

Translations

Friel, Brian . Plays One: Philadelphia, Here I Come! The Freedom of the City, Living Quarters, Aristocrats, Faith Healer, and Translations . 455 p. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.

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FULL TEXT

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TRANSLATIONS

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Front matter

for Stephen Rea

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MANUS
SARAH
JIMMY JACK
MAIRE
DOALTY
BRIDGET

HUGH
OWEN
CAPTAIN LANCEY
LIEUTENANT YOLLAND

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Translations was first presented by Field Day Theatre Company in the Guildhall, Derry on Tuesday, 23 September 1980. The cast was as follows:

MANUS	Mick Lally
SARAH	Ann Hasson
JIMMY JACK	Roy Hanlon
MAIRE	Nuala Hayes
DOALTY	Liam Neeson
BRIDGET	Brenda Scallon
HUGH	Ray McAnally
OWEN	Stephen Rea
CAPTAIN LANCEY	David Heap
LIEUTENANT YOLLAND	Shaun Scott

<i>Direction</i>	Art O Briain
Design	Consolata Boyle

Design assistance	Magdalena Rubalcava
	Mary Friel
<i>Lighting</i>	Rupert Murray

Field Day Theatre Company was formed by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea. *Translations* was their first production.

The action takes place in a hedge-school in the townland of Baile Beag/Ballybeg, an Irish-speaking community in County Donegal.

ACT ONE	An afternoon in late August 1833.
ACT TWO	A few days later.
ACT THREE	The evening of the following day.

One interval—between the two scenes in Act Two.

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Main text

ACT ONE

The hedge-school is held in a disused barn or hay-shed or byre. Along the back wall are the remains of five or six stalls—wooden posts and chains—where cows were once milked and bedded. A double door left, large enough to allow a cart to enter. A window right. A wooden stairway without a banister leads to the upstairs living-quarters (off) of the schoolmaster and his son. Around the room are broken and forgotten implements: a cart-wheel, some lobster-pots, farming tools, a battle of hay, a churn, etc. There are also the stools and bench-seats which the pupils use and a table and chair for the master. At the door a pail of water and a soiled towel. The room is comfortless and dusty and functional—there is no trace of a woman's hand.

When the play opens, MANUS is teaching SARAH to speak. He kneels beside her. She is sitting on a low stool, her head down, very tense, clutching a slate on her knees. He is coaxing her gently and firmly and—as with everything he does—with a kind of zeal.

MANUS is in his late twenties/early thirties; the master's older son. He is pale-faced, lightly built, intense, and works as an unpaid assistant—a monitor—to his father. His clothes are shabby; and when he moves we see that he

is lame.

SARAH's speech defect is so bad that all her life she has been considered locally to be dumb and she has accepted this: when she wishes to communicate, she grunts and makes unintelligible nasal sounds. She has a waiflike appearance and could be any age from seventeen to thirty-five.

JIMMY JACK CASSIE—known as the Infant Prodigy—sits by himself, contentedly reading Homer in Greek and smiling to himself. He is a bachelor in his sixties, lives alone, and comes to these evening classes partly for the company and partly for the intellectual stimulation. He is fluent in Latin and Greek but is in no way pedantic—to him it is perfectly normal to speak these tongues. He

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never washes. His clothes—heavy top coat, hat, mittens, which he wears now—are filthy and he lives in them summer and winter, day and night. He now reads in a quiet voice and smiles in profound satisfaction. For JIMMY the world of the gods and the ancient myths is as real and as immediate as everyday life in the townland of Baile Beag.

MANUS holds SARAH's hands in his and he articulates slowly and distinctly into her face.

MANUS:

We're doing very well. And we're going to try it once more—just once more. Now—relax and breathe in ... deep ... and out ... in ... and out ...

(SARAH shakes her head vigorously and stubbornly.)

MANUS:

Come on, Sarah. This is our secret.

(Again vigorous and stubborn shaking of SARAH's head.)

MANUS:

Nobody's listening. Nobody hears you.

JIMMY:

'Ton d'emeibet epeita thea glaukopis Athene ...'

MANUS:

Get your tongue and your lips working. 'My name—' Come on. One more try. 'My name is—' Good girl.

SARAH:

My ...

MANUS:

Great. 'My name—'

SARAH:

My ... my ...

MANUS:

Raise your head. Shout it out. Nobody's listening.

JIMMY:

'... alla hekelos estai en Atreidao domois ...'

MANUS:

Jimmy, please! Once more—just once more—'My name—' Good girl. Come on now. Head up. Mouth open.

SARAH:

My ...

MANUS:

Good.

SARAH:

My ...

MANUS:

Great.

SARAH:

My name ...

MANUS:

Yes?

SARAH:

My name is ...

MANUS:

Yes?

(SARAH pauses. Then in a rush.)

SARAH:

My name is Sarah.

MANUS:

Marvellous! Bloody marvellous!

(MANUS hugs SARAH. She smiles in shy, embarrassed pleasure.)

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Did you hear that, Jimmy?—‘My name is Sarah’—clear as a bell.

(To SARAH)

The Infant Prodigy doesn't know what we're at.

(SARAH laughs at this. MANUS hugs her again and stands up.)

Now we're really started! Nothing'll stop us now! Nothing in the wide world!

(JIMMY, chuckling at his text, comes over to them.)

JIMMY:

Listen to this, Manus.

MANUS:

Soon you'll be telling me all the secrets that have been in that head of yours all these years. Certainly, James—what is it?

(To SARAH)

Maybe you'd set out the stools?

(MANUS runs up the stairs.)

SARAH:

Wait till you hear this, Manus.

MANUS:

Go ahead. I'll be straight down.

JIMMY:

'Hos ara min phamene rabdo epemassat Athene—' 'After Athene had said this, she touched Ulysses with her wand. She withered the fair skin of his supple limbs and destroyed the flaxen hair from off his head and about his limbs she put the skin of an old man ...! The devil! The devil!

(MANUS has emerged again with a bowl of milk and a piece of bread.)

JIMMY:

And wait till you hear! She's not finished with him yet!

(As MANUS descends the stairs he toasts SARAH with his bowl.)

JIMMY:

'Knuzosen de oi osse—' 'She dimmed his two eyes that were so beautiful and clothed him in a vile ragged cloak begrimed with filthy smoke ...! D'you see! Smoke! Smoke! D'you see! Sure look at what the same turf-smoke has done to myself!

(He rapidly removes his hat to display his bald head.)

Would you call that flaxen hair?

MANUS:

Of course I would.

JIMMY:

'And about him she cast the great skin of a filthy hind, stripped of the hair, and into his hand she thrust a staff and a wallet! Ha-ha-ha! Athene did that to Ulysses! Made him into a tramp! Isn't she the tight one?

MANUS:

You couldn't watch her, Jimmy.

JIMMY:

You know what they call her?

MANUS:

'Glaukopis Athene.'

JIMMY:

That's it! The flashing-eyed Athene! By God, Manus, sir, if you had a woman like that about the house, it's not stripping a turf-bank you'd be thinking about—eh?

MANUS:

She was a goddess, Jimmy.

JIMMY:

Better still. Sure isn't our own Grania a class of a goddess and—

MANUS:

Who?

JIMMY:

Grania—Grania—Diarmuid's Grania.

MANUS:

Ah.

JIMMY:

And sure she can't get her fill of men.

MANUS:

Jimmy, you're impossible.

JIMMY:

I was just thinking to myself last night: if you had the choosing between Athene and Artemis and Helen of Troy—all three of them Zeus's girls—imagine three powerful-looking daughters like that all in the one parish of Athens!—now, if you had the picking between them, which would you take?

MANUS:

(To SARAH)

Which should I take, Sarah?

