

The Best of Cruiskeen Lawn

by Myles na gCopaleen

A collection of columns on
the 50th anniversary of
Brian O'Nolan's death

**Selected and introduced
by Frank McNally**

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Contents

Introduction	4
Cruiskeen Lawn December 4th, 1944	6
Cruiskeen Lawn January 11th, 1941	8
Cruiskeen Lawn December 9th, 1957	9
Cruiskeen Lawn March 7th, 1958	10
Cruiskeen Lawn June 24th/July 8th, 1942 (combined text).....	12
Cruiskeen Lawn July 5th, 1944.....	14
Cruiskeen Lawn June 19th, 1944	16
Cruiskeen Lawn – publication date unknown.....	18
Cruiskeen Lawn June 23rd, 1943	19
Cruiskeen Lawn February 27th, 1945	20
Cruiskeen Lawn October 11th, 1943.....	22
Cruiskeen Lawn July 20th, 1942.....	24
Cruiskeen Lawn December 7th, 1942	26
Cruiskeen Lawn September 8th, 1943	27
Cruiskeen Lawn May 17th, 1951.....	29
Cruiskeen Lawn June 18th, 1943	31
Cruiskeen Lawn August 3rd, 1942.....	33
Cruiskeen Lawn April 11th, 1959	34
Cruiskeen Lawn October 2nd, 1944.....	36
Cruiskeen Lawn November 10th, 1941.....	38
Cruiskeen Lawn November 15th, 1941.....	40
Cruiskeen Lawn February 5th, 1953	41
Cruiskeen Lawn March 25th, 1957	43
Cruiskeen Lawn August 28th, 1942.....	45

Introduction

Myles na gCopaleen
by Frank McNally

Brian O’Nolan made his debut as an *Irish Times* columnist in October 1940, but that was not his first appearance in the paper. For two years previously, he had haunted the letters page under a variety of false names: starting and stoking rows, usually of the literary kind. His best-known pseudonym, Flann O’Brien, was introduced to the world in this manner.

In giving him a column, editor Bertie Smyllie may have been partly motivated by a desire to rescue the letters forum from further abuse. But he was also impressed by O’Nolan’s obvious wit and by his fluency in Irish: a crucial bonus.

Attempting to broaden the newspaper’s readership beyond its old Protestant unionist base, Smyllie intended the column to be exclusively in Ireland’s mother tongue, which it was for the first year. From the end of 1941, however, *Myles na gCopaleen* - O’Nolan’s newspaper persona - began writing in English every other day. And from the end of 1943, he dropped Irish completely, to the editor’s great regret.

By the time *Cruiskeen Lawn* (Hiberno-English for “the little brimming jug”) started, Flann O’Brien had also made his novel-writing debut with the brilliant but unread *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939).

The early columns continued that book’s anarchic humour, introducing characters including Keats & Chapman, “The Brother”, the train-obsessed “Steam Man”, and Sir Myles na gCopaleen (“the Da”), while making multiple other flights of comic genius on subjects ranging from the revival of Irish to cosmic physics.

As Flann, O’Nolan had completed a second novel, *The Third Policeman*, in 1940: now considered a classic but unpublished in his lifetime. As Myles, he made occasional forays outside the column: first with *An Béal Bocht* (1941), a brilliant spoof on the Blasket school of literature, and then a couple of plays, including *Faustus Kelly*, which had a short run in the Abbey in 1943.

After that, until the last years of his life, *Cruiskeen Lawn* was O’Nolan’s main or only literary output. It appeared daily throughout the war and for a year or so afterwards. Then it was reduced to three days a week, a rate more-or-less maintained, apart from a few longer absences through ill health, until his death.

The column was sometimes written by others, notably O’Nolan’s friends Niall Montgomery and Niall Sheridan. Montgomery, in particular, was a regular substitute in the post-war years. But the Myles na Gopaleen pseudonym (minus the eclipsis, eventually) was permanent.

And apart from such clues as a periodic obsession with architecture, Montgomery’s main profession, the demarcation of authorship is not always clear. This is partly because, after the war, the comic invention of the early *Cruiskeen* gradually gave way to a more conventional and satirical approach, depending on and responding to the daily news agenda.

In all his years writing for the *Irish Times*, the author’s real name rarely appeared in its pages. One such occasion was in 1943 when, in his day job as a civil servant with the Department of Local Government, O’Nolan was appointed secretary into the Cavan Orphanage fire, in which 35 children had died.

Cruiskeen Lawn made no reference to that tragedy. As the years passed, however, Myles did increasingly engage in comment that annoyed or embarrassed his political masters in “Yokel Government”, as he liked to call it.

Although he was well known to be the main author, the pseudonym usually saved him. But on one occasion, unwisely, he allowed his picture to accompany the column. Soon afterwards, in 1953, with his hold on employment already undermined by alcohol-related absenteeism, he annoyed his bosses once too often and was forced to retire.

Thereafter, at aged 42, he became a full-time writer for the first time, albeit one increasingly impaired by drinking and ill-health.

Encouraged by the republication of *At Swim-Two-Birds* in 1959, he made a belated return to novels with *The Hard Life* (1960) and *The Dalkey Archive* (1964), for which he plundered parts of the still unpublished *Third Policeman*). *Cruiskeen Lawn*, meanwhile, continued intermittently until he died on April Fools Day 1966.

Despite their inferiority to the earlier books, the later ones were nevertheless welcomed in literary circles as a return by the author to real work.

Cruiskeen Lawn, by contrast, tended to be critically disparaged, merely because it appeared in newsprint. The tone had been set in a 1946 profile of the author, which called it “brilliant but futile”. It continued in a posthumous profile by Hugh Kenner, which seemed to regard O’Nolan’s journalism and his alcohol addiction as equal enemies to literature.

“Was it the drink was his ruin, or was the column?” asked Kenner; “For ruin is the word.” A later generation of critics has been less harsh. While the cult of Flann O’Brien’s novels continues to grow, encouraged by such developments as a cameo role for the *Third Policeman* in the hit US TV series *Lost*, so does appreciation of *Cruiskeen Lawn*.

At its best, during the early 1940s, it was the funniest thing being written in the English language. It is also now seen as a logical progression from *At Swim-Two-Birds* which, having several different beginnings and endings, and characters who were at least semi-autonomous, purported to kill off the conventional novel.

A follow-up was always going to be challenging. But 50 years after O’Nolan’s death, the combined newspaper columns, reassembled in whichever order the reader likes, can be considered a literary masterpiece in their own right.

Cruiskeen Lawn December 4th, 1944

I happened to glance at my hands the other day and noticed they were yellow. Conclusion: I am growing old (though I claim I am not yet too old to dream). Further conclusion: I should set about writing my memoirs. Be assured that such a book would be remarkable, for to the extraordinary adventures which have been my lot there is no end. (Nor will there be.) Here is one little adventure that will give you some idea.

Many years ago a Dublin friend asked me to spend an evening with him. Assuming that the man was interested in philosophy and knew that immutable truth can sometimes be acquired through the kinesis of disputation, I consented. How wrong I was may be judged from the fact that my friend arrived at the rendezvous in a taxi and whisked me away to a licensed premises in the vicinity of Lucan.

Here I was induced to consume a large measure of intoxicating whiskey.

My friend would not hear of another drink in the same place, drawing my attention by nudges to a very sinister-looking character who was drinking stout in the shadows some distance from us.

He was a tall cadaverous person, dressed wholly in black, with a face of deathly grey. We left and drove many miles to the village of Stepside, where a further drink was ordered. Scarcely to the lip had it been applied when both us noticed – with what feelings I dare not describe – the same tall creature in black, residing in a distant shadow and apparently drinking the same glass of stout.

We finished our own drinks quickly and left at once, taking in this case the Enniskerry road and entering a hostelry in the purlieu of that village.

Here more drinks were ordered but had hardly appeared on the counter when, to the horror of myself and friend, the sinister stranger was discerned some distance away, still patiently dealing with his stout.

We swallowed our drinks raw and hurried out. My friend was now thoroughly scared, and could not be dissuaded from making for the far-away hamlet Celbridge; his idea was that, while another drink was absolutely essential, it was equally essential to put many miles as possible between ourselves and the sinister presence we had just left.

Need I say what happened? We noticed with relief that the public house we entered in Celbridge was deserted, but as our eyes became more accustomed to the poor light, we saw him again; he was standing in the gloom, a more terrible apparition than ever before, ever more menacing with each meeting. My friend had purchased a bottle of whiskey and was now dealing with the stuff in large gulps.

I saw at once that a crisis had been reached and that desperate action was called for.

“No matter where we go,” I said, “this being will be there unless we can now assert a superior will and confound evil machinations that are on foot. I do not know whence comes this apparition, but certainly of this world it is not. It is my intention to challenge him.”

My friend gazed at me in horror, made some gesture of remonstrance, but apparently could not speak.

My own mind was made up. It was me or this diabolical adversary: there could be no evading the clash of wills, only one of us could survive. I finished my drink with an assurance I was far from feeling and marched straight up to the presence.

A nearer sight of him almost stopped the action of my heart; here undoubtedly was no man but some spectral emanation from the tomb, the undead come on some task of inhuman vengeance. "I do not like the look of you," I said, somewhat lamely.

"I don't think so much of you either," the thing replied; the voice was cracked, low and terrible. "I demand to know," I said sternly, "why you persist in following myself and my friend everywhere we go."

"I cannot go home until you first go home," the thing replied. There was an ominous undertone in this that almost paralysed me.

"Why not?" I managed to say.

"Because I am the taxi-driver!"

Out of such strange incidents is woven the pattern of what I am pleased to call my life.

Cruiskeen Lawn January 11th, 1941

A lady lecturing recently on the Irish language drew attention to the fact (I mentioned it myself as long ago as 1925) that, while the average English speaker gets along with a mere 400 words, the Irish-speaking peasant uses 4,000.

Considering what most English speakers can achieve with their tiny fund of noises, it is a nice speculation to what extremity one would be reduced if one were locked up for a day with an Irish-speaking bore and bereft of all means of committing murder or suicide.

My point, however, is this. The 400/4,000 ration is fallacious; 400/400,000 would be more like it. There is scarcely a single word in the Irish (barring, possibly, Sasanach) that is simple and explicit.

Apart from words with endless shades of cognate meaning, there are many with so complete a spectrum of graduated ambiguity that each of them can be made to express two directly contrary meanings, as well as a plethora of intermediate concepts that have no bearing on either.

