

# “Compartmentation of personality for the purpose of literary utterance”: Pseudonymity and heteronymity in the various lives of Flann O’Brien

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## Abstract

The often overlooked third name in the trinity of great Irish-born modernist writers, Joyce-Beckett-O’Brien, consists himself of a trinity of names: Brian O’Nolan / Myles na gCopaleen / Flann O’Brien. These, along with at least two dozens of other pen-names, are part of an elaborate identity game set up by their author. We will identify these as part of a larger strategy of multiplication and ambiguation of identities, meant to problematize authorship, whether actual or fictionalized. After distinguishing among pseudonyms, autonyms, oronyms and heteronyms, we will determine the roles these play in O’Brien’s literary conception, ranging from the topical-tactical to the philosophical-metaphysical.

**Keywords:** pseudonym, heteronym, autonym, identity

Anyone using three different names — a first one to sign papers as a public servant with the Customs, a second one to publish articles in the local newspaper, and a third one to rebrand himself as an author of modernist novels — must definitely have a special concern with names and naming. And when the title of that author’s best novel points to a placename that no longer exists and that is never used as such in the novel; and when that author takes the name of his main literary rival and sticks it onto a character that washes glasses at the back of a pub; and when that author strips other revered writers of their names and attaches them to a Stanley-and-Laurel-type burlesque couple, – well, then that author’s concern for names seems to verge on the obsessional.

But when we learn that the author is an Irishman with a special propensity towards irreverent humor, then one wonders whether this interest in names might not be part of the same big game of pastiche and tongue-in-cheek irony that informs his novels.

Should we then trust Flann O’Brien – for, as the reader might have guessed by now, this is the one name that our author went down in literary history – and take seriously his interest in names? And, if so, was his interest purely philological and historical, or did it aim higher, at some archetypal or metaphysical levels? Or should we rather heed at his fame as an ironist and suspect a lighter game, that is laughing at our hermeneutic endeavours?

With little hope to cut out a definite answer, this is the wild goose chase that the present paper is about to go for.

Flann O’Brien might have been what Kelly Anspaugh called an “ontological polymorph,” playing an intricate *identity game* in both his life and his work. He might have got an inkling about the volatility of names long before his writerly personality split: while his paternal grandfather Dónall spelled his name the full Irish way, that is, *Ó Nualláin*, (Ó Nualláin, 1998, 11), his father Michael “called himself *Nolan* for some

purposes throughout his life," yet "he was married Michael *O'Nolan*, but signed the register" in a half-baked Irish way "as Miceál *O Nualáin*," only to revert to the full Irish *Ó Nualláin* upon his appointment as a Customs and Excise commissioner (Cronin, 2003, 3-4). These are already four spellings in just two generations! Some of these changes were the result of sheer negligence, some betray the nationalistic opportunism typical for many citizens of the new Free Irish State. Michael/Miceál's indifference to his family name was passed on to his son Brian, as the latter's biographer, Anthony Cronin, has noted: "Names were always a somewhat provisional matter for Michael O'Nolan, as they would be later for his son Brian." (2003, 3).

Like many critics after him, Ciarán Ó Nualláin could not escape the conundrum of his brother's names when he titled his classic biography *The early years of Brian O'Nolan / Flann O'Brien/ Myles na gCopaleen* (1998). In this title each slash sign marks the gap between one carefully crafted identity and the next.