JIMMY:

No harm to Helen; and no harm to Artemis; and indeed no harm to our own Grania, Manus. But I think I've no choice but to go bull-straight for Athene. By God, sir, them flashing eyes would fair keep a man jigged up constant!

(Suddenly and momentarily, as if in spasm, JIMMY stands to attention and salutes, his face raised in pained ecstasy. MANUS toughs. So does SARAH. JIMMY goes back to his seat, and his reading.)

MANUS:

You're a dangerous bloody man, Jimmy Jack.

JIMMY:

'Flashing-eyed'! Hah! Sure Homer knows it all, boy. Homer knows it all.

(MANUS goes to the window and looks out.)

MANUS:

Where the hell has he got to?

(SARAH goes to MANUS and touches his elbow. She mimes rocking a baby.)

MANUS:

Yes, I know he's at the christening; but it doesn't take them all day to put a name on a baby, does it?

(SARAH mimes pouring drinks and tossing them back quickly.)

MANUS:

You may be sure. Which pub?

(SARAH indicates.)

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MANUS:

Gracie's?

(No. Further away.)

MANUS:

Con Connie Tim's?

(No. To the right of there.)

MANUS:

Anna na mBreag's?

(Yes. That's it.)

MANUS:

Great. She'll fill him up. I suppose I may take the class then.

(MANUS begins to distribute some books, slates and chalk, texts, etc., beside the seats. SARAH goes over to the straw and produces a bunch of flowers she has hidden there. During this:)

JIMMY:

'*Autar o ek limenos prosebe*—' But Ulysses went forth from the harbour and through the woodland to the place where Athene had shown him he could find the good swineherd who—'*o oi biotoio malista kedeto*'—what's that, Manus?

MANUS:

'Who cared most for his substance'.

JIMMY:

That's it! 'The good swineherd who cared most for his substance above all the slaves that Ulysses possessed ...'

(SARAH presents the flowers to MANUS.)

MANUS:

Those are lovely, Sarah.

(But SARAH has fled in embarrassment to her seat and has her head buried in a book. MANUS goes to her.)

MANUS:

Flow-ers.

(Pause. SARAH does not look up.)

MANUS:

Say the word: flow-ers. Come on—flow-ers.

SARAH:

Flowers.

MANUS:

You see?—you're off!

(MANUS leans down and kisses the top of SARAH's head.)

MANUS:

And they're beautiful flowers. Thank you.

(MAIRE enters, a strong-minded, strong-bodied woman in her twenties with a head of curly hair. She is carrying a small can of milk.)

MAIRE:

Is this all's here? Is there no school this evening?

MANUS:

If my father's not back, I'll take it.

(MANUS stands awkwardly, having been caught kissing SARAH and with the flowers almost formally at his chest.)

MAIRE:

Well now, isn't that a pretty sight. There's your milk. How's Sarah?

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(SARAH grunts a reply.)

MANUS:

I saw you out at the hay.

(MAIRE ignores this and goes to JIMMY.)

MAIRE:

And how's Jimmy Jack Cassie?

JIMMY:

Sit down beside me, Maire.

MAIRE:

Would I be safe?

JIMMY:

No safer man in Donegal.

(MAIRE *flops on a stool beside JIMMY.*)

MAIRE:

Ooooh. The best harvest in living memory, they say; but I don't want to see another like it.

(*Showing JIMMY her hands.*)

Look at the blisters.

JIMMY:

Esne fatigata?

MAIRE:

Sum fatigatissima.

JIMMY:

Bene! Optime!

MAIRE:

That's the height of my Latin. Fit me better if I had even that much English.

JIMMY:

English? I thought you had some English?

MAIRE:

Three words. Wait—there was a spake I used to have off by heart. What's this it was?

(*Her accent is strange because she is speaking a foreign language and because she does not understand what she is saying.*)

'In Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoll.' What about that!

MANUS:

Maypole.

(Again MAIRE ignores MANUS.)

MAIRE:

God have mercy on my Aunt Mary—she taught me that when I was about four, whatever it means. Do you know what it means, Jimmy?

JIMMY:

Sure you know I have only Irish like yourself.

MAIRE:

And Latin. And Greek.

JIMMY:

I'm telling you a lie: I know one English word.

MAIRE:

What?

JIMMY:

Bo-som.

MAIRE:

What's a bo-som?

JIMMY:

You know—

(*He illustrates with his hands*)

—bo-som—bo-som—you know—Diana, the huntress, she has two powerful bosom.

MAIRE:

You may be sure that's the one English word you would know.

(*Rises*)

Is there a drop of water about?

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(MANUS gives MAIRE his bowl of milk.)

MANUS:

I'm sorry I couldn't get up last night.

MAIRE:

Doesn't matter.

MANUS:

Biddy Hanna sent for me to write a letter to her sister in Nova Scotia. All the gossip of the parish. 'I brought the cow to the bull three times last week but no good. There's nothing for it now but Big Ned Frank.'

MAIRE:

(*Drinking*)

That's better.

MANUS:

And she got so engrossed in it that she forgot who she was dictating to: 'The aul drunken schoolmaster and that lame son of his are still footering about in the hedge-school, wasting people's good time and money.'

(MAIRE has to laugh at this.)

MAIRE:

She did not!

MANUS:

And me taking it all down. 'Thank God one of them new national schools is being built above at Poll na gCaorach.' It was after midnight by the time I got back.

MAIRE:

Great to be a busy man.

(MAIRE moves away. MANUS follows.)

MANUS:

I could hear music on my way past but I thought it was too late to call.

MAIRE:

(To SARAH)

Wasn't your father in great voice last night?

(SARAH *nods and smiles.*)

MAIRE:

It must have been near three o'clock by the time you got home?

(SARAH *holds up four fingers.*)

MAIRE:

Was it four? No wonder we're in pieces.

MANUS:

I can give you a hand at the hay tomorrow.

MAIRE:

That's the name of a hornpipe, isn't it?—'The Scholar In The Hayfield'—or is it a reel?

MANUS:

If the day's good.

MAIRE:

Suit yourself. The English soldiers below in the tents, them sapper fellas, they're coming up to give us a hand. I don't know a word they're saying, nor they me; but sure that doesn't matter, does it?

MANUS:

What the hell are you so crabbed about?!

(DOALTY and BRIDGET enter noisily. Both are in their twenties. DOALTY is brandishing a surveyor's pole. He is an [\[Page 390\]](#) open-minded, open-hearted, generous and slightly thick young man. BRIDGET is a plump, fresh young girl, ready to laugh, vain, and with a countrywoman's instinctive cunning. DOALTY enters doing his imitation of the master.)

DOALTY:

Vesperal salutations to you all.

BRIDGET:

He's coming down past Carraig na Ri and he's as full as a pig!

DOALTY:

Ignari, stulti, rustici—pot-boys and peasant whelps—semi-literates and illegitimates.

BRIDGET:

He's been on the batter since this morning; he sent the wee ones home at eleven o'clock.

DOALTY:

Three questions. Question A—Am I drunk? Question B—Am I sober?

(Into MAIRE's face)

Responde—responde!

BRIDGET:

Question C, Master—When were you last sober?

MAIRE:

What's the weapon, Doalty?

BRIDGET:

I warned him. He'll be arrested one of these days.

DOALTY:

Up in the bog with Bridget and her aul fella, and the Red Coats were just across at the foot of Croc na Mona, dragging them aul chains and peeping through that big machine they lug about everywhere with them—you know the name of it, Manus?

MAIRE:

Theodolite.

BRIDGET:

How do you know?

MAIRE:

They leave it in our byre at night sometimes if it's raining.

JIMMY:

Theodolite—what's the etymology of that word, Manus?

MANUS:

No idea.

BRIDGET:

Get on with the story.

