



The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien

Flann O'Brien , Neil Murphy (Editor) , Keith Hopper (Editor) , Jack Fennell (Translator)

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This riotous collection at last gathers together an expansive selection of Flann O'Brien's shorter fiction in a single volume, as well as O'Brien's last and unfinished novel, "Slattery's Sago Saga." Also included are new translations of several stories originally published in Irish, and other rare pieces. With some of these stories appearing here in book form for the very first time, and others previously unavailable for decades, *Short Fiction* is a welcome gift for every Flann O'Brien fan worldwide.

The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien Details

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Author : Flann O'Brien , Neil Murphy (Editor) , Keith Hopper (Editor) , Jack Fennell (Translator)

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From Reader Review The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien for online ebook

Allan MacDonell says

My guess is that the two editors of *The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien* are some type of completists. This scholarly and annotated assemblage of bits and other bits collects the scraps of O'Brien's genius that have not already been crammed into previous best-ofs. To say that the material here is nowhere near the top-shelf lyrical and lacerating brilliance of *The Hard Life* and *The Third Policeman* goes without saying, but I just said it. I'll say also that Flann O'Brien has never written a page that would be wrong to turn to.

Marc Faoite says

This is a mixed bag, more for fans than neophytes, and probably not the best introduction to the writer, but if you've been through most of his oeuvre and are looking to read some of the pieces that fell between the gaps then certainly it may be of interest.

Guttersnipe Das says

Often a collection of short fiction is the place to start if you wish you wish to begin to discover a writer unfamiliar to you. For example, you could begin to explore Joyce with Dubliners, or Beckett with the Complete Short Prose. Not so in this case. This book is for fans and scholars. If you are not yet a fan, you will be shortly, but please: start with At Swim, Two Birds.

That said, Dalkey Archive has done great service by rescuing these stories. Several of them are so vivid and appealing that I expect that they will now be anthologized for as long as the human race hangs on. I am thinking of "John Duffy's Brother" and especially "Scenes in a Novel", which experiments with the device of characters in rebellion against their novel, prefiguring At Swim, Two Birds.

The story that impressed me most was "Drink and Time in Dublin" -- a relentless and unsparing account of going on a bender. My god, but the man tells a lot of the truth. (When I visited the Writer's Museum in Dublin, I went up to the attendant and said very earnestly that I wished to visit all the places in Dublin associated with the life of Flann O'Brien. The gentleman shook his head at me and said, "You couldn't possibly, you'd die a' alcohol poisoning.")

"Slattery's Sago Saga", the forty-one page manuscript of O'Brien's last unfinished novel -- about a plan to remove all the potatoes from Ireland and replace them with sago -- is a joy and a frolic. If there turns out to be an afterlife, you will find me in the pub of that establishment, begging Flann O'Brien to tell me the rest of the story.

MJ Nicholls says

The Short Fiction of . . . Flann O'Brien? Next to Fernando Pessoa, Brian O'Nolan was the ruler of the pseudonyms, aplomb at the nom de plume, master of the mystifiers. This collection contains stories by Brian Ó Nualláin, Brother Barnabas, Flann O'Brien, Lir O'Connor, Myles na gCopaleen, Brian Nolan, Myles na Gopaleen, and John Shamus O'Donnell (who may or may not have been Brian O'Nolan). A second serving of stories that might have been written by your man would probably be as long as this collection. Each author has a different style of storytelling (not always corresponding to its author). The uncollected stories here are five translations from the Irish, all written in a faux-Gaeltacht manner, especially 'The Tale of Black Peter,' that would find its satirical peak in *The Poor Mouth*. The remaining stories were previously collected in *Stories & Plays* (Paladin) in the UK and include a revised reprint of the unfinished novel *Slattery's Sago Saga* (not an embarrassment, but not a triumph either). 'Scenes in a Novel' is a forerunner for *At Swim-Two-Birds*, which finds Flann already frolicking with the metafictional only several years out of college. 'John Duffy's Brother' is an hilarious story about a man convinced he is the 9.20 train to Dublin, and 'Two in One' is a sinister taxidermist murder story, close in tone to *The Third Policeman*. Several other stories read like offshoots of the *Cruiskeen Lawn* columns, reading more like bar-room anecdotes or the standard Gopaleen banter that enlivened the Irish Times every week. The dubious story, 'Naval Control,' about a re-animated wife, contains hallmarks of Flann (or whomever), but its authorship still seems dubious. For all his multiple pen names and personae, Brian O'Nolan retained a unique comic voice that was unmistakably his own.