And all this strictly within the linguistic field. Superimpose on all that the miasma of ironic usage, poetic licence, oxymoron, plamá, Celtic invasion, Irish bullery and Paddy Whackery, and it is a safe bet that you will find yourself very far from home. Here is an example copied from Dinneen and from more authentic sources known only to my little self.

Cur, g. curtha and cuirthe, m. – act of putting, sending, sowing, raining, discussing, burying, vomiting, hammering into the ground, throwing through the air, rejecting, shooting, the setting or clamp in a rick of turf, selling, addressing, the crown of cast-iron buttons which have been made bright by contact with cliff-faces, the stench of congealing badger's suet, the luminance of glue-lice, a noise made in an empty house by an unauthorised person, a heron's boil, a leprachaun's (sic) denture, a sheep-biscuit, the act of inflating hare's offal with a bicycle pump, a leak in a spirit level, the whinge of a sewage farm windmill, a cornrake's clapper, the scum on the eye of a senile ram, a dustman's dumpling, a beetle's faggot, the act of loading every rift with ore, a dumb man's curse, a basket, a "kur", a fiddler's occupational disease, a fairy godmother's father, a hawk's vertigo, the art of predicting past events, a wooden coat, a custard-mincer, a blue-bottle's "farm", a gravy flask, a timber-mine, a toy craw, a porridge-mill, a fair-day donnybrook with nothing barred, a stoat's stomach-pump, a broken –

But what is the use? One could go on and on without reaching anywhere in particular.

Your paltry English speaker apprehends sea-going craft through the infantile cognition which merely distinguishes the small from the big.

If it's small, it's a boat, and if it's big it's a ship. In his great book *An tOileánach*, however, the uneducated Tomás Ó Criomhthain uses, perhaps, a dozen words to convey the concept of carrying super-marinity – áthrach long, soitheach, bád, naomhóg, bád raice, galbhád, púcán and whatever you are having yourself.

The plight of the English speaker with his wretched box of 400 vocal beads may be imagined when I say that a really good Irish speaker would blurt out the whole 400 in one cosmic grunt. In Donegal there are native speakers who know so many million words that it is a matter of pride with them never to use the same word twice in a life-time. Their life (not to say their language) becomes very complex at the century mark; but there you are.

Cruiskeen Lawn December 9th, 1957

Somebody should write a monograph on the use of the word "supposed" in this country.

Start listening for it, either in your own mouth or in others, and you will see that it comprises the sum of the national character, that, it is a mystical synthesis of all Irish habits, hopes and regrets.

There is no immediately obvious or neat Gaelic equivalent, and I harbour the guess that the discovery of this boon "supposed", may have been a factor in the change over to English.

You meet a man as you take a walk along the strand at Tramore. "Of course, I'm not supposed to be here at all," he tells you, "I'm supposed to be travelling for orders for th'oul fella in Cork. I'm here for the last week. How long are you supposed to be staying?"

The word occurs most frequently in connection with breaches of the law or in circumstances where the gravest catastrophe is imminent. You enter a vast petrol depot. The place is full of refineries, tanks, and choking vapour fills the air. The man on the spot shows you the wonders and in due course produces his cigarettes and offers you one. "Of course I needn't tell you," he comments as he lights up, "there's supposed to be no smoking here at all."

You enter a tavern, meet a butty you have not seen for ages, and you invite him to join you in a drink. He accepts. He toasts your health, takes a long libation and gingerly replaces the glass on the counter. He then taps his chest in the region of the heart. "As you know," he remarks casually, "I'm not supposed to touch this stuff."

Yes, drink is full of this property of suppose. You have been to some very late and boring function. You are going home, you feel you need a drink but you are a gentleman and know nothing about the licensing laws. Naturally you rap at the door of the first pub you see. All is in darkness. The door opens, a head appears, it peeps up the street and down; next thing you are whisked in.

"We're supposed to be closed, you know."

Menuhin is not a great violinist, in the view of the Irish. He is merely supposed to be one of the greatest violinists in the world. Nor is Irish the national language of Ireland, the Constitution notwithstanding. It is supposed to be. You are not supposed to own a radio set without paying the licence. Not more than eight people are supposed to stand inside a bus, and none is supposed to stand on top. You are aware that your colleague was at the races when he was supposed to be sick, but you are not supposed to know and certainly you are not supposed to report such an occurrence. You are not supposed to use the firm's telephone for a private trunk call. And so on. In no such context does the term "not supposed" connote prohibition. Rather does it indicate the recognition of the existence of a silly taboo which no grown-up person can be expected to take seriously. It is the verbal genuflection of the worshipper who has come to lay violent hands on the image he thus venerates. It is the domestic password in the endemic conspiracy of petty lawlessness. All that I believe to be true, though possibly I am not supposed to say it so bluntly.

Cruiskeen Lawn March 7th, 1958

I found myself going homeward the other evening, not in a cab but in that odd mobile apartment with the dun-coloured wall paper, a brown study. Long, long thoughts were in my mind. I was contemplating myself in the light of certain occult criteria which substitute for "time", "death", "success" and other imponderables that blinding flash of vision which simultaneously begins, explains and closes all. (Do ye folly me?) Such insights as I have been vouchsafed give warning that all of us will encounter serious trouble in due time, for the upper limits of our serial existences bristle with complexity and problems. Your politician will assure you that the post-war world is still the great problem that looms ahead (stale and all as the alibi is in 1958) but those of us who do not spend all our time in this universe well know that the real problem will be the post-world war.

Yet, going home that evening, I was remembering my small self, thinking of all that had happened through the years, re-examining the melange of achievement, grief and disillusion which I am please to call my life, or *ma vie bohémienne*. Lord, what a skillet of strange stew that has been! Praise I have received, blame also: yet how vain are both, how easy of purchase in the mart of men! I feel that one thing at least stands forever to my credit in the golden ledgers – the rather generous provision I made for the widow Manity and her children when her husband, my best friend, died after a long illness. Poor suffering Hugh Manity, I kept the promise I made to him on this death bed.

When I reached Santry I was in an odd mood for one who is a philosopher and world authority on the Scaligers. I felt . . . old. Age hath like a brandy a mellowness yet withal a certain languor. My daughter was in the next room; my daughter was humming and putting on her hat. I called her. "Hello, Bella. Sit down for a moment will you." "Yes, Poppa. What's the matter?" A long watery stare out of the window. The pipe is introduced and fiddled with.

"Bella, how old are you?"

"Nineteen, Poppa. Why?"

Another pause without comfort.

"Bella, we've known each other for a long time. Nineteen years. I remember when you were very small. You were a very good child."

"Yes, Poppa."

More embarrassment.

"Bella . . . I have been good to you haven't I? At least I have tried to be." "You are the best in the world, Poppa. What are you trying to tell me?"

"Bella, I want to say something to you. I am going to give you a surprise, Bella. Please don't think ill of me . . . but . . . Bella –"

With a choking noise she sprang forward and had her arms about me. "Oh Poppa, I know, I know! I know what you are going to say. You . . . you're not my Poppa at all. You found me one day . . . when I was very small . . . and you brought me home . . . and cared for me . . . and now you find you have been in love with me all these years."

Well boys adear, what would you do, reader? Ah? With a coarse oath I flung the trollop from me, went to the wardrobe and pulled on the long dark overcoat Dev gave me many years ago. With collar up, I stamped out into the rain, hurrying with long loping strides to the local cinema. In my pocket was the old-fashioned blue-metal Mauser, a present from Hamar Greenwood. I demanded to see the manager. This suave ruffian came out and invited me into his private office.

Soon afterwards two shots rang out, and I sincerely hope I will be given the opportunity of explaining to the jury that I had merely wished to suggest to the girl that I had worked and scraped for years to keep other people in luxury, and that it was time I should be relieved of the humiliation of having to press my own trousers.

Cruiskeen Lawn June 24th/July 8th, 1942 (combined text)

When it suits their book, some people do not scruple to drop hints in public places that I am opposed to poppet valves; it is, of course, a calumny. The fact is that I supported poppet valves at a time when it was neither profitable nor popular.

As far back as the old Dundalk days, when the simple v. compound controversy raised questions almost of honour with the steam men of the last generation, I was an all-out doctrinaire compounder and equally an implacable opponent of the piston valve. I saw even then that the secret of a well-set poppet valve – short travel – was bound to win out against prejudice. I remember riding an old 2-8-2 job on a Cavan side-road, and my readers can believe me or not as they please, but we worked up 5392 I.H.P. with almost equal steaming in the H.P. and L.P. cylinders, a performance probably never equalled on the grandiose “Pacific” jobs so much talked about across the water. The poppet valves (“pops”, old Joe Garrigle called them – R.I.P, a prince among steam men) gave us a very sharp cut-off. And we were working on a side road, remember.

There is not the same stuff in the present generation as there was in the one gone by, trite as that remark may sound. In hotels, public houses, restaurants, theatres and other places where people gather, I hear on all sides sneers and jibes at compound jobs. They eat coal and oil, they are unbalanced thermo-dynamically, they “melt” on high cut-off, and all the rest of it. Really, it is very tiresome. Your old-time steam man understood nothing but steam, but at least he understood it thoroughly. To see some of the sprouts that are abroad nowadays and to hear their innocent gabble about matters that were thrashed out in the Dundalk shops fifty years ago is to wonder whether man is moving forward at all through the centuries.

The other day I wanted to make a trip to the south, and arrived at Kingsbridge to find the train stuffed to the luggage racks with – well, what do you think, cliché fan? “Perspiring humanity,” of course. I was told there was no room for me. Perhaps it was injudicious, but I rang up the authorities and asked could I, as an old steam man, be permitted to travel on the plate, offering to fire as far as Mallow, or take over the regulator when and if required. The refusal I received was, cliché speaking, blunt. After making this call I noticed a queer change coming over the station staff. I could hear phrases like the following being bandied about (and that’s a nice occupation, bandying phrases):

Your man is here.

The boss says your man is to be watched.

Don’t let your man near the engine.

Your man’ll do something to this train if we aren’t careful.

There’ll be a desperate row if your man is let up on the engine.

Your man ought to be heaved out of here, he’ll do something before he goes and get somebody sacked over it.

Don’t let your man near the sheds.

I did manage to get a look at the job they had harnessed for the run. There was any amount of evidence of “foaming”. Your men do not seem to realise that if water is carried into the cylinder with

the steam, you get a sharp loss of superheat as well as damage to the piston valve liners. This of course is due to the use of feed water that is "dirty" in the chemical sense. What was wanted here was a good boiler washout and the use of some modern castor oil emulsion preparation to reduce the concentration of solids and suspended matter in the f.w. I know I might as well be talking to the wall, of course.