JIMMY:

Theo—theos—something to do with a god. Maybe *thea*—a goddess! What shape's the yoke?

DOALTY:

'Shape!' Will you shut up, you aul eejit you! Anyway, every time they'd stick one of these poles into the ground and move across the bog, I'd creep up and shift it twenty or thirty paces to the side.

BRIDGET:

God!

DOALTY:

Then they'd come back and stare at it and look at their calculations and stare at it again and scratch their heads. And cripes, d'you know what they ended up doing?

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BRIDGET:

Wait till you hear!

DOALTY:

They took the bloody machine apart!

(And immediately he speaks in gibberish—an imitation of two very agitated and confused sappers in rapid conversation.)

BRIDGET:

That's the image of them!

MAIRE:

You must be proud of yourself, Doalty.

DOALTY:

What d'you mean?

MAIRE:

That was a very clever piece of work.

MANUS:

It was a gesture.

MAIRE:

What sort of gesture?

MANUS:

Just to indicate ... a presence.

MAIRE:

Hah!

BRIDGET:

I'm telling you—you'll be arrested.

(When DOALTY is embarrassed—or pleased—he reacts physically. He now grabs BRIDGET around the waist.)

DOALTY:

What d'you make of that for an implement, Bridget? Wouldn't that make a great aul shaft for your churn?

BRIDGET:

Let go of me, you dirty brute! I've a headline to do before Big Hughie comes.

MANUS:

I don't think we'll wait for him. Let's get started.

(Slowly, reluctantly they begin to move to their seats and specific tasks. DOALTY goes to the bucket of water at the door and washes his hands. BRIDGET sets up a hand-mirror and combs her hair.)

BRIDGET:

Nellie Ruadh's baby was to be christened this morning. Did any of you hear what she called it? Did you, Sarah?

(SARAH grunts: No.)

BRIDGET:

Did you, Maire?

MAIRE:

No.

BRIDGET:

Our Seamus says she was threatening she was going to call it after its father.

DOALTY:

Who's the father?

BRIDGET:

That's the point, you donkey you!

DOALTY:

Ah.

BRIDGET:

So there's a lot of uneasy bucks about Baile Beag this day.

DOALTY:

She told me last Sunday she was going to call it Jimmy.

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BRIDGET:

You're a liar, Doalty.

DOALTY:

Would I tell you a lie? Hi, Jimmy, Nellie Ruadh's aul fella's looking for you.

JIMMY:

For me?

MAIRE:

Come on, Doalty.

DOALTY:

Someone told him ...

MAIRE:

Doalty!

DOALTY:

He heard you know the first book of the Satires of Horace off by heart ...

JIMMY:

That's true.

DOALTY:

... and he wants you to recite it for him.

JIMMY:

I'll do that for him certainly, certainly.

DOALTY:

He's busting to hear it.

(JIMMY *fumbles in his pockets.*)

JIMMY:

I came across this last night—this'll interest you—in Book Two of Virgil's *Georgics*.

DOALTY:

Be God, that's my territory alright.

BRIDGET:

You clown you!

(*To SARAH*)

Hold this for me, would you?

(*her mirror.*)

JIMMY:

Listen to this, Manus. '*Nigra fere et presso pinguis sub vomere terra ...*'

DOALTY:

Steady on now—easy, boys, easy—don't rush me, boys—

(*He mimes great concentration.*)

JIMMY:

Manus?

MANUS:

'Land that is black and rich beneath the pressure of the plough ...'

DOALTY:

Give *me* a chance!

JIMMY:

'And with *cut putre*—with crumbly soil—is in the main best for corn.' There you are!

DOALTY:

There you are.

JIMMY:

'From no other land will you see more wagons wending homeward behind slow bullocks.' Virgil! There!

DOALTY:

'Slow bullocks'!

JIMMY:

Isn't that what I'm always telling you? Black soil for corn. *That's* what you should have in that upper field of yours—corn, not spuds.

DOALTY:

Would you listen to that fella! Too lazy be Jasus to

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wash himself and he's lecturing me on agriculture! Would you go and take a running race at yourself, Jimmy Jack Cassie!

(Grabs SARAH.)

Come away out of this with me, Sarah, and we'll plant some corn together.

MANUS:

All right—all right. Let's settle down and get some work done. I know Sean Beag isn't coming—he's at the salmon. What about the Donnelly twins?

(To DOALTY)

Are the Donnelly twins not coming any more?

(DOALTY shrugs and turns away.)

Did you ask them?

DOALTY:

Haven't seen them. Not about these days.

(DOALTY begins whistling through his teeth. Suddenly the atmosphere is silent and alert.)

MANUS:

Aren't they at home?

DOALTY:

No.

MANUS:

Where are they then?

DOALTY:

How would I know?

BRIDGET:

Our Seamus says two of the soldiers' horses were found last night at the foot of the cliffs at Machaire Buidhe and

...

(She stops suddenly and begins writing with chalk on her slate.)

D'you hear the whistles of this aul slate? Sure nobody could write on an aul slippery thing like that.

MANUS:

What headline did my father set you?

BRIDGET:

'It's easier to stamp out learning than to recall it.'

JIMMY:

Book Three, the *Agricola* of Tacitus.

BRIDGET:

God but you're a dose.

MANUS:

Can you do it?

BRIDGET:

There. Is it bad? Will he ate me?

MANUS:

It's very good. Keep your elbow in closer to your side. Doalty?

DOALTY:

I'm at the seven-times table. I'm perfect, skipper.

(MANUS moves to SARAH.)

MANUS:

Do you understand those sums?

(SARAH *nods*: Yes. MANUS *leans down to her ear*.)

MANUS:

My name is Sarah.

(MANUS *goes to MAIRE*. *While he is talking to her the others swop books, talk quietly, etc.*)

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MANUS:

Can I help you? What are you at?

MAIRE:

Map of America.

(*Pause*.)

The passage money came last Friday.

MANUS:

You never told me that.

MAIRE:

Because I haven't seen you since, have I?

MANUS:

You don't want to go. You said that yourself.

MAIRE:

There's ten below me to be raised and no man in the house. What do you suggest?

MANUS:

Do you want to go?

MAIRE:

Did you apply for that job in the new national school?

MANUS:

No.

MAIRE:

You said you would.

MANUS:

I said I might.

MAIRE:

When it opens, this is finished: nobody's going to pay to go to a hedge-school.

MANUS:

I know that and I ...

(He breaks off because he sees SARAH, obviously listening, at his shoulder. She moves away again.)

I was thinking that maybe I could ...

MAIRE:

It's £56 a year you're throwing away.

MANUS:

I can't apply for it.

MAIRE:

You *promised* me you would.

MANUS:

My father has applied for it.

MAIRE:

He has not!

MANUS:

Day before yesterday.

MAIRE:

For God's sake, sure you know he'd never—

MANUS:

I couldn't—I can't go in against him.

(MAIRE *looks at him for a second. Then:—*)

MAIRE:

Suit yourself.

(*To BRIDGET*)

I saw your Seamus heading off to the Port fair early this morning.

BRIDGET:

And wait till you hear this—I forgot to tell you this. He said that as soon as he crossed over the gap at Cnoc na Mona—just beyond where the soldiers are making the maps—the sweet smell was everywhere.

DOALTY:

You never told me that.

BRIDGET:

It went out of my head.

DOALTY:

He saw the crops in Port?

BRIDGET:

Some.

MANUS:

How did the tops look?

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BRIDGET:

Fine—I think.

DOALTY:

In flower?

BRIDGET:

I don't know. I think so. He didn't say.

MANUS:

Just the sweet smell—that's all?

BRIDGET:

They say that's the way it snakes in, don't they? First the smell; and then one morning the stalks are all black and limp.