Brian O'Nolan was the orderly and meretricious public servant the Irish Ministry of Finance in the stately building on the Liffey, *rive gauche*; he spoke and wrote perfect Irish (which was part of his *job description*) and showed no signs of any "spare time literary activities". In a way even this 'civil' name was something of a pseudonym, for, as Anthony Cronin suggested, it "was unusual;" indeed *O'Nolan* differed both from the anglicized *Nolan* and the full Irish name adopted "by those members of the family who objected to the English form of their name" (Cronin, 2003, 4). However, this was not exactly "the anglicized version of his Irish name," as Thibodeau claims (41), but rather the Hibernian variant of the English version of his name (with an O with apostrophe, rather than the Ò with the *sine fada*), Irish sounding, yet easy on the eyes for the English. The reason for this choice might have been that "to Irish ears O'Nolan has a would-be aristocratic ring, a faint suggestion of chieftainship of the clan." (Cronin, 2003, 4) In the years of Gaelic revivalism, a period of nationalist (and hence linguistic) fervour, adopting a name with a *panache* was tantamount to an act of political defiance. Yet, the fact that its bearer stops short from adopting its full Irish spelling is symptomatic of his ambivalent attitude to the Irish tradition.

The author's second avatar, Myles na gCopaleen, was the penname of the hard-boiled Hibernian journalist, who held in *The Irish Times* a popular column called *Cruiskeen Lawn* (Irish for 'the brimming jug') for over one quarter of a century. The column started in 1946 and it was initially written in Irish – which explains the Irish title and auctorial travesti – but later came to appear alternatively in Irish and English. The quaint-looking name *Myles na gCopaleen* is Irish for "Myles of the little horses" or ponies. O'Nolan took it from Myles-na-Gopaleen, a secondary character in *The Collegians*, a novel of 1829 by Gerald Griffin, or rather from Dion Boucicault's stage adaptation *The Colleen Bawn* of 1860 (Room, 2010, 342). The name was in itself a promise of boisterous and irreverent behaviour, as the original Myles was "an Irish picaro a rough-and-ready, hard-drinking, thoroughly charming rogue" (Anspaugh, 2007, 4). Needless to say, the promise was fully fulfilled by the savage yet well-beloved column.

Once the column turned bilingual, O'Nolan decided to make the name of its author more palatable (pun intended), and "in deference to the Anglo-Saxon epiglottis," he changed it to Myles na Gopaleen (qtd in Vintaloro, 2008, 261), dropping the 'g' that marks the Irish genitive. This was an extended hand across the Irish/English divide, operating very much like in the case of his adoption of O'Nolan (over Ó'Nualláin): it provided enough linguistic ground to establish the name as Irish, yet it anglicized to a certain extent its spelling, so as not to alienate his English readers.

Yet, the use of Myles went beyond its mere function as an auctorial pseudonym. Straddling the author/narrator divide, it became the name of a fictional persona projected into the text. In the introduction to a collection of Myles' wartime articles, John Wyse Jackson argues that

the new Myles na gCopaleen was not just another pseudonym: he would become the greatest fictional artefact that O'Nolan ever created. Myles might be the 'writer' of *Cruiskeen Lawn*, but he is also the main actor in it (Jackson W. 11-12).

A greater-than-life narrator-*cum*-character, onto which O'Nolan breathed autonomous fictional life, providing him with a biography, temperament and opinions of his own. This narrator is not to be mistaken with its author, not just because narratologists warn us never to confuse narrators with empirical authors, even when they share the same name (which, of course, is not the case here); but because the narrator is built like a character, and obeys the laws of fiction, not those of life. Vintaloro sees this fictional actor as both a "personaggio da *commedia dell'arte*" and "autore di un complesso 'romanzo' in capitoli separatamente l'uno dall'altro, un'opera la cui coerenza narrativa è data dalla *persona* e dalla sua teatralità" (2009, xi).

In the chemistry of this narrator-actor, O'Nolan is just an ingredient out of many. Myles, notes Gallagher, "became a mythical figure in which were mixed characteristics borrowed from the experiences of a typical Dublin man — and occasionally of O'Nolan himself — and a mass of unbelievable, extravagant features" (1981, 12). Not only has this narrator become autonomous from its creator, but he seems to sunder from humanity itself, by transgressing the limits of human condition. Anne Clissmann gives a memorable description of this character and of all the transgressions that the author's poetic licenses enable him:

Myles [...] transcended time, space and continuity - all the human limitations. Even death could hold no sway over him. He died and revived frequently, and he enjoyed lying in state watching the millions mourn over his demise until death became tedious and he decided to live again (193).