Danny Daley says

This is an odd, and yet, completely satisfying collection of short stories by Flann O'Brien. Odd, because the short stories are very short, three to eight pages each, but satisfying because, despite their short length and very small scope, they say precisely what they need to and deliver excellently crafted closing paragraphs. These stories are built for myth and humor and are meant to be re-read and possibly recited in social contexts, and they work perfectly to that end. The stories are great examples of modern myth-making. The collection ends with the first 40 or so pages of a novel that O'Brien left unfinished at the time of his early death, in just his mid-fifties. Reading it was bitter sweet, the story was excellent and very well written, and its abrupt end reminds the reader that O'Brien had a lot of good work left in him when he passed. A testament to O'Brien's near endless creativity.

Stephen Hull says

You might view this as one for the Flann O'Brien completists, but you could also view it as a reasonably good intro to the great man for those not wanting to dive into a whole novel. I'd opt for the former: the best way to discover your man Flann is to go straight to *At Swim-Two-Birds* or *The Third Policeman* and get the full force of his genius.

This book is, perhaps inevitably, a bit uneven, being composed of pieces written over a 34 year period, but there's much to be enjoyed. I find O'Brien less about laugh out loud moments (though there are more than enough of those) and more about the singular way he uses language. This is present in the Irish language stories here, though the feel is for me even stronger in the English ones -- perhaps because they were written later. I can't resist a small example: what other writer would describe someone standing in front of a fireplace with the words, "Sarsfield Slattery was standing with his backside outwardly poised towards a great log fire..."?

Speaking of which, theis volume also contains his last unfinished (well, barely started) novel, Slattery's Sago Saga. Worth reading for that alone, but there's much more than that here. There's, fascinatingly, quite a good short story included and then, at the end, an early, vastly inferior draft of it. It's great to get an insight into how he refined his work to get the maximum value out of his material.

There's also a short science fiction story which the editors are claiming could be by O'Brien (who famously wrote under many different pseudonyms, quite a few of which are believed to be still awaiting discovery). They say this is "a speculative gesture designed to generate further discussion and discovery." I reamin unconvinced.

A final word of warning: the book begins with the weakest material, so don't be put off by it. It gets a lot better.

Michelle Despres says

Great for super fans. Enjoyed the introduction. Enjoyed the translator's notes. Stories were ok. I could see that they were funny, but they weren't my kind of humor.

Fionnuala says

Do you know what I'm going to tell you? I'd never have heard of Mr Duffy if it hadn't been for the brother.

Mr Duffy's brother?

No, not Mr Duffy's brother, Mr O'Brien's brother, Micheál.

Micheál O'Brien?

No, no, O'Brien's brother wasn't called O'Brien. You see he had all sorts of names, the same O'Brien.

But..but who are you actually talking about now...

The man I'm talking about now is Flann O'Brien, the one who wrote all those pieces about 'The Brother' under a pseudonym - you know the ones that used to feature in The Irish Times. Give us another round there, Martin.

So The Brother's name was Micheál then? I never knew that!

No, no, The Brother never had a name at all. He was always only The Brother. No one ever knew his name that I ever heard.

But I thought you said Mr O'Brien had a brother called Micheál?

Oh indeed, yes. Mr O'Brien did have a brother called Micheál. Yes, sir! Micheál Ó Nualláin. Keep the change Martin. Your health, sir!

So Flann O'Brien's brother was called Micheál Ó Nualláin?

You could say that. Or you could say Myles na gCopaleen's brother was called Micheál Ó Nualláin. Ho, ho, yes. Are you with me? Cheers!

Now you've lost me completely. Who's this 'na gCopaleen' character?

Count O'Blather, Samuel Hall, Brother Barnabas, George Knowall, Brian Ó Nualláin, Brian Nolan, Shamus O'Donnell, The Broc, The Cruiskeen Lawn, The Irish Everyman, The Central Research Bureau.....