DOALTY:

Are you stupid? It's the rotting stalks makes the sweet smell for God's sake. That's what the smell is—rotting stalks.

MAIRE:

Sweet smell! Sweet smell! Every year at this time somebody comes back with stories of the sweet smell. Sweet God, did the potatoes ever fail in Baile Beag? Well, did they ever—ever? Never! There was never blight here. Never. Never. But we're always sniffing about for it, aren't we?—looking for disaster. The rents are going to go up again—the harvest's going to be lost—the herring have gone away for ever—there's going to be evictions. Honest to God, some of you people aren't happy unless you're miserable and you'll not be right content until you're dead!

DOALTY:

Bloody right, Maire. And sure St Colmcille prophesied there'd never be blight here. He said:

The spuds will bloom in Baile Beag

Till rabbits grow an extra lug.

And sure that'll never be. So we're all right. Seven threes are twenty-one; seven fours are twenty-eight; seven fives are forty-nine—Hi, Jimmy, do you fancy my chances as boss of the new national school?

JIMMY:

What's that?—what's that?

DOALTY:

Agh, g'way back home to Greece, son.

MAIRE:

You ought to apply, Doalty.

DOALTY:

D'you think so? Cripes, maybe I will. Hah!

BRIDGET:

Did you know that you start at the age of six and you have to stick at it until you're twelve at least—no matter how smart you are or how much you know.

DOALTY:

Who told you that yarn?

BRIDGET:

And every child from every house has to go all day, every day, summer or winter. That's the law.

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DOALTY:

I'll tell you something—nobody's going to go near them—they're not going to take on—law or no law.

BRIDGET:

And everything's free in them. You pay for nothing except the books you use; that's what our Seamus says.

DOALTY:

'Our Seamus'. Sure your Seamus wouldn't pay anyway. She's making this all up.

BRIDGET:

Isn't that right, Manus?

MANUS:

I think so.

BRIDGET:

And from the very first day you go, you'll not hear one word of Irish spoken. You'll be taught to speak English and every subject will be taught through English and everyone'll end up as cute as the Bunrana people.

(SARAH suddenly grunts and mimes a warning that the master is coming. The atmosphere changes. Sudden

business. Heads down.)

DOALTY:

He's here, boys. Cripes, he'll make yella meal out of me for those bloody tables.

BRIDGET:

Have you any extra chalk, Manus?

MAIRE:

And the atlas for me.

(DOALTY goes to MAIRE who is sitting on a stool at the back.)

DOALTY:

Swop you seats.

MAIRE:

Why?

DOALTY:

There's an empty one beside the Infant Prodigy.

MAIRE:

I'm fine here.

DOALTY:

Please, Maire. I want to jouk in the back here.

(MAIRE rises.)

God love you.

(Aloud)

Anyone got a bloody table-book? Cripes, I'm wrecked.

(SARAH gives him one.)

God, I'm dying about you.

(In his haste to get to the back seat, DOALTY bumps into BRIDGET who is kneeling on the floor and writing

laboriously on a slate resting on top of a bench-seat.)

BRIDGET:

Watch where you're going, Doalty!

(DOALTY gooses BRIDGET. She squeals. Now the quiet hum of work: JIMMY reading Homer in a low voice; BRIDGET copying her headline; MAIRE studying the atlas; DOALTY, his eyes shut tight, mouthing his tables; SARAH doing sums.

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After a few seconds:—

BRIDGET:

Is this 'g' right, Manus? How do you put a tail on it?

DOALTY:

Will you shut up! I can't concentrate!

(A few more seconds of work. Then DOALTY opens his eyes and looks around.)

False alarm, boys. The bugger's not coming at all. Sure the bugger's hardly fit to walk.

(And immediately HUGH enters. A large man, with residual dignity, shabbily dressed, carrying a stick. He has, as always, a large quantity of drink taken, but he is by no means drunk. He is in his early sixties.)

HUGH:

*Adsum, Doalty, adsum. Perhaps not in *sobrietate perfecta* but adequately *sobrius* to overhear your quip. Vesperal salutations to you all.*

(Various responses.)

JIMMY:

Ave, Hugh.

HUGH:

James.

(He removes his hat and coat and hands them and his stick to MANUS, as if to a footman.)

Apologies for my late arrival: we were celebrating the baptism of Nellie Ruadh's baby.

BRIDGET:

(Innocently)

What name did she put on it, Master?

HUGH:

Was it Eamon? Yes, it was Eamon.

BRIDGET:

Eamon Donal from Tor! Cripes!

HUGH:

And after the *caerimonia nominationis*—Maire?

MAIRE:

The ritual of naming.

HUGH:

Indeed—we then had a few libations to mark the occasion. Altogether very pleasant. The derivation of the word ‘baptize’?—where are my Greek scholars? Doalty?

DOALTY:

Would it be—ah—ah—

HUGH:

Too slow. James?

JIMMY:

‘*Baptizein*’—to dip or immerse.

HUGH:

Indeed—our friend Pliny Minor speaks of the ‘*baptisterium*’—the cold bath.

DOALTY:

Master.

HUGH:

Doalty?

DOALTY:

I suppose you could talk then about baptizing a sheep at sheep-dipping, could you?

(Laughter. Comments.)

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HUGH:

Indeed—the precedent is there—the day you were appropriately named Doalty—seven nines?

DOALTY:

What's that, Master?

HUGH:

Seven times nine?

DOALTY:

Seven nines—seven nines—seven times nine—seven times nine are—cripes, it's on the tip of my tongue, Master—I knew it for sure this morning—funny that's the only one that foxes me—

BRIDGET:

(Prompt)

Sixty-three.

DOALTY:

What's wrong with me: sure seven nines are fifty-three, Master.

HUGH:

Sophocles from Colonus would agree with Doalty Dan Doalty from Tulach Alainn: 'To know nothing is the sweetest life.' Where's Sean Beag?

MANUS:

He's at the salmon.

HUGH:

And Nora Dan?

MAIRE:

She says she's not coming back any more.

HUGH:

Ah. Nora Dan can now write her name—Nora Dan's education is complete. And the Donnelly twins?

(Brief pause. Then:—)

BRIDGET:

They're probably at the turf.

(She goes to HUGH.)

There's the one-and-eight I owe you for last quarter's arithmetic and there's my one-and-six for this quarter's writing.

HUGH:

Gratias tibi ago.

(He sits at his table.)

Before we commence our *studia* I have three items of information to impart to you—

(To MANUS)

A bowl of tea, strong tea, black—

(MANUS leaves.)

Item A: on my perambulations today—Bridget? Too slow. Maire?

MAIRE:

Perambulare—to walk about.

HUGH:

Indeed—I encountered Captain Lancey of the Royal Engineers who is engaged in the ordnance survey of this area. He tells me that in the past few days two of his horses have strayed and some of his equipment seems to be mislaid. I expressed my regret and suggested he address you himself on these matters. He then explained that he [\[Page 399\]](#)

does not speak Irish. Latin? I asked. None. Greek? Not a syllable. He speaks—on his own admission—only English; and to his credit he seemed suitably verecund—James?

JIMMY:

Verecundus—humble.

HUGH:

Indeed—he voiced some surprise that we did not speak his language. I explained that a few of us did, on occasion—outside the parish of course—and then usually for the purposes of commerce, a use to which his tongue seemed particularly suited—

(Shouts)

and a slice of soda bread—and I went on to propose that our own culture and the classical tongues made a happier conjugation—Doalty?

DOALTY:

Conjugo—I join together.

(DOALTY is so pleased with himself that he prods and winks at BRIDGET.)

HUGH:

Indeed—English, I suggested, couldn't really express us. And again to his credit he acquiesced to my logic. Acquiesced—Maire?

(MAIRE turns away impatiently. HUGH is unaware of the gesture.)

