, yet educationally bankrupt escapades of characters that he makes the object of his parodies. In *The Best of Myles* collection of newspaper columns, Myles recounts that he has a friend who is recently married who bought a library filled with books for show. He needed some way of indicating that they have been read without actually having to read them. "This is what set me thinking. Why should a wealthy person like this be put to the trouble of pretending to read at all? Why not a professional book-handler to go and suitably maul his library for so-much per shelf? Such a person, if properly qualified, could make a fortune" (18). Such "handling" would fall into four levels, the first two ranging from "popular" to "premier," which might include dog-ears and underlined passages along with tram tickets and "a leaflet in French on the works of Victor Hugo" to be inserted as bookmarks. "De Luxe Handling" would include coffee, tea, or whiskey stains on select pages along with forged author signatures in "no less than five volumes" (19). Depending on the level of service demanded by the non-reader, Myles considers offering discounts to various

occupations such as civil servants, university literary students, bank managers, or heads of medium-sized businesses. As the *pièce de résistance*:

> The fourth class is the Handling Superb, although it is not called that—*Le Traitement Superbe* being the more usual title. It is so superb that I have no space for it today. It will appear here on Monday next, and, in honour of the occasion, the *Irish Times* on that day will be printed on hand-scutched antique interwoven demidevilled superfine Dutch paper, each copy to be signed by myself and to be accompanied by an exquisite picture in tri-colour lithograph of the Old House in College Green. The least you can do is order your copy in advance. (20)

O'Brien's level of humor has the effect of moving in under the immediate perception of the reader, who, doubtless, does not see himself in the satire. Yet all the while, every one of the Plain People of Ireland, Myles's daily readers, comes in for a dose of critique.

O'Brien's targets here are numerous. The scheme comments on wealth without merit and on education without learning. The civil servants, university literary students, bank managers or heads of medium-sized businesses are each presumed to possess a level of competence and represent the very core of the new Ireland and its cultural and economic promise. The book-handling scheme commodifies the appearance of education and learning as represented in the technology most dear to O'Brien himself—the written word. It is almost as though he were taking the affront of the unread library personally. In addition, one must presume that the book-handler, whom Myles describes as "properly qualified," is not a reader of the books either. But, in order to give the appearance of having read the books, he must know the sorts of marks and marginalia that one who has read the books would recognize as signs of the books having actually been read. The book-handler's cultural capital, therefore, must also reside within the

domain of the counterfeit. O'Brien's satire plays on the cultural capital of signatures from authors, forged as they are, yet subverts this capital by suggesting that the author is a devotee of the fraudulent "non-reader" (21). In this way, he even appears to be undoing the cachet of the authors themselves. And, once more, this counterfeit education is presented as the simulacrum of true education—a false representation passed off as though it were genuine and which, because it appears to fulfill the intended outcome of education, is not found out as false among those for whom the appearance is more important than reality.

Never content to tell one joke where there was the opportunity to tell two, Flann O'Brien reprises the trope of the book-handler in a column collected in *At War* (1999). Here, once again as Myles na Gopaleen, O'Brien describes a "special Junior Service" for young people who do not wish to practice piano. The level of cultural capital that will be evidenced by this service has been dramatically reduced. Whereas one might reasonably imagine that the books handled in the original scheme had, indeed, been read by someone, here the marks of use are merely the detritus of toffee and chocolate consumption along with doodles and dirt smears. The real jab is not at the young shirker, whom, it seems, O'Brien would seek to liberate from the thrall of the practice room, but the parent, who may be assumed to be the purchaser of the service. Myles asks, "Why not teach your boy to be a cheat and a liar? He will have to match his wits against people of your own kidney when he goes out into the world" (51).

O'Brien used the *Irish Times* column to take direct aim at foolishness and he often did so by sending up pedants and others granted authority, the marker of said authority often being the high language that they used. Anne Clissmann maintains that the column was "pedantically learned, yet despises learning," displaying a "wicked awareness of the hypocrisies and idiocies of life" (183). Ironically, both the relatively tepid reception of O'Brien's novels and the rabid

popularity of the newspaper column that reached so many readers daily, and which was expected to be funny, may have been connected to O'Brien's employment of high language. Because the columns entertained the masses and because they were part of the regular flow of Irish life—they were, in effect, the cultural capital of the common man—they were ingested and lauded even though they were just as clever and just as critical as the novels which tended to go unread.

The column was routinely the site of satire intended to take on the dominant culture of established education and the knowledge it was expected to impart. One of dozens of examples found in *The Best of Myles* illustrates this point. Concerned about the role examinations played in the promotion of status quo thinking, Myles na Gopaleen posits the notion:

> It is not so much that the student is expected to be familiar with the works of very many inferior persons, for after all what else is literature but just this? What is disquieting and cannot be borne is that one is expected to admire or decry these things and that one will obtain marks and consequently be considered educated only in so far as one's admiration and contempt corresponds with those of the person who sets the paper (who is of course entitled to his opinions but not necessarily those of other people). (243-44)

This observation encapsulates O'Brien's critique of education in a nascent modern capitalist society perfectly. The degree to which one agrees with those who are determined to maintain the status quo is the best measure of whether one will enter into the ideologically dominant echelon of what Richard Ohmann had come to describe in *Politics of Knowledge* as the Professional Managerial Class (20), or be relegated, as Myles had earlier suggested, to "Boy Messenger Grade III, increasing by annual increments to £ 95 at the age of 70" (243). O'Brien's further examples of the types of knowledge one must possess—"the long simile at the end of 'The

Gypsy Scholar,' . . . Ruskin as a describer of the richly splendid" (244)—indicate the apparent banality of that which passes for cultural capital whose object is to assist in the social mobility that the burgeoning Irish middle class desires.