Cruiskeen Lawn July 5th, 1944

A note in my diary says: "Ten to the power of seventy-nine. Write on this joke".

Very well. Why not? I wish I had the money to finance real scientific research. You remember the worry we had back in the thirties (this century, I think – or was it?) about the electron, how to determine its mass. Eddington had an amusing angle on the thing. But first let us recall the previous situation where you had the crude journeyman's approach of calculating it as 10 (to the power of -27) of a gramme.

Most of us looked on that as a sort of music-hall joke – mass audience reaction makes you snigger but you are not really amused, you are sorry for having forsaken for the evening your monogram on Cicero's Pro Malony. Because it really boiled down to this – that if some smartie broke into the place, at Sèvres and stole the so-called "standard kilogramme", your " 10 (to the power of -27)" immediately became more obviously arbitrary, unfunny gaff, essentially it was.

Very well. The "scientist", in sum, had been deluding himself that the Heath Robinson experiments which led to that "discovery" could be solemnly called observational determination, whereas it is just make-believe and whimsy, all essentially feminine. The "problem" – as one then thought of it – was to relate the mass of the electron to . . . to something real (like, for instance, sleep). The point, of course, about Eddington's handling of the experiment was his realisation that it could only give information about a double wave system which "belonged" as much to the electron as to the material comparison standard necessarily used. Very well.

To reach a result it had been necessary to investigate the circumstances where the double wave can be replaced with single waves (really, this sounds like barber-shop talk!) – or in other words, to examine the process where you are slipping from macroscopic to microscopic; call them "magnitudes" by all means, terminology is unimportant.

Eddington, as you know, tied this up with his engaging patent "comparison aether," a retroambulant nonentity moping about introspectively way below the xx axis, whose mass can be calculated, needless to say, from a formula expressed largely in terms of the fundamental constants of macroscopical physics – the time- space radius, velocity of "light" . . . and all the particles in the universe.

Now when this mass is m and the electric particle-proton or electron, it doesn't matter a damn which – is, as usual, m , you have this incredible quadratic:

$$10 m - 136 m + m, = 0$$

What is quite curious is that this new equation and formula for m yield (for this velocity) a maximum value of 780 kilom. per sec. per megaparsec . . . which, of course, accords with the "value" found by observation! (!!!!!)

But here is what I am really getting at – the uniquely prolonged sneer that Eddington embodied in the paper he read to us at the Royal Society in the fateful autumn of '33.

"In the maze of connection of physical constants," he said , "there remains just one pure number" (Ho-ho-ho , I cannot help interjecting) "which is known only by observation and has no theoretical explanation. It is a very large number, about 10 (to the power of 79), and the present theory indicates that it is the number, of particles in the 'universe'.

“It may seem to you odd” (not at all, not at all, one murmurs) “that this number should come into the various constants such as the constants of gravitation. You may say, how on earth can the number of particles in remote parts of the universe affect the Cavendish experiment on the attraction of metal spheres in a laboratory?”

“I do not think they affect it at all, but the Cavendish and other experiments having given the result they did, we can deduce that space will go on and on, curving according to the mass contained in it until only a small opening remains and that the 10^{79} particle will be the last particle to be admitted through the last small opening and will shut the door after it.”

Bye-bye, 10^{79} . Mind that step!

Cruiskeen Lawn June 19th, 1944

In the Dublin District Court yesterday, an elderly man who gave his name as Myles na gCopaleen was charged with begging, disorderly conduct, using bad language and with being in illegal possession of an armchair.

He was also charged with failing to register as an alien.

A Detective Sergeant gave evidence of finding the defendant in the centre of a crowd in Capel Street.

He was sitting in the chair, cursing and using bad language. He became abusive when asked to move on and threatened to "take on" witness and "any ten butties" witness could find. Defendant was exhibiting a card bearing the words "Spare a copper, all must help each other in this cold world". Defendant lay down in the gutter when witness went to arrest him; he shouted to the crowd to rescue him, that he was a republican soldier. Witness had to send for assistance.

Defendant: Quid immerentes hospites vexas canis ignavus adversum lupos?

Detective Sergeant: This man had no difficulty in speaking English when he was lying on the street. This sort of thing makes a farce of the language movement.

Justice: If defendant does not deign to convenience the court, we will have to get an interpreter.

Defendant (to Justice): I knew your ould one.

Detective Sergeant: Your Honour can see the type he is.

Defendant: I seen the sticks of furniture on the road in 1927, above in Heytesbury Street. Now seemingly things is changed. Fortuna non mutat genus. (Laughter).

Justice: You would be well advised to behave yourself.

Defendant: Of all people.

Justice: Where did you get this chair you had?

Defendant said he got the chair from a man he met in Poolbeg Street. He did not know the man's name. The man was on his way to pawn the chair and witness agreed to take it off his hands. He bought the chair.

Justice: For how much?

Defendant: £45.

Justice: It's a pity a tallboy isn't the subject of a tall tale like that.

(Laughter).

Defendant said he was trying to go straight but the Guards were down on him. He was holding a political meeting in Capel Street when he was savagely assaulted by the Sergeant. He was discussing

monetary reform and mendicancy. He had as much right to obstruct the thoroughfare as the “Fianna Fáil crowd”.

He was kicked in the ribs by the Sergeant while lying on the ground. He would settle his account with the Sergeant at another time and in another place. This much only would he say: Cave, cave: namque in malos asperrimus parata tollo cornua.

Detective Sergeant: This type of person gives the police a lot of trouble, Your Honour.

Justice: I can see that. (To defendant) Are you married?

Defendant: Are you?

Justice: Impertinence won't help you.

Defendant: It won't help anybody. The question you put is apparently equally offensive to both of us. I am a victim of circumstance. *Maloribus praesidiis et copiis oppugnatur res publica quam defenditur propterea quod audaces homines et perditii nuta impelluntur et ipsi etiam sponte sua contra rem publicam incitantur.*

Detective Sergeant: This is a very hardened character, Your Honour. He was convicted for loitering at Swansea in 1933.

Justice: I must convict. There is far too much of this sort of thing in Dublin and I am determined to put it down.

Defendant: What sort of thing?

Justice: The larceny of armchairs.

Defendant: It wasn't an armchair. There were no arms on it.

Justice: You will go to Mountjoy for three weeks.

Defendant asked that 6,352 other offences should be taken into consideration.

Justice: I refuse to hear you further.

Defendant: Very well. I'll appeal.

Defendant was then led below, muttering.

A sequel is expected.

Cruiskeen Lawn – publication date unknown

Years ago when I was living in Islington, a cub reporter in the service of Tay Pay, founder of that modern scourge, the “gossip column”, I had great trouble with my landlord. The man was a vulgar low bowler-hatted plumber who tortured me exquisitely by his vulgarity of dress, talk and aspect. The situation rapidly became Russian. Evenings in the yellow gaslight, myself immersed in a letter to George Harris or painfully compiling my first novel, the gross plumber audibly eating tripe in an armchair behind me. The succession – the crescendo of “Greek” emotion – irritation – anger – loathing – then hatred. And then the quiet grey thought – I will do this creature in. I will do for him, gorbliney, if I have to swing for it!

It is funny how small things irk far beyond their own intrinsic significance. The way he sucked at his dirty pipe, too lazy or stupid to light it. The trick of never lacing his boots up completely. And his low boasting about his drinking. Forty-eight pints of cider in a Maidenhead inn. Mild and bitter by the gallon. I remember retorting savagely on one occasion that I would drink him under the table. Immediately came the challenge to do so. “Not now,” I remember saying, “but sooner than you think, my good friend.” That is the way we talked in those days. Possibly it was just then that I first formed my murderous resolution. But I digress.

When I had finally decided to murder this insufferable plumber, I naturally occupied my mind for some days with the mechanics of sudden death. I was familiar with the practice of homicide fashionable in the eighties, and I laid my plans with some care. I took to locking my bedroom so that the paraphernalia of execution could be amassed without arousing the suspicions of the patient.

The chopper was duly purchased, together with a spare hatchet in case the plumber’s skull should withstand the chopper. I attended a physical culture class to improve my muscles. Alcohol and tobacco were discontinued. I took long walks on Sunday afternoons and slept with the window wide open. But most important of all – remember that I speak of the gaslit eighties – I purchased a large bath and the customary drums of acid.

I was then ready. The precise moment of execution did not matter so much. It would coincide with some supreme extremity of irritation. And it did. One evening, re-opening the manuscript of my novel, I discovered traces of tripe on the clean copper-plate pages. The wretched plumber had been perusing my private documents. I went upstairs whistling “The Girl in the Hansom Cab,” came down cheerfully with the chopper behind my back, and opened the ruffian’s skull from crown to neck with a haymaker of a wallop that nearly broke my own arm. The rest was simple. I carried the body up to my room and put it in the bath of acid. Nothing more remained but to put things in order for my departure next day for a week’s holiday with my old parents in Goragewood, my native place.

When I returned to London, I went up to the bedroom with some curiosity. There was nothing to be seen save the bath of acid. I carried the bath down to the sittingroom and got a glass. I filled the glass with what was in the bath, crept in under the table and swallowed the burning liquid. Glass after glass I swallowed till all was gone.

It was with grim joy that I accomplished my threat that I would drink this plumber under the table. It was the sort of thing one did at the turn of the century.

Cruiskeen Lawn June 23rd, 1943

Yesterday I marched into the polling booth, happy that the decent government had permitted me to take part in the complex quinquennial gestation that culminates in an expression of The People's Will.

As usual, everybody looked as if they (yes, I know, that "they" is wrong there) were engaged in some criminal conspiracy. Shifty looks, muttering mechanical smiles. Women trying to look as if they had the remotest idea of the meaning of Irish politics. Youngsters of twenty-one coming in with a face that was intended to mean "I suppose I'll have to vote but God be with the days of me dead chief, Parnell." A general air of deceit and pretence, though I'm not sure that there is any difference between those two words. In the corner, a man that looked very like a member of the crew known as "all right thinking Irishmen" carefully reading a bound volume of *Irish Times* leading articles in order to find out for whom he should vote "unless the country is to embark upon another decade of recriminations based upon a civil war that was fought at a time when a large body of the electorate was not even born". (Needless to say, I dissent from the view that what took place before a man was born can be of no interest to him. I can think of a number of ante-natal occurrences that should be of some interest to every right-thinking Irishman: a certain wedding, for instance; or the steps taken in 1914-1918 which ended all war forever, the foundation of the GAA, the emigration of Bernard Shaw, even my own fight in the eighties for the use of the "full regulator" in Irish railway practice.)