Too slow. Bridget?

BRIDGET:

Acquiesco.

HUGH:

Procede.

BRIDGET:

Acquiesco, acquiescere, acquievi, acquietum.

HUGH:

Indeed—and Item B ...

MAIRE:

Master.

HUGH:

Yes?

(MAIRE gets to her feet uneasily but determinedly. Pause.)

Well, girl?

MAIRE:

We should all be learning to speak English. That's what my mother says. That's what I say. That's what Dan O'Connell said last month in Ennis. He said the sooner we all learn to speak English the better.

(Suddenly several speak together.)

JIMMY:

What's she saying? What? What?

DOALTY:

It's Irish he uses when he's travelling around scrounging votes.

BRIDGET:

And sleeping with married women. Sure no woman's safe from that fella.

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JIMMY:

Who-who-who? Who's this? Who's this?

HUGH:

Silentium!

(Pause.)

Who is she talking about?

MAIRE:

I'm talking about Daniel O'Connell.

HUGH:

Does she mean that little Kerry politician?

MAIRE:

I'm talking about the Liberator, Master, as you well know. And what he said was this: 'The old language is a barrier to modern progress.' He said that last month. And he's right. I don't want Greek. I don't want Latin. I want English.

(MANUS *reappears on the platform above.*)

I want to be able to speak English because I'm going to America as soon as the harvest's all saved.

(MAIRE *remains standing. HUGH puts his hand into his pocket and produces a flask of whiskey. He removes the cap, pours a drink into it, tosses it back, replaces the cap, puts the flask back into his pocket. Then:—*)

HUGH:

We have been *diverted—diverto—divertere*—Where were we?

DOALTY:

Three items of information, Master. You're at Item B.

HUGH:

Indeed—Item B—Item B—yes—On my way to the christening this morning I chanced to meet Mr George Alexander, Justice of the Peace. We discussed the new national school. Mr Alexander invited me to take charge of it when it opens. I thanked him and explained that I could do that only if I were free to run it as I have run this hedge-school for the past thirty-five years—filling what our friend Euripides calls the '*aplestos pithos*'—James?

JIMMY:

'The cask that cannot be filled'.

HUGH:

Indeed—and Mr Alexander retorted courteously and emphatically that he hopes that is how it will be run.

(MAIRE *now sits.*)

Indeed. I have had a strenuous day and I am weary of you all.

(*He rises.*)

Manus will take care of you.

(HUGH *goes towards the steps. OWEN enters. OWEN is the younger son, a handsome, attractive young man in his twenties. He is dressed smartly—a city man. His manner is easy and charming: everything he does is invested with consideration and enthusiasm. He now stands framed in the doorway, a travelling bag across his shoulder.*)

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OWEN:

Could anybody tell me is this where Hugh Mor O'Donnell holds his hedge-school?

DOALTY:

It's Owen—Owen Hugh! Look, boys—it's Owen Hugh!

(OWEN *enters. As he crosses the room he touches and has a word for each person.*)

OWEN:

Doalty!

(*Playful punch.*)

How are you, boy? *Jacobe, quid agis?* Are you well?

JIMMY:

Fine. Fine.

OWEN:

And Bridget! Give us a kiss. Aaaaaah!

BRIDGET:

You're welcome, Owen.

OWEN:

It's not—? Yes, it *is* Maire Chatach! God! A young woman!

MAIRE:

How are you, Owen?

(OWEN *is now in front of HUGH. He puts his two hands on his FATHER's shoulders.*)

OWEN:

And how's the old man himself?

HUGH:

Fair—fair.

OWEN:

Fair? For God's sake you never looked better! Come here to me.

(He embraces HUGH warmly and genuinely.)

Great to see you, Father. Great to be back.

(HUGH's eyes are moist—partly joy, partly the drink.)

HUGH:

I—I'm—I'm—pay no attention to—

OWEN:

Come on—come on—come on—

(He gives HUGH his handkerchief.)

Do you know what you and I are going to do tonight? We are going to go up to Anna na mBreag's ...

DOALTY:

Not there, Owen.

OWEN:

Why not?

DOALTY:

Her poteen's worse than ever.

BRIDGET:

They say she puts frogs in it!

OWEN:

All the better.

(To HUGH)

And you and I are going to get footless drunk. That's arranged.

(OWEN sees MANUS coming down the steps with tea and soda bread. They meet at the bottom.)

And Manus!

MANUS:

You're welcome, Owen.

OWEN:

I know I am. And it's great to be here.

(He turns round,

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arms outstretched.)

I can't believe it. I come back after six years and everything's just as it was! Nothing's changed! Not a thing!

(Sniffs.)

Even that smell—that's the same smell this place always had. What is it anyway? Is it the straw?

DOALTY:

Jimmy Jack's feet.

(General laughter. It opens little pockets of conversation round the room.)

OWEN:

And Doalty Dan Doalty hasn't changed either!

DOALTY:

Bloody right, Owen.

OWEN:

Jimmy, are you well?

JIMMY:

Dodging about.

OWEN:

Any word of the big day?

(This is greeted with 'ohs' and 'ahs'.)

Time enough, Jimmy. Homer's easier to live with, isn't he?

MAIRE:

We heard stories that you own ten big shops in Dublin—is it true?

OWEN:

Only nine.

BRIDGET:

And you've twelve horses and six servants.

OWEN:

Yes—that's true. God Almighty, would you listen to them—taking a hand at me!

MANUS:

When did you arrive?

OWEN:

We left Dublin yesterday morning, spent last night in Omagh and got here half an hour ago.

MANUS:

You're hungry then.

HUGH:

Indeed—get him food—get him a drink.

OWEN:

Not now, thanks; later. Listen—am I interrupting you all?

HUGH:

By no means. We're finished for the day.

OWEN:

Wonderful. I'll tell you why. Two friends of mine are waiting outside the door. They'd like to meet you and I'd like you to meet them. May I bring them in?

HUGH:

Certainly. You'll all eat and have ...

OWEN:

Not just yet, Father. You've seen the sappers working in this area for the past fortnight, haven't you? Well, the older man is Captain Lancey ...

HUGH:

I've met Captain Lancey.

OWEN:

Great. He's the cartographer in charge of this whole area. Cartographer—James?

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(OWEN begins to play this game—his father's game—partly to involve his classroom audience, partly to show he has not forgotten it, and indeed partly because he enjoys it.)

JIMMY:

A maker of maps.

OWEN:

Indeed—and the younger man that I travelled with from Dublin, his name is Lieutenant Yolland and he is attached to the toponymic department—Father?—*responde—responde!*

HUGH:

He gives names to places.

OWEN:

Indeed—although he is in fact an orthographer—Doalty?—too slow—Manus?

MANUS:

The correct spelling of those names.

OWEN:

Indeed—indeed!

(OWEN laughs and claps his hands. Some of the others join in.)

Beautiful! Beautiful! Honest to God, it's such a delight to be back here with you all again—'civilized' people.

Anyhow—may I bring them in?

HUGH:

Your friends are our friends.

OWEN:

I'll be straight back.

(There is general talk as OWEN goes towards the door. He stops beside SARAH.)

OWEN:

That's a new face. Who are you?

(A very brief hesitation. Then:—)

SARAH:

My name is Sarah.

OWEN:

Sarah who?

SARAH:

Sarah Johnny Sally.

OWEN:

Of course! From Bun na hAbhann! I'm Owen—Owen Hugh Mor. From Baile Beag. Good to see you.

(During this OWEN—SARAH exchange.)

HUGH:

Come on now. Let's tidy this place up.

(He rubs the top of his table with his sleeve.)

Move, Doalty—lift those books off the floor.

DOALTY:

Right, Master; certainly, Master; I'm doing my best, Master.