We find an even more ambitious and more thoroughly developed example of O'Brien's views on the sort of counterfeit cultural capital he descried in *The Third Policeman.* Anthony Cronin's biography of Flann O'Brien, *No Laughing Matter*, points out that this novel was rejected by his publisher Longman's on the grounds that, while the novel was expected to be "less fantastic" than had been *At Swim-Two-Birds*, instead it was "more so" (101). One of the many things that would have made the novel seem so avant-garde—aside from the main plot that centered on a murderer's cyclical journey through the hell of his own local countryside—was the side story of the mad philosopher de Selby. While the accounts of the philosophies of de Selby on their own show his ideas to be sufficiently drawn from fantasy, it is the voluminous annotation of the "scholarly pursuits" that accompanied de Selby's work that stretches the conventions of the novel as it might have been visualized by a conservative house like Longman's. As I indicated above, the narrator of the novel had dedicated his intellectual life to the assembly of the "De Selby Index," a text that sought to catalogue and reconcile the various scholarly interpretations of de Selby's work, the prospective publication of which had served as the impetus for the narrator becoming involved in a murder. In addition to the counterfeit cultural capital implied in this index, some of the specific ideas that O'Brien parodically depicts as belonging to de Selby suggest a high level of artificiality.

De Selby's coexisting madness and genius results in several quasi-scientific and philosophical observations that, at first glance, seem entirely ridiculous. Upon further inspection, these observations seem both more laughable and less so at the same time. He opines

on every conceivable subject. For example, a house he regards to be "a large coffin" (21)—an idea that is particularly interesting in light of the explosion in the home of the murderer's victim that takes the life of the murderer, thereby rendering the home a "coffin" (23). The principal source of the ineffability of de Selby is his infamous Codex, a document described by O'Brien via the narrator's annotations as:

> a collection of some two thousand sheets of foolscap closely hand-written on both sides. The signal distinction of the manuscript is that not one word of the writing is legible. Attempts made by different commentators to decipher certain passages which look less formidable than others have been characterised by fantastic divergencies, not in the meaning of the passages (of which there is no question) but in the brand of nonsense which is evolved. (145n)

It does not escape the reader's notice that much of O'Brien in general and numerous passages of *The Third Policeman* may be described in a slight variation of this description. Reading O'Brien is an object lesson in following the divergencies he has cultivated in his work and the particular "brand of nonsense" O'Brien habitually introduces is his trademark style. That the illegibility of the Codex does not prevent commentators from assigning meaning to it argues the point that there are those who can know the unknowable. This trope of unintelligibility was played out as well in *The Poor Mouth* when the escaped pig regaled the foreign Gaelic scholar with his grunts. Here O'Brien had told the reader that "good Gaelic is difficult but the best Gaelic of all is well-nigh unintelligible" (44). On the basis of this "unintelligible" utterance, an advanced degree is conferred upon the gentleman scholar, even though the granting institution was uncertain "whether any sense might be made of it" (45). Such is the nature of the cultural capital that Sean Latham describes as counterfeit.

However, the best representation of the counterfeit cultural capital O'Brien targets in *The Third Policeman* is the extensive use of notes to explain the work of de Selby in this novel that is ostensibly not about de Selby. The narrator's notes reference a dizzying array of at least five texts written by de Selby, the entire contents of which O'Brien seems to have a clear sense. These primary texts are illuminated by the narrator and by his commentaries on the commentaries written by the eight primary scholars who argue about the meanings present in the meaningless works of de Selby. The notes are cleverly interwoven into the tale of the wandering narrator that is itself often nonsensical. There are two sections of the novel that are comprised more than one-half by notes that are not related to the narrative action of that section (116-19; 166-72). O'Brien's strategy here echoes the *mise en abyme* structure he employed in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and which he reprises in *The Third Policeman* in the beautifully comical scene with Officer MacCruiskeen's thirty-one nested, hand-carved chests, the smallest of which was "nearly half a size smaller than ordinary invisibility" (174). O'Brien's parody of the sort of intellectual and scholarly work that the narrator would commit murder to get published also more subtly pokes at the general idea of knowledge we saw at work in the critique of examinations above. In *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin, and Menippean Satire*, M. Keith Booker observes (coincidentally in a note that contains references to the notes of other sources) that Irish writers often use such footnotes in their "parodies of pedantry," concluding with the astute idea that footnotes remind us all that important information is often to be found outside the text itself (49n).