In the polling booth also I saw evidence of that dreadful pest, the man who is anxious to give the impression that he is personating himself. I will not say that he tries to look like a suspicious character, for the sole reason that I try to write decent English and I will not permit myself (for one moment) to say "suspicious character" if I mean a character who is not suspicious but whose behaviour provokes suspicions on the part of others. This man manages to sidle into the booth, avoids everybody's eyes, starts searching his pockets and makes no attempt to vote. He is ultimately asked for his name and stammers a name out after some hesitation. No, he cannot find his card. He does not know his number. The agents immediately challenge him. A Guard hovers in the background (using the patent wings devised by my Research Bureau). Then the decent man changes his tune, establishes his identity with devastating precision, causes a number of bystanders to identify him, casts his vote (instead of voting) and walks out leaving a very discomfited parcel of officials behind him, all wondering if they will receive solicitors' letters the next morning. A very bad low Irish type.

Leaving the booth myself, I realised that I had once again spoilt my vote by marking Xs opposite the names I had decided to honour. I had also, of course, inserted the usual comic verse but that alone does not invalidate a voting paper. I walked home wondering why all illiterates use the complex symbol X when they put pen to paper. Are we wrong in assuming that a stroke or straight line is the simplest and most primitive literary symbol? Is it in fact more recondite and difficult than the X? Or has the X a mystical import for humans, a quality that transcends all considerations of intellect? Naturally, I do not care thraneen which it is, it is only a self-conscious peasant like myself would raise such issues in a respectable newspaper.

I am glad it is over but for my part I will not celebrate when me man is returned. I am off the bier, as the corpse said when the drunken motorist crashed into the funeral.

Cruiskeen Lawn February 27th, 1945

Here is one other awful man I feel it my duty to describe; I mean the one who is mortally curious to know "how is it done?"

This monstrous clown never looks at you when he is talking and never mentions names; he is very wealthy; he says: "I went out to Leopardstown on the bike on Saturday. Lost a packet, of course . . ."

You shrivel slightly at this humility of going to a race meeting on a bike, in order to lose the price of fifty taxis.

You know this man is insane and cravenly await what you know is coming.

He continues: "Who do you think I seen there?"

"Who?"

"Our friend."

"Our friend? Who?"

"A certain particular party that you know and that I know."

What makes you choke with rage here is the realisation that you know perfectly well whom he is talking about and thus that you are yourself embroiled in his paranoia.

The voice goes on: "On the inside, of course, chatting jockeys and owner, getting the card marked all over the show. And the big heifer of a wife standing about in the fur coat. Know what I'm going to tell you?"

"What?"

"That man put fifty notes on a thing that was rode be a certain jockey that wouldn't be third home if he was on a V2. But did that take a feather out of our friend . . .?"

Charnel-house chuckles follow, hinting that no feathers were taken out of this speculator. Your tormentor goes on: "Back in town at half six, I feel like an egg and a bit of toast and I walk into the counter of a certain place that you know and that I know. Who do I see there with two dames?"

"Our friend?" (O wretched man! You have answered the friend, and correctly!)

"Sitting up there as large as life. Bowl of soup first, of course; but not without a drop of madeira in it. Know what he fancies next?"

The monster has produced a penknife and goes through the wrist motions associated with the opening of oyster shells.

"A dozen each for all hands. Know what they had next?"

You would dearly love to say something outrageously exaggerated, like "roast peacock's breast" but you lack the courage to stand up to this torturer.

You say: "No. What?"

"A whole turkey between the three. They were working away here for two hours, chattin' the heads off each other, with all classes of liqueurs being fired back thirteen to the dozen.

And a taxi ticking away outside . . . !"

There is a pause here.

The fiend is getting ready for the finale, you can nearly hear him flexing his madhouse nerves, when the voice comes again, it is changed and earnest: "Now to my certain knowledge, that man is in a certain department of a certain store and he is paid the munificent subvention of three pounds fifteen per week. Three pounds fifteen shillings per week!"

You know the sad watery eyes are looking vacantly upwards in mute puzzlement.

You know that he is now about to enunciate his supreme interrogatory formula. You dread the impact of the end of this inevitable predestined conversation. But you are powerless.

The voice says: "What I want to know is this . . ."

Yes, there is a pause here. You knew there would be.

Then: "How is it done?"

You are a bit dazed. You notice his fingers go through the motions of pressing the keys of cash registers.

You have received a pat on the back – this ogre's only form of farewell – and he is gone.

And you are lucky to be alive, so you are.

Cruiskeen Lawn October 11th, 1943

Last week we had a rather stern address [in an Irish Times editorial] regarding the inadmissibility of the Irish language and although it is almost a gaffe for anybody qualified to speak on this subject to express opinions on it in the public prints, I feel I must speak out; otherwise there is the danger that the lying rumour will be spread by my enemies that I am silent because once again money has changed hands. (It cannot be too often repeated that I am not for sale. I was bought in 1921 and the transaction was conclusive).

In my lordship's view the movement to revive the Irish language should be persisted in. I hold that it is fallacious to offer the Irish people a simple choice between slums and Gaelic. Indeed, it is hardly an adult attitude and is known in the Hibernian philosophy as Ignoratio Mac Glinchy. If this doctrine of bread alone were followed, we would have (for one thing) to divert the revenues of Trinity College to slum clearance, and Alton and I simply will not have this. The horrible charge is made that Mr de Valera is spending half a million a year on reviving Irish. I may be a wild paddy, but I take the view that the free expenditure of public money on a cultural pursuit is one of the few boasts this country can make. Whether we get value for all the money spent on Irish, higher learning and on our university establishments is one question, but that we spend liberally on these things is to our credit, and when the great nations of the earth (whose civilisations we are so often asked to admire) are spending up to £100,000,000 (roughly) per day on destruction, it is surely no shame for our humble community of peasants to spend about £2,000 per day on trying to revive a language. It is the more urbane occupation. And what is half a million in relation to slum clearance? Faith now, could we be honest enough (for one moment) to admit to ourselves (in our heart of hearts) that there is another sort of Irish, and forced down people's throats, too, and that we spend enough on it every year to re-build all Dublin.

Irish has an intrinsic significance which (naturally enough) must be unknown to those who condemn the language. It provides through its literature and dialects a great field for the pursuit of problems philological, historical and ethnological, an activity agreeable to all men of education and goodwill. Moreover, the language itself is ingratiating by reason of its remoteness from European tongues and moulds of thought, its precision, elegance and capacity for the subtler literary nuances; it attracts even by its surpassing difficulty, for scarcely anybody living today can write or speak Irish correctly and exactly in the fashion of 300 years ago (and it may have been noticed that the one person qualified to attempt the feat has been too tired to try for the past two or three weeks). True Irish prose has a steely latinistic line that does not exist in the fragmented English patois. Here is a literal translation of a letter addressed by Hugh O'Neill to a hostile captain: –

“Our blessing to ye, O Mac Coghlin: we received your letter and what we understand from her is that what you are at the doing of is but sweetness of word and spinning out of time. For our part of the subject, whatever person is not with us and will not wear himself out in the interest of justice, that person we understand to be a person against us. For that reason, in each place in which ye do your own good, pray do also our ill to the fullest extent ye can and we will do your ill to the absolute utmost of our ability, with God's will. We being at Knockdoney Hill, 6 februarii, 1600.”

That seems to me to be an exceptional achievement in the sphere of written nastiness, and the original exudes the charm attaching to all instances of complete precision in the use of words.

There is probably no basis at all for the theory that a people cannot preserve a separate national entity without a distinct language but it is beyond dispute that Irish enshrines the national ethos, and in a subtle way Irish persists very vigorously in English. In advocating the preservation of Irish culture it is not to be inferred that this culture is superior to the English or any other but simply that

certain Irish modes are more comfortable and suitable for Irish people; otherwise these modes would simply not exist. It is therefore dangerous to discourage the use of Irish because the revival movement, even if completely ineffective, is a valuable preservative of certain native virtues and it is worth remembering that if Irish were to die completely, the standard of English here, both in the spoken and written word, would sink to a level probably as low as that obtaining in England, and it would stop there only because it could go no lower. Not even the Editor of the Irish Times is an authority on the hidden wells which sustain the ageless western Irishman, and cannot have considered the vast ethnogenic problems inherent in a proposal to deprive him of one of his essential chattels. I admire Liverpool, but if Cork is to become another Liverpool by reason of stupid admiration for the least worthy things in the English civilisation, then I can only say that the Corkmen will not live there any more, the mysterious language they speak, which is not Irish and certainly not English will be heard no more, and a race of harmless, charming and amusing people will have been extirpated.

There is another aspect to this question. Even if Irish had no value at all, the whole hustle of reviving it, the rows, the antagonisms, and the clashes surrounding the revival are interesting and amusing.

There is a profusion of unconscious humour on both sides. The solemn humbugs who pronounce weightily on the Irish language while knowing absolutely nothing about it I hold to be no less valuable than monetary reformers in the business of entertaining the nation. The lads who believe that in slip-jigs we have a national prophylaxis make life less stark. And the public-spirited parties who write letters to the papers in illiterate English expressing concern at the harm the revival movement is doing to the standard of education generally are also of clownish significance. They all combine to make colour and to amuse.

To one and all I would say this, my hand upon my heart: Go your ways, build and take down, capture and set free, gather in conclave and debate . . . but . . . do not tamper with the Irishman, touch not his sacred belongings, be solicitous that thy tongue contemneth not the smallest thing he may prize or the least thing he may love. For he is unique; if you kill him he cannot be replaced, and the world is poorer.

Cruiskeen Lawn July 20th, 1942

Dvorak's humoresque is taken up by the muted first fiddles and passed to the wood-wind. The scene is the lofty richly-panelled office of an Irish Locomotive Superintendent. It is evening.

From the nearby yards comes the hiss of steam and now and again, the gentle susurrus of a shunter's cut away lap valve. The Superintendent is at the window lost in thought, his hands in his trousers' pockets and his great shoulders hunched.

Nearby is seated his personal secretary. She is young and gazes at the granite form of the old steam man with troubled, wistful eyes. Bloom of youth's fullest peach mantles her cheek. Ringlets of amber fall peerlessly on the white neck. Her queenly hands toy with a pencil of 18-carat gold. Her name is Bella.