(OWEN stops at the door.)

OWEN:

One small thing, Father.

HUGH:

Silentium!

OWEN:

I'm on their pay-roll.

(SARAH, *very elated at her success, is beside* MANUS.)

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SARAH:

I said it, Manus!

(MANUS *ignores* SARAH. *He is much more interested in* OWEN *now.*)

MANUS:

You haven't enlisted, have you?!

(SARAH *moves away.*)

OWEN:

Me a soldier? I'm employed as a part-time, underpaid, civilian interpreter. My job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King's good English.

(*He goes out.*)

HUGH:

Move—move—move! Put some order on things! Come on, Sarah—hide that bucket. Whose are these slates? Somebody take these dishes away. *Festinate! Festinate!*

(MANUS *goes to* MAIRE *who is busy tidying.*)

MANUS:

You didn't tell me you were definitely leaving.

MAIRE:

Not now.

HUGH:

Good girl, Bridget. That's the style.

MANUS:

You might at least have told me.

HUGH:

Are these your books, James?

JIMMY:

Thank you.

MANUS:

Fine! Fine! Go ahead! Go ahead!

MAIRE:

You talk to me about getting married—with neither a roof over your head nor a sod of ground under your foot. I suggest you go for the new school; but no—'My father's in for that.' Well now he's got it and now this is finished and now you've nothing.

MANUS:

I can always ...

MAIRE:

What? Teach classics to the cows? Agh—

(MAIRE moves away from MANUS. OWEN enters with LANCEY and YOLLAND. CAPTAIN LANCEY is middle-aged; a small, crisp officer, expert in his field as cartographer but uneasy with people—especially civilians, especially these foreign civilians. His skill is with deeds, not words. LIEUTENANT YOLLAND is in his late twenties/early thirties. He is tall and thin and gangling, blond hair, a shy, awkward manner. A soldier by accident.)

OWEN:

Here we are. Captain Lancey—my father.

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LANCEY:

Good evening.

(HUGH *becomes expansive, almost courtly, with his visitors.*)

HUGH:

You and I have already met, sir.

LANCEY:

Yes.

OWEN:

And Lieutenant Yolland—both Royal Engineers—my father.

HUGH:

You're very welcome, gentlemen.

YOLLAND:

How do you do.

HUGH:

Gaudeo vos hic adesse.

OWEN:

And I'll make no other introductions except that these are some of the people of Baile Beag and—what?—well you're among the best people in Ireland now.

(*He pauses to allow LANCEY to speak. LANCEY does not.*)

Would you like to say a few words, Captain?

HUGH:

What about a drop, sir?

LANCEY:

A what?

HUGH:

Perhaps a modest refreshment? A little sampling of our *aqua vitae*?

LANCEY:

No, no.

HUGH:

Later perhaps when—

LANCEY:

I'll say what I have to say, if I may, and as briefly as possible. Do they speak *any* English, Roland?

OWEN:

Don't worry. I'll translate.

LANCEY:

I see.

(He clears his throat. He speaks as if he were addressing children—a shade too loudly and enunciating excessively.)

You may have seen me—seen me—working in this section—section?—working. We are here—here—in this place—you understand?—to make a map—a map—a map and—

JIMMY:

Nonne Latine loquitur?

(HUGH holds up a restraining hand.)

HUGH:

James.

LANCEY:

(To JIMMY)

I do not speak Gaelic, sir.

(He looks at OWEN.)

OWEN:

Carry on.

LANCEY:

A map is a representation on paper—a picture—you understand picture?—a paper picture—showing, representing

this country—yes?—showing your country in

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miniature—a scaled drawing on paper of—of—of—

(Suddenly DOALTY *sniggers*. Then BRIDGET. Then SARAH. OWEN *leaps in quickly*.)

OWEN:

It might be better if you *assume* they understand you—

LANCEY:

Yes?

OWEN:

And I'll translate as you go along.

LANCEY:

I see. Yes. Very well. Perhaps you're right. Well. What we are doing is this.

(*He looks at OWEN. OWEN nods reassuringly.*)

His Majesty's government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country—a general triangulation which will embrace detailed hydrographic and topographic information and which will be executed to a scale of six inches to the English mile.

HUGH:

(*Pouring a drink*)

Excellent—excellent.

(LANCEY *looks at OWEN.*)

OWEN:

A new map is being made of the whole country.

(LANCEY *looks to OWEN: Is that all? OWEN smiles reassuringly and indicates to proceed.*)

LANCEY:

This enormous task has been embarked on so that the military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire.

OWEN:

The job is being done by soldiers because they are skilled in this work.

LANCEY:

And also so that the entire basis of land valuation can be reassessed for purposes of more equitable taxation.

OWEN:

This new map will take the place of the estate agent's map so that from now on you will know exactly what is yours in law.

LANCEY:

In conclusion I wish to quote two brief extracts from the white paper which is our governing charter:

(Reads)

'All former surveys of Ireland originated in forfeiture and violent transfer of property; the present survey has for its object the relief which can be afforded to the proprietors and occupiers of land from unequal taxation.'

OWEN:

The captain hopes that the public will cooperate with the sappers and that the new map will mean that taxes are reduced.

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HUGH:

A worthy enterprise—*opus honestum!* And Extract B?

LANCEY:

'Ireland is privileged. No such survey is being undertaken in England. So this survey cannot but be received as proof of the disposition of this government to advance the interests of Ireland.' My sentiments, too.

OWEN:

This survey demonstrates the government's interest in Ireland and the captain thanks you for listening so attentively to him.

HUGH:

Our pleasure, Captain.

LANCEY:

Lieutenant Yolland?

YOLLAND:

I—I—I've nothing to say—really—

OWEN:

The captain is the man who actually makes the new map. George's task is to see that the place-names on this map are ... correct.

(*To YOLLAND.*)

Just a few words—they'd like to hear you.

(*To class.*)

Don't you want to hear George, too?

MAIRE:

Has he anything to say?

YOLLAND:

(*To MAIRE*)

Sorry—sorry?

OWEN:

She says she's dying to hear you.

YOLLAND:

(*To MAIRE*)

Very kind of you—thank you ...

(*To class*)

I can only say that I feel—I feel very foolish to—to—to be working here and not to speak your language. But I intend to rectify that—with Roland's help—indeed I do.

OWEN:

He wants me to teach him Irish!

HUGH:

You are doubly welcome, sir.

YOLLAND:

I think your countryside is—is—is—is very beautiful. I've fallen in love with it already. I hope we're not too—too crude

an intrusion on your lives. And I know that I'm going to be happy, very happy, here.

OWEN:

He is already a committed Hibernophile—

JIMMY:

He loves—

OWEN:

All right, Jimmy—we know—he loves Baile Beag; and he loves you all.

HUGH:

Please ... May I ...?

(HUGH is now drunk. He holds on to the edge of the table.)

OWEN:

Go ahead, Father.

(Hands up for quiet.)

Please—please.

HUGH:

And we, gentlemen, we in turn are happy to offer you our friendship, our hospitality, and every assistance that
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you may require. Gentlemen—welcome!

(A few desultory claps. The formalities are over. General conversation. The soldiers meet the locals. MANUS and OWEN meet down stage.)

OWEN:

Lancey's a bloody ramrod but George's all right. How are you anyway?

MANUS:

What sort of a translation was that, Owen?

OWEN:

Did I make a mess of it?

MANUS:

You weren't saying what Lancey was saying!

OWEN:

'Uncertainty in meaning is incipient poetry'—who said that?

MANUS:

There was nothing uncertain about what Lancey said: it's a bloody military operation, Owen! And what's Yolland's function? What's 'incorrect' about the place-names we have here?

OWEN:

Nothing at all. They're just going to be standardized.