A champion of limit transgressions, Myles is constructed thus as a greater-than-life character, "a greater man than God," endowed with supernatural powers that make him "omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent." But there is no apparent higher ground that these powers aim to. His revivals make no more sense than those of the heroes of comics and cartoons, who pop up back to life just seconds after they have been blasted or steamrolled. The reference to comics is less *risqué* than one might think, as Myles' journalistic output is mainly on the humorous side. These revivals are not part of some mythical scenario, but just opportunistic re-uses of a character that had been "shelved."

Everything about Myles seems to be incessantly changing, adapting to whatever personal war O'Nolan was waging at the time. Polar opposites coexist in him, in an impossible liminal balance; "his origins were both lowly and noble," notes Clissmann. When this portrait stretches to the point of rupture, O'Nolan conveniently turns him into a Renaissance man, "his achievements rivalled only by 'Leonardo Da Vinci'" (Clissmann 193).

The Irish sound of Myles na gCopaleen's own name might suggest that the author had deep reverence for the Irish traditions. Yet, O'Nolan's initial commitment to Irish folklore (University College Dublin he had written an MA thesis on 'Gaeligoric' literature) was offset by his growing dislike at Gaelic revivalists and their nationalist

attitude to language and culture. This is why his attitude to the Irish language is fraught with ambivalence, as "though Myles loved the [Irish] language he abhorred the purist protectionists, and this particular satire vein is amongst the most corrosive in the Mylesian canon" (Hopper, 1995, 35).

Myles-the-narrator could play out this dislike of the nationalist abuse of language in a way that O'Nolan-the-public-servant could not. The narrator acted as a shield between the corrosivity of the text and the perceived neutrality of its empirical author. The "Myles" pseudonym thus "established a crucial distinction between author *and* text; a post-modernist theme later explored in [O'Brien's] metafictional novels." (Hopper, 1995, 29-30)

It was Flann O'Brien, the author's third pseudonymic incarnation, that went down in literary history as the name of the great (post)modern novelist. The choice of this name was the result of much hesitation and deliberation. Before the publication of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in his correspondence to Graham Greene, the reader of Longman's, O'Nolan was initially inclined to prefer "the more dour and less colourful 'John Hackett', perhaps because he had already used 'Flann O'Brien' as a *nom de guerre* in letters to the *Irish Times*" (Cronin 2003, 89), kept on proposing new pen-names (alongside with other titles for the book, such as "Sweeny in the Trees," "Task-Master's Eye," "Truth is an Odd Number," "Through an Angel's Eyelids," "The Next Market Day"), only to leave the choice into the hands of Longman's reader, who settled for *Flann O'Brien*. Thus, ironically for someone so obsessed with names, the pen-name that was to make O'Nolan famous had not even been chosen by himself, but by his publisher. And, as a further irony, probably confused by these changes, the publishers inadvertently kept O'Nolan's real name on the dustjacket, yet promoted it as the work of Flann O'Brien. Anthony Cronin described the choice of this name as "a small masterpiece," as it was "unmistakeably and even rather poetically Irish" (2003, 89).

"I think this invention has the advantage that it contains an unusual Irish name and one that is quite ordinary, [whereas] 'Flann' is an old Irish name now rarely heard" wrote O'Nolan in November 1938 in a letter to his publishers (qtd in Anspaugh 5). 'Flann' means 'blood-red,' which would explain its initial choice as a *nom de guerre* for a bilious columnist. As for the origin of 'O'Brien,' Anspaugh (2007, 6) dismisses its 'ordinary' character, and suggests it might be a part of O'Nolan's warfare with Joyce; O'Nolan might have deliberately adopted it either from "the facile pens of the O'Brienite scribes" mentioned in the "Eumaeus" chapter of *Ulysses*, or from Joyce's 'Lynn O'Brien' in *Work in Progress*, the (possibly accidental) reversal of the name and surname of the hero of an millenium-old Irish ballad, Brian O Lynn.