There is silence. Over it steals the long hiss of a goods compound as it comes to rest far away. The gathering dusk enriches the majestic timbering of the old room.

Bella speaks at last, her voice the gentle voice that is used by angels.

Bella: Penny for them, super.

Superintendent (starting slightly): O nothing; Bella. Nothing.

Bella: Something is making you sad.

Superintendent: It is nothing. I see 316 is in again. That is the second time this week. Her twin blast pipes are gone again.

Bella: But do not let that prey upon your mind, super. The Works Manager will fix her up again. The Works Manager is a clever man. He will make her as good as new.

Superintendent (turning slightly with a sad smile): It is nice of you to talk like that, Bella. You are a good kid. But we must face facts. The Works Manager will never make a job of her. I am afraid . . .

Bella (softly): Yes . . . ?

Superintendent: I am afraid old 316 will never take the road again. (He turns back to the window to gaze at his black charges as they move about the yards, each with its white plumes of steam.

A lump rises in his throat and the shade of pain crosses the strong face.)

Bella: Please do not talk like that. She will ride many thousands of road-miles yet.

Superintendent (almost gruffly): Her twin blast pipes are gone, I tell you. (He pauses) I am sorry, Bella. I am sorry. That old job has me worried. I am not myself.

Bella: But, Super, we have others.

Superintendent(bitterly): We have. And bar the two 1928 single expansion jobs, there is not a sound job in the yard. Hasn't 475 a superheat that rots her with condensation?

Bella: I know.

Superintendent: And 278 is destroyed with wiredrawing, 604's best is 141bs per I.H.P. and 433 has been behaving like an old tram. The Board won't give me any money. The Works Manager says he must have three new compounds by October. I tell you there is no way out, Bella. I am a broken man.

Bella (gently): But, Super, there is always the Royal British Locomotive Corporation of Swindon.

Superintendent (irritably): I told you the Board won't part.

Bella: But, Super, the B.L.C. people are different. They will let us pay over twenty years.

Superintendent: What! Do you mean that?

Bella: Of course, darling. For a few hundred pounds down we can get a brand new de Glehn job with a draw-bar horse-power of 3,750.

Superintendent (excitedly): And with poppet valves ?

Bella: Yes, cute ones that give a wide port opening

Superintendent: – With satisfactory mean depth and a straight steam path?

Bella: Of course!

Superintendent (rushing to embrace her): Bella , DARLING! Let us go and see them to-morrow!

Bella: Yes, Super, they will give us everything we want. That is why the B.L.C. is known as the Happy House for Locomotive Superintendents. And they do not ask for references.

Superintendent (dreamily): O, darling, I feel so happy. I am a new man. (Thinks: Thank heaven for Bella. Now I will never have to worry any more about unsatisfactory ratio of mean horse-power to square foot of evaporative heating surface "foaming", "blasting", or dirty feed water.)

From far away comes the long hoarse hoot of the night goods pulling out, working at 16 per cent, of rated tractive effort.

Fade out with the overture to *Zampa*.

Cruiskeen Lawn December 7th, 1942

The other day I was reading that man down there on the right [Quidnunc] and I caught him saying this: "If you have the bones of a typewriter lying in an attic they are worth money today."

This seems reasonable enough until we bring (to bear) upon it our whole fatuous battery of professional paranoia, perversion and catachresis, rushing out with our precast vaudeville clown-routine of quotation, misinterpretation and drivelling comment. Does the result please anyone, bring the most faded polite laugh, the most, tenuous giggle, the most bilious sneer?

Well, all I can say is this: if I have the bones of a typewriter Quidnunc can do nothing for me, Harv Meade can do nothing for me, Barnville can do nothing for me, and it's a sure thing I won't be lying in an attic reading this newspaper's advice on how to make money. I'll be stuffed into some circus and billed above the Bearded Lady. On payment of sixpence you will be permitted to view my unique bones through some X-ray gadget.

Remington I knew well. He had the whole of his insides taken out of him, bones and all, when he was a lad – he was suffering from diffused chrythronielalgia – and had new bones made for him out of old typewriters. And, mark this, when he grew up, he was as fine a looking man as you'd meet in a dazed walk. (No, no, no, put away that pencil. I didn't mean you to mark it that way. I meant you to read, mark, and inwardly digest, that's all).

"In middle life Remington discovered that he had a weak cliest and (what would do him), (only) have a complete brand-new typewriter built into the upper part of his metal torso. Occasionally he would accidentally tap down a key or two when leaning against counters or bridge parapets. People said that mysterious tips for horse races were often found on his internal roller; (be that as it may) (certain it is) that he never went out without a sheet of paper stuck in his "carriage."

I well remember an embarrassing incident that occurred – I think it was the year of the split – the last time I was talking to him. (What would do me) (only) get into a political argument with him. I kept (on) tapping him on the chest to bring home all my points. Only when I heard the tinkle of a little muffed bell did I remember that I was talking to no ordinary man. Did he take offence? Not old Bill Remington. With exquisite refinement he excused himself, turned away, and inserting a hand under his waistcoat, drew back the carriage. I often wonder what stupid motto I typed out during that encounter. "Up the Prince of Wales" or something, I suppose.

Poor old Underwood and that astute statesman, Smith Premier, were also men who had the typewriter in their bones. I knew them well. Decenter men never stood in bat substance one associates with hot feet – shoe lather.

Towards the end of Premier Smith's life he was a sick man. And at what was he a very sick man?

At that.

But old George Underwood was a bright soul, always up to practical jokes and harmless rascality, you couldn't have a party without him. What shrill acoustical phenomenon was he?

A scream.

Cruiskeen Lawn September 8th, 1943

Every now and again my friend Quidnunc down here on my left (your right) sees Fitt (best tailor in Dublin) to make mysteriously incomprehensible and far-from-called for observations. (I digress to remark that uncalled for drinks are rarely served in Irish dram-shops). A few weeks ago I caught him saying in that charming high-pitched voice (there is nothing better than one coat of pitch and tar applied evenly with a mop for preserving timbre) the following:

I hope that the church and monastery of San Niccola, the most interesting buildings in Catania, have survived the recent fighting.

To this I make one unanswerable query: Why?

If you are going to make observations like this on Sicily, why pick on the one thing we know to be a piece of unthinkable theatrical shoddy, so ruthlessly "rebuilt" in the last centuries as to be completely unrecognisable, even to those of us who measured it in the sixties. I have the drawings above in a drawer to this day together with a prayer book belonging to Francis Johnson and a silver calipers once the property of Cooley R.I.P.

Look at me. I hope that nothing happens to the temple of Zeus at Agrigento, to temples "C" and "D" at Selinus, to that long pseudoperipteral hexastyle agglomeration of architectures at Segesta, comprising the styles of ten centuries on one site and presenting, through century-slow fragmentation, the artistic erasures of Time, which is cunningly enough removing the more recent, leaving the oldest to the last. I know a fair amount about this subject but do not shout about it, unlike a certain other person.

Look at me again. I have a passion for the Moslem work that was there before the Normans came and which Roger and the bishops he brought with him from Provence were broad-minded enough to admire. (I knew the Guiscards well – all excepting the brother of Pope Urban). Yet do I talk of all this?

I hope to heavens nothing happens to the Church of the Martorana that the Admiral George of Antioch built in 1143 (not 1144 as Brehier so wrong headed suggests). And I have a great graw for the Capella Palatina: very special stuff, Latin plan, structure frightfully Greek and the nave plastered with Byzantine mosaics. And then those incredible Moslem road-houses (you know – Favara, Menani (Roger II) La Ziza (William I) and La Cuba (William II))! What one finds in Sicily is....well....Europe....but is there ever a word out of me about that? Do you find me....parading my knowledge? I think not.

Cefalu, Vespri, Palermo, Monreale, that squat timber-roofed tub – if it weren't for the plan you'd say pre-Norman. And those very quare looking gadrooned vouissoirs, which really must be Islamic in origin – after all, the earliest example of them is in Bab el Futtuh, Cairo 1087, as every one knows. And those interesting intersecting arcades that give the effect of fourteenth century English window tracery . . . they at least are Norman in origin, as in the chevron ornament that we find even in Ireland and sometimes on the sleeve of me son's coat that's in the Army.

I hope nothing happens to the Municipio and the Cathedral in Syracuse (some relatives of mine are buried within the walls) – as nice a pair of late Renaissance essays as you could hope to find. I make nothing of this, nor do I shout about my predilections in the newspapers, much as less talented persons might be gently suborned to my lordly standards of taste.

If there is one thing I would warn you against it is the baroque style. There you have something that lacks the sternness and strength of truly virtuous and admirable work. It is effeminate – I would sooner have Philipstown. (I hope nothing happens to Philipstown.)

Cruiskeen Lawn May 17th, 1951

Did you read me yesterday on Alfred O'Rahilly, the Cork gawskogue? I was damn funny, if I say it meself. It was right gas. But I overlooked one small comment I had intended. AOR referred to me as "a Catholic who masquerades under the pseudonym of "Myles na gCopaleen". Thanks, but why this perfectly gratuitous assertion that I am a Catholic? How does AOR know what my beliefs are, of what nature is my creed? I do not likely take on the grandiose title of Catholic. If AOR is a Catholic, it follows that I am not: the contrary would suggest the equation $AOR = MC$, which is perfectly preposterous. In any case, I deny absolutely that I am an Irish Catholic; dub me that and you dub me heresiarch.

I promised to quote AOR's drool paragraph by paragraph and, having managed to deal with two of them yesterday, I now reach the third.

This: Ordinarily I would take no notice of a writer who with studied buffoonery divagates into paltry trivialities and offensive epithets as a subterfuge from a sociological discussion for which he is incompetent. But he asserts: "A number of readers have written asking me for definitive adjudication."

If we may judge by some of the correspondents of *The Irish Times*, this ridiculous exaltation of MC into a super-bishop may well be true. Anyway, several people have taken the matter seriously and have written to me. So in the absence of any editorial reply, I will deal briefly with the editor's blustering substitute.

When a thing is intrinsically funny it is possible to spoil it by comment. However, we'll chance it. Number wan, I really don't think it's necessary to describe "trivialities" as being "paltry". I never heard of a momentous triviality. But where are we at all, at all, when a Cork philosopher (stet), ridiculing the idea of people writing to my Excellency for advice on spiritual matters, immediately asserts that "several people have written to himself". I wonder would they be the same people? "Me dear Doctor, I was on to Myles but could get nothing out of him at all only studied buffoonery divagating into paltry trivialities. Please let me know is the bishops all gone mad . . ."