Are we still talking about one man?

It's hard to say, to tell the truth. They say you had to look at him twice before you saw he was there in the first place - like a badger on a dark night. Begor, that's a good one, a badger on a dark night! Another pint there, Martin - with a good head on it this time, mind!

But the story about Mr Duffy's brother you mentioned earlier - what has that to do with Micheál Ó Nualláin?

Wasn't Martin reading me out the death notices only the other day. I was sitting here in this exact spot nursing me pint just as I'm doing now, when he told me the news. The brother is dead, do you see. He died on the eleventh of the present month.

The real brother you mean?

The same man. And says I to myself, I better go home and open one of the brother's brother's books, to pay me respects, so to speak. The least I could do...

And so I did - but not straight away, mind. It was still only ten o'clock of a summer's evening.

Ten o'clock seems late enough to me.

If you'd lived around these parts in the time of the 'The Closed Hours', sir, you'd never stir off your stool till well past midnight.

You were saying about opening the brother's book when you got home?

What I was looking for was the articles about The Brother, do you see, written by the brother's brother, the bould Myles. But do you think I could put my hand on them? Not a chance.

What I did find was another book, The Short Fiction of Flann himself, and though it was near one o'clock in the morning, I opened it up.

Do you want to know how I opened it up?

I think you're going to tell me anyway...

I dropped it from a height, so I did. And that's how I first encountered Mr Duffy, or Mr Duffy's brother to be exact, because the book opened at the story of Mr Duffy's brother. Now wasn't that an inscrutably felicitous

coincidence? That the book opened at a story about a brother with no name!

Not this 'nameless brother' business again. Surely he had a name?

He may well have had a name. Don't most of us have names when all's said and done. It would be a strange thing for a man to have no name but stranger things have been known to occur. In fact that story was so strange that it might never have been written!

But you read this story about...about this Mr Duffy's brother, so it had been written after all...

Oh, it had been written all right, but in such a way as to keep the name of the main character incognito, so to speak, camouflaged, as it were, so the strangeness would never reflect badly on him in the future, do you see?

It can't have been very well camouflaged if his brother's name was given..

Well now, young sir, if Flann O'Brien could have ten different praenomens and cognomens, surely Mr Duffy could have ten incognito brothers, wouldn't you say? And Mr Duffy's brother could be any one of the ten. That's the very best kind of incognito to have, to be hidden inside your own name, as it were. Sure who'd think of looking for you there?

But the definition of incognito is rather...

Would you be arguing with Flann O'Brien of all people on the definition of 'incognito'? You young whippersnapper!

But you're not leaving, are you? Sure the night has barely begun and I was just going to tell you about how I'd started reading about the real fictitious 'Brother' today in the very book I was looking for when I dropped the one with Mr Duffy's brother in it from...from...sure I might as well have dropped it from the top of the bloody Wellington monument for all anyone cares...and your man is long gone anyway and not a sinner about to hear me muttering to myself except Martin and he's a great one for the deaf ear is Martin especially after closing time Martin one for the road eh Martin did you hear me Martin sure I might as well be talking to myself..

Flann O'Brien by Sean O'Sullivan

Micheál Ó Nualláin, brother of Flann O'Brien, died on the 11th of July 2016.

Portrait of Flann by his brother, Micheál.

Geoffrey says

As you might expect, a bit hit-or-miss, but hit enough to make it worthwhile. Slattery's Sago Saga is tantalizing as anything.

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

The Short Fiction of Flann O'Brien, edited by Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper, Dalkey Archive, 2013.

First things second :: thanks to Friend Aubrey for the Linking to the List.