O'Brien employs the trappings of cultural capital to bring about two specific ends. First, the references to the traditional tales of the Gaelic mythos helps to establish his credentials as an Irish writer, credentials hard-earned in his educational attainment of the M. A. in Old Irish poetry. There is a wry irony in noting that for all the satiric treatment that scholarly work and

erudition receives at the hands of Flann O'Brien, he was a thoroughly well-educated man himself. No doubt he was aware of the time and dedication required to attain his own Master of Arts degree, a degree that was regarded as prestigious in his day as the Ph.D. is today. Perhaps that awareness contributed to the lack of regard O'Brien had for those whom he deemed to be pedants or fools. O'Brien had, according to Clissmann, contributed his own translation of the poetic medieval Irish lays known as *Buile Shuibhne (The Madness of Sweeny)* to his novel *At Swim-Two-Birds* (128). He also calls upon the cultural capital of the pulp fiction novels that he knows his readers know and which will, to some degree, mollify their likely impatience with his more highbrow references, whether these references are to Cuchulain or to Finn or to Sweeny in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, or to mad philosophies in *The Third Policeman*. But he also uses the appearance of cultural capital, particularly the tools, such as highbrow language and footnotes, by which that capital is transmitted, to satirize it and, thus, to subvert it through his humorous representation of it. The authority invoked in calling up scholarly experts on even so ridiculous a character as de Selby serves to "legitimate" the observations that both de Selby, as mad genius, and O'Brien, as the genius behind the mad genius, make about the nature of what it means to be educated.

In Chapter Three I showed that the idealized conception of the family as formalized within the Irish Constitution of 1937 and the policies that evolved out of that document are not the material reality of Flann O'Brien's world and his subversion of the ideal takes the form of the representation of absences in the family. In Chapter Four, I extended my analysis to the apparatus of religion in general and the Irish Catholic Church in particular. There I showed how the Church's moral authority and its stated doctrines are often undermined by the actions it takes, especially as depicted by Flann O'Brien's writing. Humor is one of the chief entry points into an

effective critique of so powerful and potentially sanctioning institution, and it is through O'Brien's use of humor that the critique is accomplished. As I have illustrated in Chapter Five, the dominant ideologies that are produced and promulgated through the cultural institution of education are also in O'Brien's sights. He critiques the agendas and the methods, the commercial outcomes, and the artifice of much of the knowledge believed to be important in the schools of the middle decades of the twentieth century in Ireland. In all three of these institutions, the work of the dominant ideologies sought to define the identity of the new nation as it carved out its place both against its former colonial status and within a modern world at large. In the final brief chapter of this dissertation, I will more directly apply what we have seen in each of the previous critiques to the question of Irish identity as I see Flann O'Brien's depiction of it.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: IDEOLOGY, SUBVERSION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR IDENTITY

In his influential book *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society*, Joseph J. Lee sums up one of the seminal moments in the political career of Éamon de Valera in a brilliant mixture of pathos and praise. Citing de Valera's radio speech from St. Patrick's Day, 1943, in which the Taoiseach articulated his dream of the Ireland of his imagination—an Ireland of simple, frugal, values-driven people; of "cosy homesteads;" an Ireland of happy and athletic youths; and of wise, God-blessed elder—Lee declares:

> De Valera's "dream" has sometimes been derisively dismissed as impossibly "naïve." But there is nothing necessarily wrong about it. It is a matter of taste as to how his ideal society compares with rival visions. De Valera realised well enough that the dream deviated widely from existing reality. The legitimate criticism of the "dream" was not that it was naïve, but that de Valera not only had no idea how to move the existing reality in the direction of his ideal, but that many of his policies directly subverted it. (334)

The principle theme of my dissertation has been that the cultural apparatuses of family, the Church, and education, institutionalized as they are in the 1937 Constitution, the composition of which was overseen by the governments formed by Éamon de Valera, are ideologically undone in the writing of Flann O'Brien in his various identities. I have been arguing that Flann O'Brien uses strategies of humor—puns, satire and parody, witticisms—to comment in ways that disguise, yet encapulate serious critiques of the ideological and cultural direction of the Free State of Ireland. Further, because I apply a strategy of dissident reading that seeks to uncover possible subversive elements in texts, whether or not the writer has targeted the subject of the

ideological critique deliberately, it is interesting to note that Lee identifies in de Valera a similar type of possibly inadvertent subversion of his own "dream." Lee's assessment that de Valera did not know how to make the reality match the vision is one problem; that de Valera would have unwittingly applied policies that worked against that vision is quite another. But the quotation does illustrate that the identity Éamon de Valera wished for Ireland to project was far less certain than he had hoped it might be when he was shepherding the Constitution of 1937 toward ratification. I have earlier suggested that the real and material identity of Ireland both is and is not what the Constitution had sought to implement. In this final brief chapter on the implications of Flann O'Brien's writing for any analysis of the identity of Ireland, I wish to explore this notion of "is and is not."

Suggesting that Flann O'Brien has written against the ideological power of the family, the Church, and education as they are promulgated by the Constitution is not an idea that has previously been addressed in a direct way. In fact, as Keith Donohue notes in *The Irish Anatomist: A Study of Flann O'Brien,* "O'Nolan [which is what Donohue calls him when he wishes to encompass all his pseudonyms] rarely wrote about religion in his earlier books, and with the exception of a few articles on the death of the Pope in 1958 and the role of the bishops in the Mother and Child Scheme or in education, he rarely criticized Church officials in Cruiskeen Lawn" (187). It is not so much a question of whether O'Brien writes directly about or against these cultural institutions, although, as Donohue indicates, it does occasionally happen. The critical issue is what a reader may do with the works.