Number two: Wot's all this about the exaltation of myself into a super-bishop? It's a crack that comes well from AOR, who describes himself as "President, University College, Cork". My Greek dictionary states quite bluntly that the word episkopos means "president." Really, I have no ecclesiastical ambitions and I was never a member of the Jesuits: I am merely a spoiled Proust. BUT – and this is awfully important – AOR should be aware that the Catholic Church does not require that one should be a clergyman, of however low degree, to be made a Cardinal. Suppose – just suppose for a minit – that the Red Hat should go not to Drumcondra or Armagh, but to Santry! That would certainly shake some people. "No sir, he's not in. Matterafact he's across in Rome." By gob, stranger things have happened. I wonder would AOR muster sufficient humility to kneel devoutly and kiss my ring?

However . . . I showed yesterday that AOR uttered a falsehood when he asserted that the editor of this newspaper, afraid to make any move himself from his editorial eyrie, covertly prevailed upon myself to give AOR a public hiding. Now read again the tail end of the quotation above. I am awarded the title of "editor's blustering substitute."

In the same issue of *The Standard*, the editorial article is concerned with the important subject of money. The editor of the paper, having published a full-page advertisement crying the merits of Dr Browne's apparently godless Mother and Child Scheme, thought it better to pipe down till the bad

smell subsided. And so, “in the absence of any editorial reply”, as AOR says, it is he who will deal with me. He says himself that, so far as the Standard is concerned, he is “the editor’s blustering substitute”. Or has the unfortunate chiner’s prose broken down again?

But the really funny word in the tail end of the paragraph is “briefly”. The Corker’s idea of brevity is of the same order as his veracity, his learning, his reasoning powers and even his syntax: namely, less than mediocre. He deals with me briefly in some three full columns, all of which I will quote here. That means that his brevity will keep us all here till Christmas.

I pass to the next paragraph, which is headed “Gems of Invective”. The suggestion behind that is that I live in a glass house and therefore shouldn’t throw precious stones. Read it yourself: In a matter involving such far-reaching issues, especially when the campaign was opened so offensively, I have no objection to good hard-hitting argumentation. The editor of *The Irish Times* is unknown to me; I have reason to believe that he is personally a liberal, fair-minded gentleman.

But I am concerned only with him as a journalist. For all I know he may have written with his tongue in his cheek, to play up to the gallery or to increase the circulation of his paper by a *succès de scandale*.

I have vigorously argued against his editorial; I am disappointed that he has not replied with equal vigour. I am more than disappointed that, instead of this, he has got his professional jester to emit a stream of irrelevant and stupid personal invective.

Honestly lads, isn’t he the most extraordinary and incorrigible *thullabawn*. The “blustering substitute” becomes the “professional jester”, changes his clothes lower down in AOR’s treatise and becomes a “phraseological gunman”, later is stated to own a “jester’s cap and bells” and still later becomes a “pseudonymous jester”, who emits “vulgar cat-calls”. (By the way, I wonder whether a cat-call could, in certain circumstances, be felicitous?)

More particularly, I wonder what is the nature of the reason AOR says he has for believing that the editor of this newspaper is “a liberal, fair-minded gentleman”. AOR must be confusing the editor with myself.

The editor is nothing of the kind. He is a bigot who has sufficient intelligence to propagate his bigotry with a show of humanism and broadmindedness.

He has many of the characteristics of AOR himself, though he cannot match him in stupidity nor in his personal consate of hisself.

Naturally, all such judgments and comparisons are relative. In this part of the world the norm is I (“is I” sounds a bit pedantic, I admit).

In me only can you descry the statutory and sapient 4,840 square yards.*

As you read this I am writing some extremely amusing stuff, replete with quotations from AOR’s drool, for tomorrow. I never knuwn meself in better form!

*I am a wiseacre.

Cruiskeen Lawn June 18th, 1943

Well do you know the brother's taken to the books again.

You do not say so.

Comes home to the digs wan day a month ago with a big blue one under d'arm. Up to the bedroom with it and doesn't stir out all night. The brother was above having a screw at the book for over five hours non-stop. The door locked, of course. That's a quare one.

Odd behaviour without a doubt.

Well wan Sunda I seen the brother below in the sittinroom with the book in the hand and the nose stuck into it. So I thought I'd get on to him about it. What's the book, says I. It's be Sir James Johns says the brother without liftin the head. And what's the book about, says I. It's about quateernyuns says the brother. That's a quare one.

It is undoubtedly "a quare one".

The brother was reading a book about quateernyuns be Sir James Johns.

A most remarkable personality, your relative.

But I'll tell you another good one. The brother does be up in the nighttime peepin at the moon.

I see.

What do I see wan night and me comin home at two in the mornin from me meetin of the Knights only your man pokin the head out the window with the nightshirt on him. Starin out of him at the stars.

A practice beloved of all philosophers throughout the centuries.

Well I'll tell you this, mister me friend: you won't find yours truly losin sleep over a book be Sir James Johns. Damn the fear of me been up peepin out of the window in the nighttime.

I accept that statement.

Well then another funny thing. The brother does be doin sums. The digs is full of bits of papers with the brother's sums on them. And very hard sums too. Begob I found some of the brother's sums on me paper wan day, written down along the side. That's a quare one. Workin away at sums breakfast dinner and tea.

Proof at least of perseverance.

Of course all the brother's sums isn't done in the digs. He does be inside in a house in Merrion Square doin sums as well. If anybody calls, says the brother, tell them I'm above in Merrion Square workin at the quateernyuns, says he, and take any message. There does be other lads in the same house doin sums with the brother. The brother does be teachin them sums. He does be puttin them right about the sums and the quateernyuns.

Indeed.

I do believe the brother's makin a good thing out of the sums and the quateernyuns. Your men couldn't offer him less than five bob an hour and I'm certain sure he gets his tea thrown in.

That is a desirable perquisite.

Because do you know, the brother won't starve. The brother looks after Number Wan. Matteradamn what he's at, it has to stop when the grubsteaks is on the table. The brother's very particular about that.

Your relative is versed in the science of living.

Begob the sums and the quateernyuns is quickly shoved aside when the alarm for grub is sounded and all hands piped to the table. The brother thinks there's a time for everything.

And that is a belief that is well founded.

Here's me bus.

Cheers now.

Cruiskeen Lawn August 3rd, 1942

“There are less than a thousand people in the world who really understand the Einstein theory of relativity, and less than a hundred people who can discuss it intelligently.”

This disturbing statement was made recently by Sir Arthur Eddington. It is nice news for those of us who have to fork out every year to maintain our grandiose university establishments. We have perhaps 30 or 40 well-paid savants whom we have always taken to know all about physics or mathematics or whatever kindred subject they profess. Now we are told that these people know nothing about Einstein’s discoveries, and cannot make head or tail of his sums.

What would we say if a similar situation obtained in relation to, say, plumbers? “There are less than a thousand plumbers in the world who really understand how to mend a leaking tap, and less than a hundred who can discuss the subject intelligently.” That would be bad, but not at all so bad as this relativity mess, because leaking taps constitute only one (water-tight if you like) compartment of plumbing practice, and complete ignorance in regard to it does not necessarily impair the plumber’s competence when he is faced with a ruptured cistern; whereas Einstein’s discoveries entail the radical revision of conventional concepts of time, space, and matter, and a person who undertakes to discourse on such subjects while ignorant of Einstein, must necessarily rely on premisses shown to be inadmissible: he must, therefore, be talking through his stetson.

It is now accepted everywhere without much show of reserve that the earth is a sphere, but these university professors I am talking about are still (in a relative sense) teaching their students that it is flat. That is a fair and perfect analogy, because there is practically no limit to the mistakes you will make if the flatness of the earth is your fundamental credo, and you will fare no better if you choose to make pronouncements on the nature of the universe as if Einstein never existed.

What exactly is Einstein’s theory? Why should I waste my time trying to explain? I am not paid to do so. And if, as an inquiring taxpayer, you think the people in the universities should try to tell you, be assured now that they cannot, because they are as wise about it as yourself. They may offer you a nice line in algebra or astronomical trigonometry instead, but nothing at all about your man Einstein. That subject is barred. As the brother would say, Einstein’s very HARRD, but he’s very interesstin’.

We can, however, remedy this shameful situation if we have vision and courage. Take chess. In this country we have no real chess players and when the few poor tryers we have go abroad they are not even permitted to look on at the masters’ games. They are given boards and men to keep them quiet in some obscure 3B category that is reserved for the riff-raff. Most of the masters are Russian, and that is because chess is taught in the Russian national schools.

Could we not make a start by teaching Einstein’s theory in our own national schools? Make it compulsory and have it taught through Irish. Probably we would have a lot of squealing about compulsory relativity and the side-splitting joke about children being illiterate in two languages would be altered to read “illiterate in four dimensions.” But that would not matter. We could be sure that some time or other somebody in this country would understand the theory and probably know how to discuss it intelligently. A committee of national teachers might even produce a weighty report on such a departure in education.

“Johnnie, if you don’t put away those quaternions and go and feed the pigs, I will tell your father about you.”

Cruiskeen Lawn April 11th, 1959

I have pondered a bit further the remarks I made the other day about the Presidency: I said I did not consider Mr de Valera eligible at all because he was born in the USA but if he is allowed to compete, then we seem to have, subject only to the minimum age condition, a possible selection of Presidents from an enormous bloc of the total population of the earth. Just as in the case of a lord mayor, the title of President implies no sex restriction.

First, what IS a President? The word used in the Constitution is uachtarán. There is no such word in true Irish and it is the improvisation of some yahoo. Among similar connotations suggesting top, uachtar means cream, and I would say uachtarán, if it makes sense at all, means ice cream merchant. Very dignified, or glanghaoidhig an ghur-aire! The correct Irish is Presidens (see, e.g., p. 67 O Lochlainn's Tobar Fionghlan, letter from O'Hussey, 1605).

That word is, of course, from the L. Praesideo, praesidens, a president, director, ruler, i.e. "I sit before or in front of."

Well then, whom should we pick from our profusion of material? The other day I suggested the Dalai Lama but I believe he is too young. In our own country we have many people of the first distinction, such as Joe McGrath, Ernest Blythe, Oliver Flanagan, Lord Brookeborough and the Lady Fitzwilliam but, somehow, I think they would courteously decline the honour, having perhaps other preoccupations.