Unlike Myles na gCopaleen, Flann O'Brien did not develop into a narrator-character, as his voice tends to be cloaked in heterodiegetic restraint. But at the same time, "the pseudonym Flann O'Brien [was] an alter ego that partially screened O'Nolan and enabled him to criticize his government's dogmatic cultural policies with relative impunity and satiric abandon." (Esty, 1995, 27)

The "Brian-Flann-Myles trinity" – which Brendan Behan evoked in a quip – was in fact a "multi-headed hydra" – as others suggested (Yurkovsky, 1995). The three names – O'Nolan, O'Brien and Gopaleen – are just the top of the iceberg. Many more are buried in O'Nolan's student journalism, or in his hackneyed work. Some might still lie undiscovered.

Young aspiring writers often tend to minimize the risk of public failure by adopting pen-names. O'Nolan's literary debut as a student University College Dublin appears like an aggressive exercise in risk management; he descended on the student

body “like a shower of paratroopers, deploying a myriad of pseudonymous personalities in the interests of pure destruction” (Montgomery qtd. in Clissmann, 1975, 9). A student prankster, O’Nolan shifted names as he shifted genres. Under the name Samuel Hall, he tried his hand at playwriting for the UCD paper *Comhthrom Féinne* (*Fair Play*), that he edited with Niall Sheridan and Montgomery. Then, having graduated from UCD, O’Nolan published a short-lived magazine, *Blather* (1930-35), with his brother Ciarán and Niall Sheridan, where he used pseudonyms like Brother Barnabas and Count O’Blather. As *Blather* “was a kind of collective façade,” covering the “farical production” of invented controversies between the readers and the editors, the paternity of most names might be debatable, but some seem to be masks for O’Nolan himself: Lir O’Connor, Whit Cassidy, Luna Oconnor, Hilds Upshott, The O’Madan, Na2 CO3 or F. McEwe Obarn. (Brooker 2003). Apart from Oscar Love (a verbal jab at Oscar Wilde), the real sense of most of these has remained obscure to this day.

Besides witnessing the proliferation of writerly identities, composing a cast of bilious correspondents and phlegmatic editors, *Blather* also experiences another phenomenon that O’Nolan will later make extensive use of: the abusive appropriation of famous names and their collage onto preposterous figures. In *collages* typical of the avantgard, the names and heads of real Irish personalities are stuck on preposterous bodies, such as “the crude photo-montages in which the head of Eamon de Valera is superimposed on the body of a long-jumper or a baby, while his name is attached to a figure wearing a kettle on its head” or “a portrait photograph of the prime minister is mislabelled ‘Mr Silas P. Hotchkiss. President of the Clanbrassil Street Brass Fender Founders and Tinsmiths’ Protection Association, Inc’.” (Brooker, 2003, 85) Such an instance of irreverence to public figures will re-emerge in O’Nolan’s later works. Thus Keats – no other than the poet of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* – turned small pub owner in London receives Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s associate Dr. Watson. In *The Dalkey Archive*, “the spectres of Joyce and St Augustine, as rendered by O’Brien, criticize the system which has canonized them, one as a literary god and the other as a saint” (Gillespie, 2005, 4).