I am the first-born son of a family of eight children who, while not Irish, were steeped in a Catholic tradition that found us at Mass on Sundays early enough to pray the Rosary. My family—in my youth it was mostly the male members for, despite my upbringing in the post-

Vatican II Church, active leadership was largely reserved for men—would routinely make up the liturgical team during those Masses. My father served as a lector and song leader, a calling my brothers and sisters and I followed in due course. Later, both he and my mother were installed as lay distributers of Communion. It was a rare week when one or more of the Hellman brothers were not serving as altar boys. Family and Church were so tightly bound together that in 1985, our family was designated as the Knights of Columbus International Catholic Family of the Year. The large plaque, commemorating the award and representing the Holy Family, still resides today in a prominent place in my parents' living room.

I have also been an educator for nearly thirty years. I am a first-generation college graduate and have always viewed education as the great liberatory opportunity it seems to have been for me. Then I began to see that while, of course, education has these equalizing and liberating potentials, it also clearly is both shaped by and, in turn, shapes the way we "go about our business." Public schools—a trust that benefits everyone whether you have or do not have children, send them to public or private school, or, even, increasingly, educate your children at home—have become the figurative, if not actual, prisons of many students in this age of privatization, high-stakes testing, and ever-lower property tax revenues. Much of the road that brought us to this place has been mapped by the economic and social deficiencies in family life as well as a growing sense that prosperity theology is the way out of the (post)modernist feeling of isolation. Family and Church and Education cannot be untangled from one another; nor can they be minimized in their ideological importance.

Louis Althusser clearly illustrates that such cultural institutions are locations of productive practices that affirm or sanction ideologies. He argued that ideology is an imagined relationship between individuals and their real, material existence. Althusser's notion of the

materiality of ideology runs counter to the ordinary acceptance of ideological truth as simply the natural order of society. Writing specifically about Irish ideology and its impacts on identity, Terence Brown explains:

> . . . [N]ewly independent Ireland was endowed with a repository of myths, images, and motifs, literary modes and conventions cultivated to a degree that might indeed have been the envy of most emerging nations in a century of infant, fragile nationalisms. The antiquarian literary and cultural activity of the preceding one hundred years had offered Irishmen and women a range of modes of thought and feeling that could help confirm national identity and unity. So, when these imaginative assets are reckoned together with the social and national binding powers of an overwhelmingly homogeneous religious belief and practice, which provided a primary sense of identity, it can readily be seen that the new state was rich in integrative resources in spite of the vision of national fragility that Irish Ireland employed as an ideological weapon. (68-69)

In other words, despite the fears of national fragility promulgated by Irish Ireland, the religious and cultural institutions that Ireland's Constitution had reified—particularly after the 1937 version—provided a powerful sense of identity. It is often these essentialized and naturalized senses of identity that Flann O'Brien comedic subversions attacked.

It is not difficult to understand why Ireland would look to its past and either idealize it or use its horrors to project a new path for the future. Michael Mays cites Tom Nairn's work on nationalism, work that identifies nationalism's "Janus-faced" dilemma. According to Nairn, nationalism is an "agent of modernization," holding out the promise of greater economic and material prosperity along with political independence in the future. At the same time, it is a call

to look backward at the available "cultural resources" for a stable underpinning. This dualistic nationalist framework illustrates how difficult was the task that Irish political, economic, and cultural leaders had taken on for themselves when they framed the Constitutions of 1922 and of 1937 (Mays 2). Yet, as I point out in my previous chapters, the ideological direction that the Constitution of 1937, in particular, set forth was a retrogressive one that a writer like Flann O'Brien simply could not ignore, one that he felt the need (or saw the opportunity) to challenge through his satiric vision.

In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, O'Brien emphasizes the melding of the legends and traditions represented by the Finn MacCool, Sweeny, and Pooka MacPhellimey characters with the contemporary tales as represented by the characters brought forth from the work of cowboy romance writer William Tracy. Anne Clissmann has noted that O'Brien's employment of this strategy results in a narrative within which it is often difficult to determine the point of view. There are, Clissmann argues, in the course of the novel "some thirty-six different styles and forty-two extracts" from various sources (86). Whether a similarity is intended or if the text is a deliberate parody of the Cyclops episode of *Ulysses* cannot be said, but the parallel exists. As Bruce Stewart remarks, Joyce's chapter represents "the most extended exercise in stylistic parody with a specifically Irish bent" (146) in the novel. Joyce's incorporation of the varieties of literary styles parodying heroic epics, newspaper advertisements, the Bible and others suggests the multivocality of Irishness, a statement that may be as easily applied to O'Brien in his novel. Joyce's "Citizen," described in the "Cyclops" episode in gigantic terms and reminiscent of Cuchulain in his strength and rusticity, is adorned with a girdle upon which are engraved nearly ninety diverse entities, many of them Irish, most of them male, some of them imaginary, some

not even human, all intended to be associated with his vastness. Ironically, the Citizen's role in the episode is to uphold the pedigree of the nationalist movement.

