

Flann O'Brien

An Inventory of Manuscripts and Criticism at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	O'Brien, Flann, 1911-1966.
Title:	Flann O'Brien Manuscripts and Criticism
Dates:	1934-1989
Extent:	2 boxes
Abstract:	Materials relating to this Irish writer include drafts of two of his novels and a play, as well as literary criticism.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-03087
Language:	English.
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchases and gift, 1965, 1970, and 1989 (R2707, R4815, and G8215)
Processed by	Bob Taylor, 1997
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Brian O'Nolan was born into the family of a civil servant in County Tyrone, Ireland, on 5 October 1911, the third of twelve children. After the family settled in Dublin in 1923 Brian attended school there, entering University College, Dublin in 1929. After receiving a B.A. degree (English, Irish, and German) and later an M.A., O'Nolan began eighteen years' employment in the Irish civil service in 1935. During the late 1930s he embarked on a literary career, writing a bilingual column for the *Irish Times* under the pseudonym Myles na Gopaleen and publishing his first (and best-known) novel *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in 1939 under the pseudonym Flann O'Brien.

The outbreak of World War II drew attention away from what is arguably O'Nolan's major literary achievement, but he continued his newspaper column and wrote other novels: *An Beal Bocht (The Poor Mouth)*, *The Hard Life*, *The Dalkey Archive*, and the posthumously-published *The Third Policeman*, actually written in 1940. Additionally he wrote *Faustus Kelly* and other dramatic pieces.

While O'Nolan had enjoyed a continuing reputation among educated Irish, it was only upon the republication of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in 1960 that his broader fame began. A collection of his *Irish Times* pieces (edited by his brother Kevin O'Nolan) was published in 1968 as *The Best of Myles*. Brian O'Nolan died in Dublin on 1 April 1966.

Scope and Contents

The Brian O'Nolan materials at the HRC comprise two series, Works (1934-1963) and Criticism (1989). The first of these, Works, embraces the manuscripts of two of his five novels, *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Dalkey Archive*, together with manuscript materials relating to his play *Faustus Kelly*.

At Swim-Two-Birds is represented by two typescript drafts. The first of these contains extensive marginalia and holographic additions by the author. Thomas F. Shea, O'Nolan's biographer, has suggested this draft "was most likely composed between 1934 and 1937." The second typescript bears a signed note by the author indicating it is "the final version for Longmans Green," typed in 1937. Accompanying *At Swim-Two-Birds* are a group of clippings relating to that novel's 1960 republication, together with a note from O'Nolan to Niall Montgomery, dated 21 September 1960.

The Dalkey Archive exists here in four drafts. The first, dated "November 1962... July 1963" is holographic; three typescripts are dated August, September, and October 1963. The first of these is identified as "first typescript," while the second is described as "first typescript drastically revised." The last typescript is bound in boards and dated October 1963 but otherwise unidentified as to priority.

O'Nolan's play *Faustus Kelly* is represented by two manuscripts (each contained in a ruled notebook), together with a number of unbound leaves of dramatic writing for that 1943 play.

The second series, Criticism, is represented by a typescript draft of Thomas F. Shea's *Flann O'Brien's Exorbitant Novels*, which was published in 1992 by Bucknell University Press.

Index Terms

Other Authors

Shea, Thomas F., 1953-

Series I. Works

At Swim-Two-Birds

Typescript with holograph corrections	box 1 folder 1
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Typescript ("Final version for Longmans Green")	folder 2
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Reviews of 1960 edition, with letter from O'Nolan to Niall Montgomery	folder 3
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Faustus Kelly

Holograph manuscript	folder 4
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Holograph manuscript, dated "27/4/42"	folder 5
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Holograph manuscript, dialogue on loose leaves	folder 6
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The Dalkey Archive

Holograph manuscript, Nov. 1962-July 1963	box 2 folder 1
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Typescript, Aug. 1963	folder 2
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Typescript, "drastically revised," Sept. 1963	folder 3
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Typescript, bound, Oct. 1963	folder 4
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Series II. Criticism

Shea, Thomas F. *Flann O'Brien's Exorbitant Novels*

box 2
folder 5