The practice of adopting pseudonyms also occurs with O’Nolan’s fictitious characters. *An Béal Bocht*, the bitter satire that “mocks all those writers who would sentimentalize the holy poverty and sacred simplicity of the Gaelic peasant” (Kiberd, 1995, 508), later to be translated by the author himself as *The Poor Mouth*, shows Irish peasants donning and sporting Gaelic poetic names, as “they all lacked names and surnames but received honorary titles, self-granted” (1993, [1941], 52). There are no less than 41 such pseudo-names, all having the fake quaint veneer of Gaeligore and sounding somewhat like tribal *noms de guerre* — The Running Knight, Mary’s Spinning-wheel, John of the Glen, The West Wind, The Speckled Fellow, The Bandy Ulsterman, The Lively Boy – or purporting to point some totemic animal (commensurate with the smallness of the Irish fauna) – Connacht Cat, The Little Brown Hen, The Purple Cock, The Gaudy Crow, The Robin Redbreast, The Gluttonous Rabbit. Some of these are less-than-heroic and seem to point haphazardly to whatever spot of Irish landscape was in sight (The Sod of Turf, The Branchy Tree, The Little Stack of Barley). Among these, some ridiculous intruders are out of place: Popeye the Sailor, The Temperate Munsterman, The Headache, or The Dative Case. The very ‘impurities’ in this long inventory of pseudo-Gaelic onomastics are those that create the humorous effect.

O’Nolan’s proliferation of *noms de plume* continued in his later years. Suspicions that he might have been the author of several issues of the penny-dreadful detective

series *Sexton Blake* have yet to be confirmed. In the series of *Cruiskeen Lawn* articles known as "The Brother," the generic Irish Everyman, the Brother, morphs into a Professor Latimer Dodds, who composes a four-page book of instructions on how to walk a tightrope. Between 1960 and 1966 George Knowall was the pseudonym he used to sign "Bones of Contention," a column in the *Nationalist* and *Leinster Times* (Anspaugh 20). All these are just paper beings, but their existence becomes sometimes hauntingly real, as they reinforce the "lack of a distinct frontier between the character of ink and the illusion of reality" (Gallagher 2007, 9)

This already intricate identity game is further complicated by the presence of several nameless narrator-editors whose prerogatives often mimic the actual author's powers. The narrative instance that the contemporary reader of *Cruiskeen Lawn* had immediate contact with was an idiosyncratic narrator-editor, whose 'expert' voice and strong textual presence might easily obscure the more discreet paratextual presence of Myles na gCopaleen. A series of articles bear the impersonal stamp of The Central Research Bureau, an institutional entity that patents preposterous inventions (many of which seem to have originated in some modern Academy of Lagado) and promotes, in pompous scientific lingo, their alleged progressive qualities; even if occasionally we can hear a first-person voice, this is never identified, referring to itself simply as 'myself' or 'our Bureau;' at other times the voice, ponderous with technological expertise, seems to be a collective one, distinct from that of its patron Myles:

The Myles na gCopaleen Central Research Bureau is experimenting with the manufacture of intoxicating ice cream. [...] The experiments continue night and day. Myles na gCopaleen, the da, has already decorated several employees for gallantry and distinguished conduct in the tasting room and has not scrupled to get them the best room in the hospital (O'Brien, 1993, 122).

At other times, O'Nolan ventriloquized the voice of a nameless journalist, introducing Myles:

Sir Myles na gCopaleen (the da) was 87 yesterday. [...] Sir Myles, an imposing old-fashioned figure in his lavender waistcoat and cravat, received the tenants and villagers in the old baronial hall (1993, 154).

or simply announced the absence of the now rejuvenated patron:

Myles himself, the brilliant young journalist, will be out of town for 14 days (1993, 155).

This journalist sounds like a *habitué* of the V.I.P. gossip column, and he goes on to report undisturbedly the most preposterous facts:

Sir Myles na gCopaleen (the da) who has been buried in the country for some months, was exhumed last week following a dispute as to the interpretation of a clause in his will [...] The Grand old man was alive and well, and looked extremely fit as he stepped from the coffin. (1993, 158).

Another nameless narratorial presence occurs in the paratext of *The Dalkey Archive*. This is the anonymous editor working in the *soussol* of the text (apparently unbeknownst to the writer of the story at the surface) to boost the critical posterity of his hero, the natural philosopher De Selby. His verbose presentations of De Selby's speculative scientific theories gain momentum from footnote to footnote, parasitizing

the bottom of the pages, to the point of overgrowing the text of the novel with a comedy of mock pedantry.