But, as Shakespeare's Macmorris asks in *Henry V*, "What ish my nation?" (3.2.121). The "multicultural" references throughout both Joyce's chapter in *Ulysses* and O'Brien's *At-Swim-Two Birds* number in the scores. Whereas Joyce's episode culminates with a defining moment for the Citizen when he must come face to face with the paradox of his God having been a Jew like Leopold Bloom, who had earlier staked his claim to Irishness despite his Hungarian lineage (280), O'Brien appears to tell us that his Irish "citizen" is one who appreciates the "permanence" of the Jem Casey poem "A Pint of Plain is Your Only Man"—a "pome that will be heard wherever the Irish race is wont to gather, it'll live as long as there's a hard root of any Irishman left by the Almighty on this planet" (79). Joyce, as I pointed out in my introductory chapter, is the Irishman who got away to the European continent; O'Brien is the one who stayed behind in Ireland.

The belief that the Gaelic movement represented Ireland's best opportunity to set itself apart from Britain culturally and politically is clearly an idea at which O'Brien takes aim fairly directly. This may be no more brilliantly depicted in his work than in the Gaelic *feis*, to which I have previously referred, in *The Poor Mouth*. Terence Brown dedicates a substantial chapter of his book *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present* to the importance of the Irish language after the establishment of the Treaty of 1921 that resulted in the Free State. The chapter highlights such concerns as the dramatic reduction of Irish speakers, especially in the western counties that were typically known for their high incidence of Irish speakers (50-51). In his *Modern Irish Literature and Culture: A Chronology*, James M. Cahalan cites Loreto Todd in reporting that the 1900 census indicated "only 210,000 monoglot speakers of Irish—those who

spoke solely Irish." Cahalan continues his commentary to suggest that the number of such speakers of Irish would gradually be reduced to nearly zero, as nearly "all native Irish speakers can also speak English" (143). As Declan Kiberd insists in his analysis of Douglas Hyde's work and that of the Gaelic League, especially as regards Hyde's "deanglicization," Ireland was unique among those places that had previously been part of the British empire, since "Anglicization . . . had penetrated every layer of Irish life, a situation rather different from that to be encountered in Africa or Asia" (251).

In contrast, Brown offers a lengthy passage from the *Catholic Bulletin* from 1924 in which Professor T. Corcoran repudiates the notion that modern Irish cultural identity is a synthesis: "The Irish nation is the Gaelic nation; its language and literature is the Gaelic language; its history is the history of the Gael. All other elements have no place in Irish national life, literature and tradition save as far as they are assimilated into the very substance of Gaelic speech, life and thought" (52-53). Professor Corcoran could hardly be more direct about the interchangeability and exclusivity of Irish and Gaelic in nation, language, literature, and history. In *The Poor Mouth*, Flann O'Brien provides a hilarious parody of the sacred passion some in the nation, such as Professor Corcoran, had for "all things Gaelic." These are the words of a proud Gael from Dublin at the *feis* hosted by the Old Grey-Fellow: "Gaels! he said, it delights my Gaelic heart to be here today speaking Gaelic with you at this Gaelic feis in the centre of the Gaeltacht. May I state that I am a Gael. I'm Gaelic from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet—Gaelic front and back, above and below. Likewise you are all truly Gaelic. We are all Gaelic Gaels of Gaelic lineage" (54-55)—and on and on for forty-three more repetitions and variations of "Gael" or "Gaelic" in that passage. O'Brien is indeed proud to be Irish and Gaelic, but he clearly shows that to insist in such an insecure manner on one's cultural identity is to risk

the effacement of it all together. In similar fashion, O'Brien devilishly challenges the sensibilities of those who take national pride too far, especially with respect to language. O'Brien's own expertise in the language, grounded in his early home life as well as his advanced study at UCD, meant that he almost certainly had more facility with Irish Gaelic than either de Valera or many of the other leaders of Ireland who sought to force the language onto the schoolchildren of the day. As I indicated throughout Chapter Five, some of the swipes Flann O'Brien takes at the educational system's approach to the Irish language reveal this critique of Irish identity as bound up in linguistic issues.

Indeed, no less an authority on nationalism and identity than Eric Hobsbawm suggests that the issue of language was not central to the early Irish nationalist movements. He argues that neither Daniel O'Connell's Catholic emancipation and penal laws repeal efforts in 1830, nor the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893 (which Hobsbawm contends had no initial political goals), nor the Fenian movement in between in the 1860s and thereafter, were based in any substantial way on the differentiation that promoting the Irish language would provide toward political autonomy. Hobsbawm indicates that the emphasis on Gaelicism is a more modern phenomenon (103-06). So when O'Brien focuses on Gaelicism *ad nauseum* in this humorous parody, he effectively neutralizes the impact of the nationalistic appeal.

