

## INTRODUCTION

This proposal for the Research Foundation 2003 Summer Scholars Program requests funding for a significant contribution to the field of Irish Studies. Already accepted by the Dalkey Archive Press, this project will culminate in the my editing the publication of *A Flann O'Brien Casebook*, a collection of writings by a few of the most noted readers of Flann O'Brien. Because O'Brien's writings have enjoyed a renaissance with the republication of all of his novels by the same press that will publish this casebook, my editorship of and introduction to the collection addresses a growing interest among scholars and general readers. In addition, my work on this project will support my continued work on O'Brien and Irish literature generally—work that has already translated into several courses that I teach at CSU Chico.

### SIGNIFICANCE, PURPOSE, AND OBJECTIVE

Believed by many readers and scholars to be one of the most significant writers of mid-century Ireland, Flann O'Brien has not enjoyed the academic attention that his works rightly deserve. As one of the foremost innovators of a style that we only now come to term "postmodern," O'Brien experimented restlessly with the conventions of the novel, the newspaper, and the short story. Publishing his ideas under a variety of pseudonyms and guises, O'Brien seemed to enjoy *carte blanche* acceptance in the otherwise conservative and tight-lipped Dublin of the 1940s and 1950s. During his lifetime, O'Brien enjoyed the attention of a literary-minded coterie who recognized the aesthetic value of his experiments with form, but was too quickly dismissed by academics as a mere prankster.

In the early 1980s, O'Brien's work saw a minor reevaluation, when theorists of the novel discovered in his work the very types of stylistic virtuosity that they praised in their definition of the "postmodern novel." Endlessly self-reflective, this style of novel offered a serious

interrogation of the possibilities of describing truth in fiction—possibilities earlier foreclosed by the realism so embraced by early twentieth-century readers. Such questions and possibilities were the cornerstone of O’Brien’s novels—all of which predate by several decades the novels hallowed as “postmodern.” Of significant philosophical as well as literary importance, the novels of Flann O’Brien have enjoyed only a handful of book-length studies of O’Brien’s work exist.

Addressing this current lack of recent scholarship, *A Flann O’Brien Casebook*—already accepted for publication by the Dalkey Archive Press—offers new and provocative essays on the current significance of O’Brien’s novels. As the editor of this project, I have two responsibilities. First, I have begun soliciting essays from the most innovative scholars writing on O’Brien’s work. My second responsibility to this project is to provide a comprehensive survey of this history of O’Brien scholarship, from the earliest reviews of his first novel *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) to the latest articles discussing O’Brien. This critical introduction, moreover, will help establish O’Brien’s significance in both the field of Irish Studies and the larger field of twentieth-century literature. O’Brien’s contributions to both fields have too long been ignored, and this project will rejuvenate a scholarly conversation that has been quiet too long. Perhaps most significantly, the editorship of such an important work will allow me to direct the growing interest in O’Brien’s work: the critical introduction will underscore and emphasize debates on O’Brien’s novels while allowing me to position myself as a foremost scholar in the field. Indeed, in some sense, this project will allow me to determine the issues of future debate in the field—debates that my future work will address and further develop. My insights and work on O’Brien, then, will become central components for the future of the conversations on these works.

In early February, 2003, I was invited by the general editor of The Dalkey Archive Casebook Series—the same press, significantly, that republished all of O’Brien’s novels—to assume editorship of the casebook. This invitation followed my the acceptance by the same publisher of my article on O’Brien’s novels. After consulting with the general editor of The Dalkey Archive Press, I can say with confidence that this project will reach full completion by early August.

A Research Foundation Summer Scholars grant would not only allow me to complete this significant project, but it would also support the process of turning my dissertation into a publishable manuscript by next year. In my dissertation, I familiarized myself with the terms and issues central to discussions about O’Brien—discussions that illuminated the omissions too apparent in the debates. Since the funding will allow me to visit the papers of O’Brien’s estate, I could integrate my primary research on the *Casebook* with the primary research that I will need to direct as I finish the book manuscript. Moreover, the project’s reception will develop a growing readership in my own work, thus further contributing to my future acceptance of a book-length manuscript.