In any case, on the principle that the director of a large hospital should never be a doctor, I feel we would be well advised to look outside the walls.

What qualifications do we seek? I would specify modest essentials such as good and powerful personality, commanding appearance, accomplished speaker, experience of the world, and the quality of not being afraid on occasion to be a sloven or be so silly as to think that magnum is just an old Latin gender. Nothing very exclusive about that criterion. Let yourself in, nearly.

Let me suggest a few myself, with brief reasons.

Groucho Marx – Yeats wrote of a lady who had "the walk of a queen," and while Groucho's walk is scarcely that of a king, it is some walk. It would look marvellous at a reception in Iveagh House. He can talk, too, and smoke cigars. He might even talk Irish.

Harry Truman – Can talk well, too, has the experience and is a skilled desk-bombardier should war come.

Paul Robeson – Can sing and act, well in with Khrushchev and has been persecuted by the Americans. Excellent neutral type. Drinks.

Randolph Churchill – Has the authentic magistral manner, sound bottle-man, raconteur and . . . hates the Irish.

Marilyn Monroe – Hmm. Doubtful. Cute, mind you, but she'd have to bring that Miller with her – sombre type, thoughtful, smokes pipes, writes. Just what would he be? Presidential Consort? I'm afraid the arrangement would snarl up protocol and worry the fancy-pants in Iveagh H.

Well, reader, why not get out your own list and send it on to me. What was that? MYSELF? Aw now look here, have I not enough on my hands at my estates in Santry? Yes, I suppose I could go on living there – “at or near Dublin,” the book says; but I couldn’t have tramps in black tailcoats coming out with those female baboons they call their wives to drink my whiskey, or political bowsies riding out to ask me for their seals. Faith and I would give them seals! Besides, I would have Brendan Behan moving in to live with me.

A horrible thought occurs to me. Article 12 (8) of the Constitution prescribes that the President, on entering office, shall take a solemn (and I think blasphemous) oath about upholding the Constitution and the laws. If elected, I might agree to recite the words, but first warning those present that I regarded the oath as an empty formula and not binding on me in conscience. Has been done before, a man told me.

Cruiskeen Lawn October 2nd, 1944

We are now entered into the murk of autumn. I do not apprehend this fact by espying the customary carpet of brown loaves (nay, leave it, printer – it is a pretty image of yours) as I ride in the bois. The fact is that the Knights are drawing in, now is curtain close drawn, now doth the viper tongue renew his talent.

For truth to tell, the customary autumn campaign of whispered calumny and detraction directed against my person by beings eaten up by self-interest has again opened. I am not unaware of what these creatures say, not ignorant that they have launched an attack, as baseless as it is dastardly, on the good name and reputation of my family.

The Irish people will by now be well aware of the custom, observed scrupulously by me over the last couple of decades, of studiously ignoring the cowardly and bullying menaces of the hired thugs and desperadoes, commissioned – nay, even equipped with cudgels – by parties in high places to reduce or to endeavour to reduce by every means in their power, be these fair or fowl (stet), the spirit, the high courage and resolve which none can attempt to deny have always characterised not only my public life but my conduct of those more personal affairs where honour, delicacy and the sanctity of the home tend rather to be luxurious pleasures than the stern duties they inevitably become when applied to the conduct of the affairs of state.

Just men throughout the length and breadth of this fair land must know how consistently I have wrapped the incorruptible flame of my probity and virtue in a mantle of unaffected indifference; all must bear testimony to the unassailable quality of my conduct throughout these years.

But, in spite of obvious temptations, I have always refused to regard myself as being other than ordinary flesh and blood; I have conceived this foible to be my right and my privilege, small guerdon for my not inconsiderable services to the dear land of my adoption – and so, the time has come when my mere human nature asserts itself so strongly that I can no longer pretend not to be affronted.

I can not long stand calmly by. Insults levelled at myself must, I hold, of their very nature be false and ridiculous, but offence offered to my family is another matter and I have the humility to regard it as a matter even graver.

This then is the occasion when I no longer choose to disdain the challenge, to reject the smarting affront of the caitiff's glove, to deny myself, to deny the shades of those who have gone before me, the satisfaction of entering the lists to break a lance in a cause which I am pleased to regard as being lofty, worthy and glorious.

My people have settled in this town of Dublin (and I do not exclude the financial connotation of "settled) for the past four or five centuries, but that is not to say that the unity of the family, the close association with our cousins the Gaplinsteins in Luxembourg, with the Sicilian Marchese Coplinino, the duc de St Gauplain in Caen, the Earl of Cruiskeen and Llawn in Scotland and the Duke of Copeland in England – that is not for a moment to suggest that the close communion has ever for a moment been disturbed.

We are all part of the one great European family – our common ancestor we hold to be that stalwart hero of pre-Imperial Rome, T. Coplinius Miles, four times consul, seven times censor and subsequently, with his uncles Romulus and Remus, deified under the emperors.

The exploits of collateral branches of the family under the Comnenan dynasty, with the Ming people, with Genghis Khan, with Ivan the Fourth, these are details which must await their due meed [stet] of praise in another place and at another time.

But that, in brief, is the story of my family. What then can I say about the muttered accusation which was brought to my ear last Friday, that my grandfather's people – forsooth! — were tinkers in the Liffey Valley! I can but cry: it is a lie, my lords, and I do not for a moment hesitate categorically to stigmatize it as such. These boys were not tinkers – they were thinkers. Of my link with the Great O'Neill, more anon.

Cruiskeen Lawn November 10th, 1941

It will be remembered (how, in Heaven's name, could it be forgotten?) that I was discoursing on Friday last on the subject of book-handling, my new service, which enables ignorant people who want to be suspected of reading books to have their books handled and mauled in a manner that will give the impression that their owner is very devoted to them. I described three grades of handling and promised to explain what you get under Class Four – the Superb Handling, or the Traitement Superbe, as we lads who spent our honeymoon in Paris prefer to call it. It is the dearest of them all, of course, but far cheaper than dirt when you consider the amount of prestige you will gain in the eyes of your ridiculous friends. Here are the details:

“Le Traitement Superbe. Every volume to be well and truly handled, first by a qualified handler and subsequently by a master-handler who shall have to his credit not less than 550 handling hours; suitable passages in not less than fifty per cent of the books to be underlined in good-quality red ink and an appropriate phrase from the following list inserted in the margin, viz:

Rubbish!

Yes, indeed!

How true, how true!

I don't agree at all.

Why?

Yes, but cf. Homer, *Od.*, iii, 151.

Well, well, well.

Quite, but Boussuet in his *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle* has already established the same point and given much more forceful explanations.

Nonsense, nonsense!

A point well taken!

But why in heaven's name?

I remember poor Joyce saying the very same thing to me.

Need I say that a special quotation may be obtained at any time for the supply of Special and Exclusive Phrases? The extra charge is not very much, really.

That, of course, is not all. Listen to this:

“Not less than six volumes to be inscribed with forged messages of affection and gratitude from the author of each work, e.g.,

‘To my old friend and fellow-writer, A.B., in affectionate remembrance, from George Moore.’

'In grateful recognition of your great kindness to me, dear A.B., I send you this copy of The Crock of Gold. Your old friend, James Stephens.'

'Well, A.B., both of us are getting on. I am supposed to be a good writer now, but I am not old enough to forget the infinite patience you displayed in the old days when guiding my young feet on the path of literature. Accept this further book, poor as it may be, and please believe that I remain, as ever, your friend and admirer, G. Bernard Shaw.'

'From your devoted friend and follower, K. Marx.'

'Dear A.B., – Your invaluable suggestions and assistance, not to mention your kindness, in entirely re-writing chapter 3, entitles you, surely, to this first copy of Tess. From your old friend T. Hardy.'

'Short of the great pleasure of seeing you personally, I can only send you, dear A.B., this copy of The Nigger. I miss your company more than I can say . . . (signature undecipherable).'

Under the last inscription, the moron who owns the book will be asked to write (and shown how if necessary) the phrase "Poor old Conrad was not the worst."

All this has taken me longer to say than I thought. There is far more than this to be had for the paltry £32 7s 6d that the Superb Handling will cost you. In a day or two I hope to explain about the old letters which are inserted in some of the books by way of forgotten book-marks, every one of them an exquisite piece of forgery. Order your copy now!

Cruiskeen Lawn November 15th, 1941

Occasionally we print and circulate works written specially for the Club by members of the WAAMA League. Copies are sent out in advance to well-known critics, accompanied by whatever fee is usually required to buy them.

We sent one man ten bob with a new book and asked him to say that once one takes the book up one cannot leave it down. The self-opinionated gobdaw returned the parcel with an impudent note saying that his price was twelve and sixpence. Our reply was immediate. Back went the parcel with twelve and sixpence and a curt note saying that we were accepting the gentleman's terms. In due course we printed the favourable comment I have quoted.

But for once we took steps to see that our critic spoke the truth. The cover of the volume was treated with a special brand of invisible glue that acts only when subjected to the heat of the hands. When our friend had concluded his cursory glance through the work and was about to throw it away, it had become practically part of his physical personality. Not only did the covers stick to his fingers, but the whole volume began to disintegrate into a viscous mess of treacly slime. Short of having his two arms amputated, putting the book down was an impossibility. He had to go round with the book for a week and submit to being fed like a baby by his maid. He got rid of the masterpiece only by taking a course of scalding hot baths that left him as weak as a kitten.

That's the sort of customers we of the WAAMA League are.

Letters have been pouring in in shoals (please notice that when it is a question of shoals of letters they always pour) regarding the book-handling service inaugurated by my Dublin WAAMA League. It has been a great success. Our trained handlers have been despatched to the homes of some of the wealthiest and most ignorant in the land to maul, bend, bash, and gnaw whole casefuls of virgin books. Our printing presses have been turning out fake Gate Theatre and Abbey programmes by the hundred thousand, not to mention pamphlets in French, holograph letters signed by George Moore, medieval playing cards, and the whole paraphernalia of humbug and pretence.

There will be black sheep in every fold, of course. Some of our handlers have been caught using their boots, and others have been found thrashing inoffensive volumes of poetry with horsewhips, flails, and wooden clubs. Books have been savagely attacked with knives, daggers, knuckle-dusters, hatchets, rubber-piping, razor-blade-potatoes, and every device of assault ever heard of in the underworld. Novice handlers, not realising that tooth-marks on the cover of a book are not accepted as evidence that its owner has read it, have been known to train terriers to worry a book as they would a rat.