Daniel Corkery addressed what questions of cultural identity meant for the writers and readers of Irish literature. He believed that Irish literature written in English, what he called "Anglo-Irish" literature, could be divided into two kinds: "the literature of the Ascendency writer and that of the writer for the Irish people. Roughly, the first kind includes all the literature that lives by foreign suffrage; the second all that lives by native suffrage. . . . One is therefore driven to the conclusion that the second class is true Anglo-Irish literature, since in it we find

reflected the face of the people of the land" (22-23). Terence Brown, for his part, depicts Corkery's fervor regarding the view that Anglo-Irish writers of the Literary Revival were not true members of the Irish nation as "polemical and dogmatic," and finds Corkery's efforts to include John Millington Synge within the nation of Irish writers despite his Ascendency origins to be "contortions" (54). Indeed, Corkery's own fictional writings were themselves written exclusively in English. Cultural identity in Irish literature is not on firm ground.

Flann O'Brien's depiction of Ireland as the sinister "Sea-cat" in *The Poor Mouth* represents Ireland's dualistic and potentially self-destructive cultural identity in a very physical way. The "large quadruped . . . spewing showers of putrid stench" (75) is shaped like a map of Ireland that has been turned ninety-degrees counter-clockwise. This beast terrorizes Ireland, "attacking the paupers and scattering death and ill-luck liberally" (77) and, given that is the very topographical image of Ireland, it represents Ireland and what it was becoming and how it posed the greatest threat to its own existence. Was this to be a nation rooted in its traditions and legends, desperate to overcome its often-cruel colonial past, seeking a way forward while peering backward? Or was it to be a nation entering into a new era, one that could ally itself with its former oppressor, and join a modern Europe? As Patrick Kavanagh, O'Brien's good friend and the best Irish poet in the generation between Yeats and Seamus Heaney, forcefully declared about Ireland and then plaintively asked in his poem "Memory of Brother Michael,"

> Culture is always something that was,
> Something pedants can measure,
> Skull of bard, thigh of chief,
> Depth of dried-up river.
> Shall we be thus for ever?

Shall we be thus for ever? (84)

Perhaps the best way to approach this question is to follow the advice of Sergeant Pluck in *The Third Policeman*: "The first beginnings of wisdom . . . is to ask questions but never to answer any. *You* get wisdom from asking and *I* from not answering" (59). The answers may still be formulating even in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

The persistent disguising of Brian O'Nolan as authorial presence—from his earliest days as Brother Barnabas at University College, Dublin, through the selection of Flann O'Brien as primary literary moniker, through his personae of Myles na Gopaleen and George Knowall—invites commentary related to Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" One of the early statements that Foucault makes about the text and authorship relation is this one: "In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears" (102). What appears to be a paradox is made evident in the rest of the essay as Foucault works through the problematic nature of authorship. The passage also provides opportunities for readers to play with its language. For instance, the post-structuralist view of language as expansive, de-centered, and open is here juxtaposed with the image of a subject/agent being pinned into it. This type of imprisonment in language simply could not be part of any defining characteristic of textuality. In addition, Foucault plays with the concept of "creating a space," which is to say "inventing a gap or hole." It is precisely other than this that Foucault actually intends. The space is not a void; it is the room into which the author metaphorically enters so as to free the text's readers to interact with that text. In these ways, Foucault "performs" his thesis, giving evidence to his own argument.

Foucault's author-and-text relationship reinforces the ways in which I have been applying Alan Sinfield's dissident reading strategy. That is, my reading of Flann O'Brien is one of creation as much as it is an interpretation. This idea is also reminiscent of Derrida's statement in "Plato's Pharmacy," wherein he observes that "A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer" (69). Now, it seems, we have both text and author whose desire or intent is to "avail not" to the only part of the equation that is left: the reader. Indeed, a reader's interaction with the text, and whatever concomitant exploration of the author that ensues, is the central creative act that can occur after authorship. In effect, if the reader's pleasurable and participatory interactions with the text freely invent that text, then the reader's similar explorations with the author are inventive as well. Tony Bennett's explanation of this process suggests that texts serve as "the means for a politically transformative practice" that may result in the modification of the relationship between cultural forms, such as literary texts, or even Constitutions, that shape persons and the persons themselves. In his essay "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies," Bennett argues that "the literary text is so fashioned as to assist the subject's transition from ideology to science in providing a means through which—by constantly measuring the difference between the literary and the ideological—the reader can scrape away the clouded visions of ideology and hence embark upon the royal road which leads to scientific knowledge" (24). Bennett further asserts, in *Formalism and Marxism*,

> The task which faces Marxist criticism is not that of reflecting or of bringing to light the politics which is already there, as a latent presence within the text that has but to be made manifest. It is that of *actively politicizing* the text, of *making its politics for it,* by producing a new position for it within the field of cultural

> relations and, thereby, new forms of use and effectivity within the broader social process. (136)

Alan Sinfield, Michel Foucault, and Tony Bennett insist that the author's text is comprised of gaps and it is here that political meaning is constructed, between the false consciousness of ideology and the culture that is lived within the material existence with which each subject interacts. It has been these gaps in O'Brien's writing that I have been interested in exposing and which, however (un)intentional they may been on O'Brien's part, I have sought to examine in political terms.

As I have shown in the previous three chapters, Flann O'Brien's satires and parodies, his humorous columns and his novels, open spaces for the critical reader to view the contradictions inherent in cultural apparatuses and institutions whose primary goals are to reinforce relations that preserve the status quo's hegemony. Hegemony is an especially insidious form of subjugation that institutionalizes the hierarchical power differences so thoroughly as to lead both the colonizer and the colonized to accept their status as the norm. But, as Said writes in his introduction to *Orientalism*, "There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed" (19-20). The rules of the system never change; only the ones who believe they make the rules do.