To negotiate one's way among so many names is a venturesome and problematic affair. Anspaugh apologized for his use of the three names: "If this seems awkward, it is an awkwardness that O'Nolan has made inescapable by his perverse and incorrigible pseudonymity." (2007, 24) Hugh Kenner gives the extreme example of a carefully planned practical joke that O'Nolan, "who had made misinformation into an art form," once played on *Time* magazine, making the reputed magazine present as 'Time-checked fact' absurd allegations about himself. Michael Epp detects a further "example of the success of O'Brien's masking" in the 1995 edition of *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*:

Despite the fact that Merriam-Webster claims to be a company that 'is your assurance of quality and authority,' it wrongly states that 'Brian O'Nuallain' the Irish spelling of O'Brien's real name, is in fact 'a pseudonym of Flann O'Brien' (837) (Epp, 1999, 18).

In the presence of such a proliferation of fictional names and identities, one question becomes unavoidable: Just how serious was O'Nolan/O'Brien/Myles about names?

A glance into the official correspondence of the real-life O'Nolan (found in the records of the Department of Local Government and Public Health) casts some light on the matter:

During my recent absence from the office, I received two letters addressed to B. Nolan. This is not the same name under which I entered the Civil Service, nor is it the English transliteration in use by my family. *My own name is one of the few subjects upon which I claim to be an authority* and notwithstanding any colloquialism countenanced for the sake of convenience in the office, I would be glad if my predilection in the matter [of its spelling] be accepted in official correspondence in the future (qtd. in Cronin 2003, 78-9, my emphasis).

In his peculiar brand of officialese O'Nolan leaves little doubt as to how important names were in his life.

It is obvious however that there are significant differences among these names, in terms of their use. Some are meant for usage in the public sphere (distinct from the cultural one); some are mere fictional façades, with no trace of a purported identity behind them; some point to complex identities, either competing that of the flesh-and-blood author, or inhabiting the fictional space. Such differences would require distinctive critical concepts.

Vintaloro proposes that Brian O'Nolan should be described as the empirical comical author ("autore emirico comico") of the works ostensibly signed Flann O'Brien and Myles na Gopaleen (2008, 96). He also notices that Myles-the-journalist, acting as a buffoon or an Arlecchino, reached the peak of this fame at the very moments when Flann-the-novelist was silent; thus, from the point of view of "the socio-cultural impact of their works," the two were complimentary (2008, x).

Considering that the name he had at birth was slightly yet significantly different from the one he used in public (Ó Nualláin vs. O'Nolan), the latter might as well be described as an *autonym*, that is a name one deliberately adopted, while the former is an *ortonym* (the right/original name).

Flann O'Brien, on the one hand, has little, if any, extratextual reality. It is a name on the cover of several books authored by the real-life O'Nolan, and does not purport to have a corporeal identity outside his iconic-textual presence. On the infrequent occasions when Flann speaks in the first person, he appears as a mere abstract entity; his biography, his cultural tastes, his writerly efforts remain largely unknown. Moreover, there are no references from independent observers, whether real or fictional, that point to a 'Flann O'Brien,' which would thus legitimize his reality. Describing 'Flann O'Brien' as a *pseudonym*, or *nom de plume*, seems to be appropriate.

'Myles na gCopaleen' differs significantly from 'Flann O'Brien,' as it acquired over the years an ostensible extratextual reality. We have seen how O'Nolan uses an allegedly independent system of witnesses (the gossip columnist reporting his whereabouts, death and resurrection, his subordinates at the Research Bureau) to legitimize this identity as physical rather than just textual. Some of these testimonials occur in the paratextual space. Such is the case of "Quariversal Luminary" which is preceded by an abstract or summary, in the manner of those found in ancient treatises or in the early Augustan novels, where an anonymous editor heaps praise on "Myles na gCopaleen [who] valiantly perseveres in his tutelage of mankind," a.s.o. (1999, 89). A similar legitimizing strategy is deployed in "In Extremis" ("in which Myles na gCopaleen remains faithful to his calling"). Symptomatically for the present discussion, the abstract ends with: "With mind in turmoil, he warns of *the perils of multiple identity*" (1999, 69, my emphasis).