A gleaned List of the influential influence of Flann O'Brien ::

SKIP my List ; I'm just after Likes ::

<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by...>

From PW (in fact, more to the point, "From" Neil Murphy and Keith Hopper who edited both this Short Fiction collection AND the The Review of Contemporary Fiction: Fall 2011: Flann O'Brien: Centenary Essays) ::

Donald Barthelme

Steve Katz

Clarence Major

Susan Quist

Ishmael Reed

Gilbert Sorrentino

Ronald Sukenick

Kurt Vonnegut

Raymond Federman's Double or Nothing (1971)

B.S. Johnson's Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry (1973)

Francis Stuart's A Hole in the Head (1977)

Anthony Burgess's Earthly Powers (1980)

John Fowles's Mantissa (1981)

David Benedictus's Floating Down to Camelot (1985)

Robert Coover's Gerald's Party (1986)

Spike Milligan's Puckoon (1963)

Alf MacLochlainn's Out of Focus (1977)

Robert Anton Wilson's The Widow's Son (1985)

Paul Auster's Oracle Night (2003)

Bernard Share's Transit (2009)

Jamie O'Neill's delightfully punsome title, At Swim, Two Boys (2001)

Dante

Rabelais

Diderot

Goethe

Huysmans

Joyce

Pirandello

Gide

Huxley

an avalanche of others

Ficciones by Jorge Luis Borges
Travelling People by B.S. Johnson
Birchwood by John Banville
Mulligan Stew by Gilbert Sorrentino
If on a winter's night a traveller by Italo Calvino
Lanark: A Life in Four Books by Alasdair Gray
City by Alessandro Baricco
House of Leaves by Mark Z. Danielewski
Jude: Level 1 by Julian Gough
The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman by Laurence Sterne

Aveugle Vogel says

"ideal for gallops"

M. says

If you haven't read Flann O'Brien, don't start here. If you already know that you like him, this one is definitely worth your time. A collection of short stories, an unfinished novel, and a story that may or may not have been written under a previously unknown pseudonym. Here you'll find a lot of material that foreshadows the contents of his major works, along with plenty of original material as well. The first few stories in the book are translated from the original Gaelic versions, which relied to various degrees on cultural and linguistic puns, so much of the humor there is either contextual or lost completely in translation. Still, a lot of really enjoyable reading if you like his style!

Jim says

My first reading of Flann O'Brien's work, which may have been a mistake.

This is an interesting collection of O'Brien's short writings from various newspapers, written in both Gaelic (translated here) and English. The humor is topical and somewhat time and culture-specific, and certainly rests on the assumption that the reader is familiar with Irish history and politics, which was a reasonable assumption on O'Brien's part since he was publishing in Irish newspapers. The result for me was that a lot of the humor was lost due to my lack of knowledge of his time and culture. I'm sure, however, that these pieces were a laugh riot in the Dublin pubs of the 1930's and 40's.

Recommended for O'Brien completionists and those who are already familiar with his fiction and humor.

Daniel says

Flann O'Brien's Slattery's Sago Saga comes to Town Hall

Lisa Lambe and Darragh Kelly in The Slattery's Sago Saga.

Galway Advertiser, November 18, 2010.

By Charlie McBride

ONE OF the highlights of the Town Hall Theatre's current season takes place next week with Performance Corporation's uproarious staging of Flann O'Brien's unfinished comic novel Slattery's Sago Saga, adapted by Arthur Riordan.

The production was a huge critical and popular hit during its initial run in Dublin during the summer, with the Irish Independent hailing it as "a monstrous pudding of a comic play...fast-moving comic fantasy", while Totally Dublin declared it "one part theatre of the absurd, one part state of the nation, and one hell of an evening's entertainment...a delight from start to finish; should not be missed on its revival this autumn."

Slattery's Sago Saga's central character is Tim Hartigan who enjoys a quiet life as general dogsbody of Poguemahone Hall. However his peaceful existence is rudely shattered by the arrival of a Scottish woman, Crawford McPherson, who has a crazy plan to completely eradicate the potato from the Irish diet, replacing it with sago.

While this opening premise bears O'Brien's trademark "ferociously absurd wit", to quote another review, in other ways the book could have seemed unpromising material for a stage adaptation. O'Brien completed only seven short chapters by the time of his death in 1966 so it is not unfair to say that it's not so much unfinished as barely started.

[I forcibly removed the rest of this review because I thought that it would be both fitting and humorous.

~Daniel]

Thom Dunn says

Probably not for the un-initiated Flaneur, but a really neat (and informative) look into his creative process, as well as into the art of translation (half of the short stories here are originally written in Irish, and the editors do a great job of breaking down the reasoning behind certain idiomatic linguistic decisions).