It is not surprising that O'Brien's satiric strategies so closely resemble the Bakhtinian carnival because the carnival operates on the basis of inverting hierarchies and challenging

traditions. Renate Lachmann, Raoul Eshelman, and Marc Davis argue in their article "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture":

> In the carnival, dogma, hegemony, and authority are dispersed through ridicule and laughter. In their stead, change and crisis . . . become the theme of the laugh act. The spectacle staged by carnivalesque rituals is not actually directed against institutions, whose functions and forms are only usurped for a temporary period of time, but rather against the loss of utopian potential brought about by dogma and authority. (130)

Dermot Trellis's project in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, published just two years after the 1937 Irish Constitution takes effect, is designed to be a cautionary tale about what happens when evil corrupts goodness, particularly in the sexual realm. I have already analyzed this storyline, and shown how O'Brien subverts it in multiple ways, but here I want to add that Trellis, as self-appointed keeper of morals, may indeed have been presenting a solution in search of a problem, an action that earns for him a set of tortures at the hands of the Pooka MacPhellimey: "An anabasis of arrow-points beneath the agnail, razor-cut to knee-rear, an oak-stirk in the nipple, suspension by nose-ring, three motions of a cross-cut athwart the back, rat-bite at twilight, an eating of small-stones and a drinking of hog-slime" (190). These tortures eventually lead to a full-on trial of Trellis, presided over by all of the fictional characters whom Trellis had "borrowed" to do his foul literary work. This is a Bakhtinian inversion, one that gives the temporary appearance of seriousness. But this inversion is, itself, reversed when Trellis's manuscript, the one that "made and sustained the existence of Furriskey and his true friends" (236) who were now putting him on trial, was used to stoke the fire in his hotel room. The

destruction of the pages and the destruction of the characters and the destruction of the pursuit of justice all coincide in one peripheral act.

The proscriptions of behavior that follow from Ireland being a highly religious country and which Dermot Trellis was writing to reinforce resulted in a nation that, according to Göran Therborn's study *Between Sex and Power*, had its historically lowest rate of extra-marital births in this immediate post-1937 timeframe (165). Therborn seems to suggest that it is the relatively stifled Irish economy during the 1940s through the 1980s that accounts for this, since in the 1980s through 2000, a period of economic boom for Ireland, the rate of births out of wedlock skyrocketed—from one in twelve births in 1985 to nearly one in three in 2000 (200). In other words, if one is concerned about the sanctity of the traditional married family, Ireland after 1937 certainly attained its desired outcomes. But these outcomes came at a price for women and their lack of equality, a condition to which O'Brien only briefly alludes in the persons of Annie in *The Hard Life* and Mary in *The Dalkey Archive*. In this way, O'Brien raises some specific issues, but he shows himself not to be dedicated to the overall economic equality of women.

It is ironic, therefore, that what may very well be called "utopian" notions are present in the 1937 Constitution, indeed in any constitution. Constitutions are, by their very nature, essentialist documents, always seeking to define the norms against which further policies and practices may be measured. In this sense, they are also, thus, condemned to imperfection. Ireland does appear to reflect the stated expectations of the Constitution with regards to the family and the place of women, but it took an extended period of economic sluggishness and repressive social policy to maintain this condition.

Thus, we continue to be faced with a set of questions. Can Flann O'Brien perceive the challenges that beset his homeland, a homeland to which he remained dedicated and of which he

was proud his entire life, and present those challenges to his readers on a nearly continuous basis with great hilarity, with crystalline clarity, and not offer solutions to the problems? Can the serious critiques that emanate from the comical representations in that writing be read as merely the removal of the blinders that prevent clear-eyed awareness? In Chapter Four, I cited O'Brien's most perceptive biographer, Anthony Cronin, when he suggested that Flann O'Brien reflected "the innate nihilism of the comic vision" (*Laughing* 105). Perhaps these are the questions that we cannot answer but through which, in the asking, we arrive at some kind of wisdom.

Particularly in the afterglow of a centenary observance, Flann O'Brien may be in a period of favorable critical assessment unlike any he was able to enjoy in his lifetime. In the introduction to his book *The Story of Ireland*, published in O'Brien's centenary year of 2011, the young Irish scholar Neil Hegarty contends that neither the censors nor customs men, not to mention Archbishop John Charles McQuaid as representative of the Church, could "stifle the minds of writers such as Flann O'Brien." Hegarty praises O'Brien for his "merciless satire . . . about stereotypes of native misery" in *The Poor Mouth*, and calls O'Brien's critique of Irish life in *The Hard Life* "anarchic, surreal and brave" (xv-xvi). Hegarty seems to suggest that despite all the mechanisms that would make O'Brien's writing appear subversive and, thus, to be a thumb in the eye of the state and the Church, O'Brien persisted in his "dissent . . . articulated by a comparatively small intellectual elite whose views rarely reached beyond a limited audience" (xvi). I do not disagree with Hegarty, but would hasten to suggest that O'Brien's work, far from representing a small group chafing under a repressive yoke, truly captured the cultural place of a nation in process. After seven centuries of submission peppered with rebellion, the twentieth century brought Ireland into a world for which it was hardly prepared; a world that challenged

even the existential future of its chief oppressor as a continued world power. Flann O'Brien captured that evolving era with an ear that translated the anxieties of the time into comedy. And his comedy gave a voice to "The Plain People of Ireland."