Even if, as it might be argued, Myles identity is far from being fixed, and it hovers between the extremes of age (from very young to venerably old), social class and attitude, what matters is that he is endowed with an identity, however fluid and fluctuating.

With Myles, we find ourselves in a situation akin to that of the Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa, and his score of alternative identities, each with a distinct biography, personality, voice and *oeuvre*: Álvaro de Campos, the naval engineer turned decadent poet, then converted to symbolism and futurism; Ricardo Reis, the physician aficionado of classical poetry; Bernardo Soares, diarist and author of the *Book of Untranquility*; Alberto Caeiro, the self-taught urbanite; and Fernando Pessoa himself, master of lyrical and philosophical excess, succumbed to TB (Vintaloro, 2008, 146-7). Note that, like in the case of O'Nolan/Myles, these are not auctorial alter egos, as they constructed from scratch as distinct personalities whose identities remains distinct from that of their empirical author. Rather than *alter egos*, we might describe them punningly as *alternative identities*, each native of a dissimilar Other, originating in a different port of call. Pessoa, himself a theoretical spirit, suggested for these the term *heteronym*.

*Heteronyms* differ from "the literary tradition of pseudonyms, alter egos, or character-narrators" in that they claim to possess "a form of real existence." In Pessoa's specific case the heteronyms grow to obscure the identity of their puppeteer, their work becoming "greater than his own name" in both bulk and value. The ultimate implication of "populating his interior world with other writers of his own invention, the heteronyms" is that "the works themselves, be they truthful or beautiful, are completely independent of the intention or personality of any 'real' authors, who are at odds with their own expression" (Jackson D. 2010, 6).

The case of Myles resembles greatly that of Pessoa's heteronyms, and the implication of a certain autonomizing of the text from its author, or even of a Barthean "death of the author" ring particularly true in the case of an author whose masterpiece stages a rebellion of the characters against their author, followed by an judicial

indictment of the latter and a near-execution. In *At Swim-two-Birds*, “the death of the author” ceases to be just a metaphor for the *effacement* of the empirical author behind the intrinsic authority of the text itself, only to become a disquieting reality of the lynching of the author by its now autonomized textual artefacts, i.e. his characters.

One last question resides: What was the auctorial intention behind these pseudonymic and heteronymic games?

The question was dealt with by many, and the answers range from the topical-tactical to the philosophical-metaphysical.

Some saw it as a mere textual game, one of the many played by O’Nolan (such as the game of multiplication of narrative instances, of alternative beginnings, of impossible metaleptic encounters in *At Swim-Two-Birds*), and pointed to the mere pleasure of deception.

Others saw this as a mere “process of masking” (“processo di mascheramento”, Vinataloro, 2008) carried out by an essentially public-shy writer, for whom “l’accumulation des pseudonymes révèle son obsession à dresser des obstacles pour protéger l’intimité de son identité” (Gallagher 2008).

Some pointed to the tactical advantages of pseudonyms, such as of eluding the inherent criticism from Gaelic revivalist, or from a public not yet ready to admit the kitsch stereotyping of their recently regained Irish identity. Terence Dewsnap points to “O’Brien’s interest in the possibilities of the pseudonymous journalist” as providing an escape route from the critique of the nationalist citizens (à la the Joycean episode of *Cyclops*), for “it absolves him of responsibility” (qtd in Epp, 1999, 75). Others have turned to the psychological advantages that the multiplication of identities had for the Irish artist. Giordano Vintaloro sees O’Nolan “hiding behind many screens” and happy about “his own ability to escape any categorization.” (2008, vii) Rudiger Imhof sees the heteronymic strategy as liberating (from the pressure of multiplicity) and yet disciplining (against the dangers of anomy):

The invention of Myles na Gopaleen was the wellhead of his power, a strategy at once liberating and defensive, allowing him to exteriorize contradictions that might otherwise have been paralyzing (72).