Since the project’s deadline is already set, my work assumes a direct and clear path towards completion. My familiarity with O’Brien scholarship will allow a swift and economical approach to the research for the project. Because so little primary research has been done on O’Brien, my critical introduction will address as well a glaring absence in the discussion of O’Brien’s work. Significantly, the deadline of the project necessitates my visiting in early June the Special Collections Library. As well as the book project and continued work on a larger manuscript, my work on O’Brien easily carries over into the classes that I will teach in future semesters; because O’Brien holds such a curious place in the history of twentieth-century

literature, my summer's work on him will prepare me not only for the graduate seminars on Irish Literature and Critical Theory that I teach at CSU Chico, but also for the undergraduate-level surveys of the British novel.

With my familiarity in the field, experience with the subject, and definite deadline, *A Flann O'Brien Casebook* will provide a fresh perspective on an important writer; it will address a growing interest in several fields while addressing a glaring gap in scholarship; and, perhaps most importantly, it will help expand my course offerings at California State University, Chico.

I appreciate your time and consideration in reviewing this application. Thank you.

### PROPOSED ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINE

With a Research Foundation Summer Scholars grant, I would be able to visit the Flann O'Brien papers housed in the Special Collections Library of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, where I would finish my primary research on the critical introduction to *A Flann O'Brien Casebook*. The specific timeline is as follows:

DATE	TASKS
20 June—5 July	Primary Research at Southern Illinois University Special Collections Library
7 July—25 July	Complete and submit draft of introduction to the General Editor of The Dalkey Archive Press
28 July—8 August	Finish project with the changes recommended. The final drafts, then, constitute the completion of <i>A Flann O'Brien Casebook</i> .

### ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

In addition to contributing directly to the growing discussions of Flann O'Brien's novels, this project will further establish me as an important scholar in the fields of Irish and twentieth-century literature. Because the project has already been contracted and has a definite deadline, the university will immediately enjoy attention from these important fields.

## QUALIFICATIONS

My professional interest in O'Brien's work began early in my graduate school career, an interest that directed much of my own future scholarship. I have presented three papers at national conferences on his work. These conferences, moreover, comprised audiences of both Irish Studies scholars as well as scholars of twentieth-century literature—a diversity in interest that I believe speaks directly to the importance of *A Flann O'Brien Casebook*. As I continued to receive useful and productive feedback from top scholars in the field, I further developed my ideas on Flann O'Brien in my work: I dedicated a chapter of my dissertation on twentieth-century Irish literature to the novels of Flann O'Brien. This chapter integrates the current scholarship in the field, while identifying in the process the gaps which my summer project will fill.

Since my Ph.D. is in twentieth-century British and Irish literature, I am well-versed in the debates about Flann O'Brien as both an "Irish writer" as well as a stylistic virtuoso—a perspective that I believe broadens the usefulness of my project. This perspective informs my own teaching of O'Brien at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. Because my interest in O'Brien's work has been so longstanding, I have had an opportunity to integrate his works and ideas into my present courses and the syllabi of future courses. At present, I teach a graduate seminar in Modern Irish Literature, a seminar that has helped focus my attention to the absences that such a work like *A Flann O'Brien Casebook* would fill.

### **RESULTS OF PREVIOUS SUPPORT**

Since I am now finishing my first year at California State University, Chico, my funding has been restricted to two CELT mini-grants that have funded travel to two conferences this year. My application last semester for a Research Foundation Summer Scholars was declined, but happily the circumstances under which the proposal was submitted have changed: only in February did I receive the invitation from The Dalkey Archive Press to edit the volume. With one CELT mini-grant, I could present a paper to the Midwest Regional American Conference for Irish Studies; with the second, I will present a completed paper at one of the most prestigious conferences in the study of James Joyce—the most direct influence on Flann O’Brien’s work.

### **CURRENT AND PENDING SUPPORT**

Currently I am receiving no university support for this project.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Please see the attached offer and acceptance from the editor of The Dalkey Archive Press.