According to Anne Clissmann, the "Cruiskeen Lawn" column in the *Irish Times*, which began as a way for O'Brien to excoriate the self-righteous speaker of Irish, soon enabled him to satirize nearly every aspect of Irish life (188). Its daily appearance for nearly a quarter-century spread the O'Brien worldview far beyond Hagerty's "small intellectual elite" to a large and receptive audience of devotees, who would not consider the day complete without a wee dram from the little full jug. The Plain People of Ireland are the middle class, both upper and lower, and they are very sure of what they know and do not know, these assured beliefs sometimes being the same. They are "the voice of confident mediocrity" (208). The musings of the Plain People of Ireland nearly always echo the commonplace and the ideologically dominant. Therefore, when O'Brien makes them out to be half-witted, he is subverting the view that would be promoted as commonsense. A full and detailed exploration of the entire body of the columns, resulting in a book-length study, is long overdue.

In a moment of glaring honesty which, perhaps, represents a dropping of the mask that he typically preferred, Flann O'Brien wrote a stunning observation on identity in one of his *Irish Times* columns. Collected in *The Best of Myles*, the column makes a strong argument about the realities of the times in which he lives and writes. He begins, "I dislike labels—rather I mean it's not that they aren't terribly useful. *They are, old man.* But do . . . do they sufficiently take account of one as . . . a . . . person? There is my dilemma. . . . I know how the small mind hates what can't be penned into the humiliating five-foot shelf of its 'categories.'" One immediately notes a hesitation, a tentativeness in the elliptical pauses that suggests a testing of hypotheses. I

contend this is a hypothesis that concerns the Irish project as much as it may also be a hypothesis of self. O'Brien continues:

> And so . . . if you must libel me, sorry, wrong brief, if you must label me, if you must use one epithet to "describe" a being who in diversity of modes, universality of character and heterogeneity of spatio-temporal continuity transcends your bathetic dialectic, if, in short, one . . . practically algebraic symbol must suffice to cover the world-searing nakedness of that ontological polymorph who is at once immaculate brahmin, austere neo-platonist, motor-salesman, mystic, horse-doctor, hackney journalist and ideological catalyst, call me . . . call me (qu'importe en effet, tout cela?) call me . . . ex-rebel. (373)

To defame any person or, in fact, any nation with a neat and tidy identity is to damage its multiplicity, its ethereality, its yeomanry, its integrity. Scholars writing about Flann O'Brien have used in the titles of their studies such descriptors as post-modernist, anatomist, exorbitant, complex, and three-faced. No doubt, the implications of such descriptors take into account critical approaches that these scholars have taken to Flann O'Brien's work as well as O'Brien's own self-description—that of diversity and heterogeneity, of polymorphism and mysticism. Flann O'Brien's terms of self-description may as easily be used to accommodate all of Ireland as O'Brien experienced it and wished to express it. Far from the mere outcome of the ideologies enshrined in the Constitution of 1937, Ireland as ex-rebel, now autonomous, lives its history and its identity in the quotidian worlds of its entire people.

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APPENDIX

Articles 41, 42, and 44 of the Irish Constitution as

Ratified by Plebescite, July 1, 1937

THE FAMILY

Article 41

1.

1. The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.

2. The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensible to the welfare of the Nation and the State.

2.

1. In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

2. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

3.

1. The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack.

2. No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage.

3. No person whose marriage has been dissolved under the civil law of any other State but is a subsisting valid marriage under the law for the time being in force within the

jurisdiction of the Government and Parliament established by this Constitution shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage within that jurisdiction during the lifetime of the other party to the marriage so dissolved.

EDUCATION

Article 42

1. The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.
2. Parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State.
3.
    1. The State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the state, or to any particular type of school designated by the State.
    2. The State shall, however, as guardian of the common good, require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social.
4. The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.

5. In exceptional cases, where the parents for physical or moral reasons fail in their duty towards their children, the State as guardian of the common good, by appropriate means shall endeavour to supply the place of the parents, but always with due regard for the natural and imprescriptible rights of the child.

RELIGION

Article 44

1.

1. The State acknowledges that the homage of public worship is due to Almighty God. It shall hold His Name in reverence, and shall respect and honour religion.

2. The State recognises the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of its citizens.

3. The State also recognises the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, as well as the Jewish Congregations and the other religious denominations existing in Ireland at the date of the coming into operation of this Constitution.

2.

1. Freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion are, subject to public order and morality, guaranteed to every citizen.

2. The State guarantees not to endow any religion.

3. The State shall not impose any disabilities or make any discrimination on the grounds of religious profession, belief or status.

4. Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations, nor be such as to affect

prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school.

5. Every religious denomination shall have the right to manage its own affairs, own, acquire and administer property, movable and immovable, and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes.

6. The property of any religious denomination or any educational institution shall not be diverted save for necessary works of public utility and on payment of compensation.