One such categorization is the psychoanalyst’s insistence on the underlying determinism of childhood upon our adult identity. The use of heteronyms, in O’Nolan like in Pessoa, “opened European literature and psychology to freedom and escape from [such] determinism” and, after having “empti[ed] out [one’s] selves” filled them with the products of one’s imagination (Jackson D., 2010, 5).

O’Nolan had himself made contradictory statements about his intentions. In a discussion with Niall Sheridan he seems to support the aesthetics of the cut-out or found object (that Ihab Hassan described as typical of postmodernism), where the very question of authorship is eluded. Thus, “the principles of the Industrial Revolution should be applied at last to literature and a book [be] made of various ‘found’ passages had a better chance of becoming a bestseller;” with the immediate result of eroding “overweening, omniscient authorship” (Kiberd, 2001, 308).

The careful way in which O’Nolan cultivated and managed his pseudonyms and heteronyms indicates yet another fact. The author of *At Swim-Two-Birds* intended each facet of his complex and paradoxical personality to occupy a literary niche of his own. He felt that, to the eyes of the common reader and critic, there might be some incompatibility between the genial Brother, the playful polymorph Myles and the stern

voice in the metaphysical-Manichaeic narrative of *The Third Policeman*. These narrative entities needed to be set apart by casting them into widely dissimilar auctorial guises, each with his own psychology and idiosyncrasies.

Anne Clissmann believed that the “major aim in the selection of a new pseudonym was that it should reflect different aspects of O'Brien's personality to those seen in the novels” (Clissmann, 1975, 190). Like in the case of Pessoa, the plurality of names therefore indicates an “*éclatement de l’identité*” into “*une identité multiple*,” in which the proliferation of heteronyms is manifest as a “*procéssus de nomination à dédoublements multiples du sujet*” (Pèrez Babo, 2010, 140).

In 1964, in one of his rare interventions on the proscenium of his texts, O’Nolan, in his typical half-serious half-jokingly manner, in a style mimicking that of the future exegetes that he so much professed to abhor, made an illuminating statement:

Compartmentation of personality for the purpose of literary utterance ensures that the fundamental individual will not be credited with a certain way of thinking and fixed attitudes. No author should write under his own name nor under one permanent pen name (qtd in Hopper, 1995, 29-30)

And, throughout his work, O’Nolan made sure that his minions – whether called Flann O’Brien, Myles na gCopaleen, the Brother, Lir O’Connor or the Connacht Cat – always don a new identity upon stepping onto the stage of “his sparetime literary activities”.

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## **“Compartimentarea personalității în vederea expresiei literare”: Pseudonimie și heteronimie în diferitele vieți ale lui Flann O'Brien**

### **Rezumat**

Deseori uitat, al treilea nume din treimea marilor scriitori moderni de origine irlandeză, Joyce-Beckett-O'Brien, este el însuși o treime de nume: Brian O'Nolan / Myles na gCopaleen / Flann O'Brien. Acestea, alături de cel puțin încă 20 de alte *noms de plume*, sunt parte a unui elaborat joc al identităților, pus la cale de către autor. Le vom identifica pe acestea ca făcând parte dintr-o mai amplă strategie a multiplicării și a ambiguizării identităților, menită să problematizeze chestiunea autorității, fie reală, fie ficționalizată. După ce vom distinge între pseudonime, autonime, ortonime și heteronime, vom determina rolurile pe care acestea le au în concepția literară a lui O'Brien, de la cele locale și tactice, la cele filosofice și metafizice.