MANUS:

You mean changed into English?

OWEN:

Where there's ambiguity, they'll be Anglicized.

MANUS:

And they call you Roland! They both call you Roland!

OWEN:

Shhhhh. Isn't it ridiculous? They seemed to get it wrong from the very beginning—or else they can't pronounce Owen. I was afraid some of you bastards would laugh.

MANUS:

Aren't you going to tell them?

OWEN:

Yes—yes—soon—soon.

MANUS:

But they ...

OWEN:

Easy, man, easy. Owen—Roland—what the hell. It's only a name. It's the same me, isn't it? Well, isn't it?

MANUS:

Indeed it is. It's the same Owen.

OWEN:

And the same Manus. And in a way we complement each other.

(He punches MANUS lightly, playfully and turns to join the others. As he goes.)

All right—who has met whom? Isn't this a job for the go-between?

(MANUS watches OWEN move confidently across the floor, taking MAIRE by the hand and introducing her to YOLLAND. HUGH is trying to negotiate the steps. JIMMY is lost in a text. DOALTY and BRIDGET are reliving their giggling. SARAH is staring at MANUS.)

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ACT TWO

SCENE I

The sappers have already mapped most of the area. YOLLAND's official task, which OWEN is now doing, is to take each of the Gaelic names—every hill, stream, rock, even every patch of ground which possessed its own distinctive Irish name—and Anglicize it, either by changing it into its approximate English sound or by translating it into English words. For example, a Gaelic name like Cnoc Ban could become Knockban or—directly translated—Fair Hill. These new standardized names were entered into the Name-Book, and when the new maps appeared they contained all these new Anglicized names. OWEN's official function as translator is to pronounce each name in Irish and then provide the English translation.

The hot weather continues. It is late afternoon some days later.

Stage right: an improvised clothes-line strung between the shafts of the cart and a nail in the wall; on it are some shirts and socks.

A large map—one of the new blank maps—is spread out on the floor. OWEN is on his hands and knees, consulting it. He is totally engrossed in his task which he pursues with great energy and efficiency.

YOLLAND's hesitancy has vanished—he is at home here now. He is sitting on the floor, his long legs stretched out before him, his back resting against a creel, his eyes closed. His mind is elsewhere. One of the reference books—a church registry—lies open on his lap.

Around them are various reference books, the Name-Book, a bottle of poteen, some cups, etc.

OWEN completes an entry in the Name-Book and returns to the map on the floor.

OWEN:

Now. Where have we got to? Yes—the point where that stream enters the sea—that tiny little beach there. George!

YOLLAND:

Yes. I'm listening. What do you call it? Say the Irish name again?

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OWEN:

Bun na hAbhann.

YOLLAND:

Again.

OWEN:

Bun na hAbhann.

YOLLAND:

Bun na hAbhann.

OWEN:

That's terrible, George.

YOLLAND:

I know. I'm sorry. Say it again.

OWEN:

Bun na hAbbann.

YOLLAND:

Bun na hAbbann.

OWEN:

That's better. Bun is the Irish word for bottom. And Abha means river. So it's literally the mouth of the river.

YOLLAND:

Let's leave it alone. There's no English equivalent for a sound like that.

OWEN:

What is it called in the church registry?

(Only now does YOLLAND open his eyes.)

YOLLAND:

Let's see ... Banowen.

OWEN:

That's wrong.

(Consults text.)

The list of freeholders calls it Owenmore—that's completely wrong: Owenmore's the big river at the west end of the parish.

(Another text.)

And in the grand jury lists it's called—God!—Binhone!—wherever they got that. I suppose we could Anglicize it to Bunowen; but somehow that's neither fish nor flesh.

(YOLLAND closes his eyes again.)

YOLLAND:

I give up.

OWEN:

(At map)

Back to first principles. What are we trying to do?

YOLLAND:

Good question.

OWEN:

We are trying to denominate and at the same time describe that tiny area of soggy, rocky, sandy ground where that little stream enters the sea, an area known locally as Bun na hAbhann ... Burnfoot! What about Burnfoot?

YOLLAND:

(Indifferently)

Good, Roland, Burnfoot's good.

OWEN:

George, my name isn't ...

YOLLAND:

B-u-r-n-f-o-o-t?

OWEN:

Are you happy with that?

YOLLAND:

Yes.

OWEN:

Burnfoot it is then.

(He makes the entry into the Name-Book.)

Bun na hAbhann—B-u-r-n-

YOLLAND:

You're becoming very skilled at this.

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OWEN:

We're not moving fast enough.

YOLLAND:

(Opens eyes again)

Lancey lectured me again last night.

OWEN:

When does he finish here?

YOLLAND:

The sappers are pulling out at the end of the week. The trouble is, the maps they've completed can't be printed without these names. So London screams at Lancey and Lancey screams at me. But I wasn't intimidated.

(MANUS *emerges from upstairs and descends.*)

'I'm sorry, sir,' I said, 'But certain tasks demand their own tempo. You cannot rename a whole country overnight.'
Your Irish air has made me bold.

(*To* MANUS)

Do you want us to leave?

MANUS:

Time enough. Class won't begin for another half-hour.

YOLLAND:

Sorry—sorry?

OWEN:

Can't you speak English?

(MANUS *gathers the things off the clothes-line. OWEN returns to the map.*)

OWEN:

We now come across that beach ...

YOLLAND:

Tra—that's the Irish for beach.

(*To* MANUS)

I'm picking up the odd word, Manus.

MANUS:

So.

OWEN:

... on past Burnfoot; and there's nothing around here that has any name that I know of until we come down here to the south end, just about here ... and there should be a ridge of rocks there ... Have the sappers marked it? They have. Look, George.

YOLLAND:

Where are we?

OWEN:

There.

YOLLAND:

I'm lost.

OWEN:

Here. And the name of that ridge is Druim Dubh. Put English on that, Lieutenant.

YOLLAND:

Say it again.

OWEN:

Druim Dubh.

YOLLAND:

Dubh means black.

OWEN:

Yes.

YOLLAND:

And Druim means ... what? a fort?

OWEN:

We met it yesterday in Druim Luachra.

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YOLLAND:

A ridge! The Black Ridge!

(To MANUS)

You see, Manus?

OWEN:

We'll have you fluent at the Irish before the summer's over.

YOLLAND:

Oh, I wish I were.

(To MANUS as he crosses to go back upstairs)

We got a crate of oranges from Dublin today. I'll send some up to you.

MANUS:

Thanks.

(To OWEN)

Better hide that bottle. Father's just up and he'd be better without it.

OWEN:

Can't you speak English before your man?

MANUS:

Why?

OWEN:

Out of courtesy.

MANUS:

Doesn't he want to learn Irish?

(To YOLLAND)

Don't you want to learn Irish?

YOLLAND:

Sorry—sorry? I—I—

MANUS:

I understand the Lanceys perfectly but people like you puzzle me.

OWEN:

Manus, for God's sake!

MANUS:

(Still to YOLLAND)

How's the work going?

YOLLAND:

The work?—the work? Oh, it's—it's staggering along—I think—
(To OWEN)
—isn't it? But we'd be lost without Roland.

MANUS:

(Leaving)

I'm sure. But there are always the Rolands, aren't there?

(He goes upstairs and exits.)

YOLLAND:

What was that he said?—something about Lancey, was it?

OWEN:

He said we should hide that bottle before Father gets his hands on it.

YOLLAND:

Ah.

OWEN:

He's always trying to protect him.

YOLLAND:

Was he lame from birth?

OWEN:

An accident when he was a baby: Father fell across his cradle. That's why Manus feels so responsible for him.

YOLLAND:

Why doesn't he marry?

OWEN:

Can't afford to, I suppose.

YOLLAND:

Hasn't he a salary?