One man (he is no longer with us) was sent to a house in Kilmainham, and was later discovered in the Zoo handing in his employer's valuable books to Charlie the chimpanzee. A country-born handler "read" his books beyond all recognition by spreading them out on his employer's lawn and using a horse and harrow on them, subsequently ploughing them in when he realised that he had gone a little bit too far. Moderation, we find, is an extremely difficult thing to get in this country.

Cruiskeen Lawn February 5th, 1953

In the Dublin Corporation there are a few persons of some standing and education who might be conceded, for convenience, the title "gentleman". The rest are unfortunate shaymuses. If you asked one of the latter what they thought of Tito, they would reply that he wouldn't have a chance unless the distance was at least a mile and a half. If you then wittily asked whether it would be a good thing to bet on the tóstalisator, the great jaw would drop, the ruined graveyard of tombstone teeth would be revealed, the eyes would roll, and the malt-eroded voice would say "Hah?"

A few years ago there was every prospect of an epidemic or plague because the Corporation could not "afford" to collect dustbins more than once a week. No money in the kitty. The next thing we read was that the Corporation were arranging to lay out some £6,000 of the ratepayers' money to buy themselves "robes". And they did. And I certify that you won't see anything at the pantomimes to compare with a Corporator in his full regimentals.

Dublin is a city of some 500,000 people. Do you know how many ambulances the Corporation can "afford"?

Five! That is one ambulance per 100,000 of the population. If there was a mass accident such as the escape of gas in a cinema (as happened recently in a country cinema) it is likely that people would die like flies before they could be got to hospital.

It is in these circumstances that the shaymuses recently reached down into our pockets and voted thousands of pounds – or the price of many ambulances – for the purposes of this Tóstal, including the construction of two elongated troughs of water on O'Connell Bridge.

As I explained yesterday, we are all expected to paint our houses and pretty-up our gardens to enrich hotel keepers and publicans; it is even hoped that the impoverished Bank of Ireland may be given some sort of financial aid to remove the filth of a couple of centuries from its facade.

Here we have a characteristic shaymus attitude. The shaymus has a great admiration for the whited sepulchre idea – the cult of the external – no better exemplified than in what is permitted to go on in 70 per cent of the city's public houses – dirty premises and utensils, adulterated drink, short measures and toilets of indescribable filth. It is the Corporation's elementary duty to do something drastic about such a situation – and not to please some fly-by-night tóstalite, but to protect the lives of the people who live here. The Corporators have other fish to fry. And the excuse cannot be that the Corporators do not know about the situation, because many of them are rarely out of the pubs.

What will our tóstalite think when, describing a pub resplendent with gaudy new paint, he goes in?

It is none of my business (I am blushing slightly at the moment), but here is a 6-mark question: how many public conveniences for women are there in the city proper?

TWO!

For Heaven knows how long, people living or working close to either bank of the river Liffey have been nearly asphyxiated at low tide. That has been quite good enough for the ratepayers, but now that nice visitors are expected, little Johnny Dublin must not be seen with such a dirty nose. The river bed is to be cleaned. (Perhaps, indeed, I am being a bit hard on the Tóstal if it results in even that much).

ACCISSOO! (Bless me again). Andy Clarkin's Clock Is Still Stopped Ochone Ochone!

That joke has become rather thin. There is a large public clock over the Lord Mayor's business premises in Pearse Street. It has been stopped for years and its two faces are rotting. Goodness knows I have drawn enough attention to it in the past. When the gentleman responsible has the nerve to tell us to paint our houses, put out flags and window boxes, and so on – and when he presides at a Corporation meeting whereat the shamuses vote away thousands of our money for this Tóstal, I say it is not good enough.

It impels me to say something which may seem rather tasteless. In two years Clarkin has got (or will have got) £5,000 of the ratepayers' money, and since there is not a dee of tax payable on it, it effectively amounts to about £7,000. With other perquisites, the job has been worth £8,000 – and I make no reference to some further £1,400 tax-free pay as a senator. Surely to goodness he can AFFORD to take his own advice?

I wonder is he a hard-faced man? I have no idea what he looks like. Could he, I wonder, manage to use his influence and . . . and get . . . his picture in the papers?

Cruiskeen Lawn March 25th, 1957

I presume the reader has read my notes of last week dealing with a report in the *United Nations World* concerning the therapeutic metamorphosis of the desert Arab by confrontation with the American Way of Life as manifested by oil companies.

We saw that Mohammed Mutarid “doesn’t get about the desert any more – he’s too tied down at the office.”

I will quote a little bit more, this time about Ali din Hussein: “To see the result of this policy consider Ali din Hussein, a man in his late 30s.

He came to ‘Aramco’ from a Bedouin tribe 14 years ago. Today he is a superintendent of a ‘separator’, an installation which separates gas from oil as it comes out of the ground.

The separator is isolated in the desert, twenty miles from the nearest company office.

The continuous efficient operation of this complicated 700,000 [pounds] mechanism is essential.

Hussein, who has 30 men under him, is in complete charge.”

Let us again view this transfiguration from the viewpoint of our indigenous hypoanthrope (or untermensch), Shaun O’Shaughraun.

True we have probably no oil or even gas under the soil but we have something perhaps more valuable: I mean the mystical salts and nutriments which genially conspire to produce the turnip. In considering Shaun vis-à-vis the national turnip wealth we seem suddenly (unlike so many perfectly good turnips today) pulled up.

If there is one thing about Shaun, you will be told, he will not snag turnips; he would prefer to be in the Civil Service. But read again the quotation above.

The essential of the American concept is that Hussein had men under him.

Why not Shaun? And there is no obligation in the code to give the names of those undermen or explain why they are not hyperanthropes (or übermenschen). Follow?

It is helpful sometimes to view the future in retrospect.

Consider Shaun O’Shaughraun, an Irish boy in his late 40s. He came to CARS (Cruiskeen-American Rehabilitation Scheme) from the Mushabejaber tinker hill tribe 46 years ago.

Today he is superintendent of a “separator”, an installation which separates turnips from the earth and from weeds, other turnips, tin cans, cigarette packets, muck, offal and the earth itself.

A magnetic sool gayr detects all sound turnips and directs them via an endless conveyor belt to a “hospital” where they are washed, shaved, uniformly shaped and scented, packed untouched by hand into ribbon-tied boxes and taken in snag-powered lorries to Shannon Airport for dispatch by air to Irish communities in the U.S.

Weeds and other snaggings are automatically extracted from the soot gayr's rejects by ingenious electrically-powered antennae known as *lawva fawda* and conveyed to a complex of secret "secondary hopsitals" where the material is converted into Irish tweed, low-grade industrial usquebaugh, carpenter's scantlings, newsprint, plastic hurley sticks, cut-glass eggcups and ingots of radioactive turf.

Shaun, who has 45,000 men under him, is in complete charge.

Let us in heaven's name get a grip of ourselves. Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori my eye! If deposits of oil can attract American and Russian philanthropists to the Near East so readily, why cannot our scientists investigate the industrial potential of turnips?

It was reported recently that an Englishman had invented a process of making a substitute for petrol from turf and that he had come to this country after the British had rejected his invention. Where is he and what is he doing?

The release of energy from natural substances is acknowledged to be merely a matter of probing out certain procedural secrets.

The combustion of natural oil is the lazy fellow's way out.

I honestly believe that a nuclear bomb (if we are to take that as the summum of human achievement to date) can be made from a turnip.

Our agricultural lads seem to believe that, too, for they think weed-choked turnips are too dangerous to snag.

Napophobia, or fear of turnips, it must be the duty of the new Administration to . . . to weed out!

Cruiskeen Lawn August 28th, 1942

A lifetime of cogitation has convinced me that in this Anglo-Irish literature of ours (which for the most part is neither Anglo, Irish, nor literature) (as the man said), nothing in the whole galaxy of fake is comparable with Synge.

That comic ghoul with his wakes and mugs of porter should be destroyed finally and forever by having a drama festival at which all his plays should be revived for the benefit of the younger people of today. The younger generation should be shown what their fathers and grand-daddies went through for Ireland, and at time when it was neither profitable nor popular.

We in this country had a bad time through the centuries when England did not like us. But words choke in the pen when one comes to describe what happened to us when the English discovered we were rawther interesting peepul ek'tully, that we were nice, witty, brave, fearfully seltic and fiery, lovable, strong, lazy, boozy, impulsive, hospitable, decent, and so on till you weaken.

From that day the mouth-corners of our smaller intellectuals (of whom we have more per thousand births than any country in the world) began to betray the pale froth of literary epilepsy. Our writers, fascinated by the snake-like eye of London publishers, have developed exhibitionism to the sphere of acrobatics. Convulsions and contortions foul and masochistic have been passing for literature in this country for too long.

Playing up to the foreigner, putting up the witty celtic act, doing the lovable but erratic playboy, pretending to be morose and obsessed and thoughtful – all that is wearing so thin that we must put it aside soon in shame as one puts aside a threadbare suit. Even the customers who have been coming to the shop man and boy for fifty years are fed up. Listen in the next time you hear some bought-and-paid-for Paddy broadcasting from the BBC and you will understand me better.

This trouble probably began with Lever and Lover. But I always think that in Synge we have the virus isolated and recognisable. Here is stuff that anyone who knows the Ireland referred to simply will not have. It is not that Synge made people less worthy or nastier, or even better than they are, but he brought forward with the utmost solemnity amusing clowns talking a sub-language of their own and bade us take them very seriously.

There was no harm done there, because we have long had the name of having heads on us. But when the counterfeit bauble began to be admired outside Ireland by reason of its oddity and "charm", it soon became part of the literary credo here that Synge was a poet and a wild celtic god, a bit of a genius, indeed, like the brother.

We, who knew the whole inside-outs of it, preferred to accept the ignorant valuations of outsiders on things Irish. And now the curse has come upon us, because I have personally met in the streets of Ireland persons who are clearly out of Synge's plays. They talk and dress like that, and damn the drink they'll swally but the mug of porter in the long nights after Samhain.

The Plain People of Ireland: Any relation between that man and Synge Street in Dublin where Bernard Shaw was born?

Myself: I don't think so, because Bernard Shaw was born before Synge.

The Plain People of Ireland: The Brothers runs a very good school there – manys a good Irishman got his learnin there. They do get a very high place in the Intermediate and the Senior Grade every year.

Myself: Faith you're right.

The Plain People of Ireland: But of course your man Shaw digs with the other foot.

Myself: Aye.