OWEN:

What salary? All he gets is the odd shilling Father throws
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him—and that's seldom enough. I got out in time, didn't I?

(YOLLAND *is pouring a drink.*)

Easy with that stuff—it'll hit you suddenly.

YOLLAND:

I like it.

OWEN:

Let's get back to the job. Druim Dubh—what's it called in the jury lists?
(*Consults texts.*)

YOLLAND:

Some people here resent us.

OWEN:

Dramduff—wrong as usual.

YOLLAND:

I was passing a little girl yesterday and she spat at me.

OWEN:

And it's Drimdoo here. What's it called in the registry?

YOLLAND:

Do you know the Donnelly twins?

OWEN:

Who?

YOLLAND:

The Donnelly twins.

OWEN:

Yes. Best fishermen about here. What about them?

YOLLAND:

Lancey's looking for them.

OWEN:

What for?

YOLLAND:

He wants them for questioning.

OWEN:

Probably stolen somebody's nets. Dramduffy! Nobody ever called it Dramduffy. Take your pick of those three.

YOLLAND:

My head's addled. Let's take a rest. Do you want a drink?

OWEN:

Thanks. Now, every Dubh we've come across we've changed to Duff. So if we're to be consistent, I suppose Druim Dubh has to become Dromduff.

(YOLLAND is now looking out the window.)

You can see the end of the ridge from where you're standing. But D-r-u-m-or D-r-o-m-?

(Name-Book)

Do you remember—which did we agree on for Druim Luachra?

YOLLAND:

That house immediately above where we're camped—

OWEN:

Mm?

YOLLAND:

The house where Maire lives.

OWEN:

Maire? Oh, Maire Chatach.

YOLLAND:

What does that mean?

OWEN:

Curly-haired; the whole family are called the Catachs. What about it?

YOLLAND:

I hear music coming from that house almost every night.

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OWEN:

Why don't you drop in?

YOLLAND:

Could I?

OWEN:

Why not? We used D-r-o-m then. So we've got to call it D-r-o-m-d-u-f-f—all right?

YOLLAND:

Go back up to where the new school is being built and just say the names again for me, would you?

OWEN:

That's a good idea. Poolkerry, Ballybeg—

YOLLAND:

No, no; as they still are—in your own language.

OWEN:

Poll na gCaorach,

(YOLLAND *repeats the names silently after him.*)

Baile Beag, Ceann Balor, Lis Maol, Machaire Buidhe, Baile na gGall, Carraig na Ri, Mullach Dearg—

YOLLAND:

Do you think I could live here?

OWEN:

What are you talking about?

YOLLAND:

Settle down here—live here.

OWEN:

Come on, George.

YOLLAND:

I mean it.

OWEN:

Live on what? Potatoes? Buttermilk?

YOLLAND:

It's really heavenly.

OWEN:

For God's sake! The first hot summer in fifty years and you think it's Eden. Don't be such a bloody romantic. You wouldn't survive a mild winter here.

YOLLAND:

Do you think not? Maybe you're right.

(DOALTY *enters in a rush.*)

DOALTY:

Hi, boys, is Manus about?

OWEN:

He's upstairs. Give him a shout.

DOALTY:

Manus! The cattle's going mad in that heat—Cripes, running wild all over the place.

(*To YOLLAND*)

How are you doing, skipper?

(*MANUS appears.*)

YOLLAND:

Thank you for—I—I'm very grateful to you for—

DOALTY:

Wasting your time. I don't know a word you're saying. Hi, Manus, there's two bucks down the road there asking for you.

MANUS:

(*Descending*)

Who are they?

DOALTY:

Never clapped eyes on them. They want to talk to you.

MANUS:

What about?

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DOALTY:

They wouldn't say. Come on. The bloody beasts'll end up in Loch an Iubhair if they're not capped. Good luck, boys!

(*DOALTY rushes off. MANUS follows him.*)

OWEN:

Good luck! What were you thanking Doalty for?

YOLLAND:

I was washing outside my tent this morning and he was passing with a scythe across his shoulder and he came up to me and pointed to the long grass and then cut a pathway round my tent and from the tent down to the road—so that my feet won't get wet with the dew. Wasn't that kind of him? And I have no words to thank him ... I suppose you're right: I suppose I couldn't live here ... Just before Doalty came up to me this morning, I was thinking that at that moment I might have been in Bombay instead of Ballybeg. You see, my father was at his wits end with me and finally he got me a job with the East India Company—some kind of a clerkship. This was ten, eleven months ago. So I set off for London. Unfortunately I—I—I missed the boat. Literally. And since I couldn't face Father and hadn't enough money to hang about until the next sailing, I joined the army. And they stuck me into the Engineers and posted me to Dublin. And Dublin sent me here. And while I was washing this morning and looking across the Tra Bhan, I was thinking how very, very lucky I am to be here and not in Bombay.

OWEN:

Do you believe in fate?

YOLLAND:

Lancey's so like my father. I was watching him last night. He met every group of sappers as they reported in. He checked the field kitchens. He examined the horses. He inspected every single report—even examining the texture of the paper and commenting on the neatness of the handwriting. The perfect colonial servant: not only must the job be done—it must be done with excellence. Father has that drive, too; that dedication; that indefatigable energy. He builds roads—hopping from one end of the Empire to the other. Can't sit still for five minutes. He says himself the longest time he ever sat still was the night before Waterloo when they were waiting for Wellington to [\[Page 416\]](#) make up his mind to attack.

OWEN:

What age is he?

YOLLAND:

Born in 1789—the very day the Bastille fell. I've often thought maybe that gave his whole life its character. Do you think it could? He inherited a new world the day he was born—The Year One. Ancient time was at an end. The world had cast off its old skin. There were no longer any frontiers to man's potential. Possibilities were endless and exciting. He still believes that. The Apocalypse is just about to happen ... I'm afraid I'm a great disappointment to him. I've neither his energy, nor his coherence, nor his belief. Do I believe in fate? The day I arrived in Ballybeg—no, Baile Beag—the moment you brought me in here, I had a curious sensation. It's difficult to describe. It was a momentary sense of discovery; no—not quite a sense of discovery—a sense of recognition, of confirmation of something I half knew instinctively; as if I had stepped ...

OWEN:

Back into ancient time?

YOLLAND:

No, no. It wasn't an awareness of *direction* being changed but of experience being of a totally different order. I had moved into a consciousness that wasn't striving nor agitated, but at its ease and with its own conviction and assurance. And when I heard Jimmy Jack and your father swapping stories about Apollo and Cuchulainn and Paris and Ferdia—as if they lived down the road—it was then that I thought—I knew—perhaps I could live here ...

(Now embarrassed)

Where's the pot-teen?

OWEN:

Poteen.

YOLLAND:

Poteen—poteen—poteen. Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be ... hermetic, won't it?

OWEN:

You can learn to decode us.

(HUGH emerges from upstairs and descends. He is dressed for the road. Today he is physically and mentally jaunty and alert—almost self-consciously jaunty and alert. Indeed, as the scene progresses, one has the sense that he is deliberately

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parodying himself. The moment HUGH gets to the bottom of the steps YOLLAND leaps respectfully to his feet.)

HUGH:

(As he descends)

Quantumvis cursum longum fessumque moratur

Sol, sacro tandem carmine vesper adest.

I dabble in verse, Lieutenant, after the style of Ovid.

(To OWEN)

A drop of that to fortify me.

YOLLAND:

You'll have to translate it for me.

HUGH:

Let's see—

No matter how long the sun may linger on his long and weary journey

At length evening comes with its sacred song.

YOLLAND:

Very nice, sir.

HUGH:

English succeeds in making it sound ... plebeian.

OWEN:

Where are you off to, Father?

HUGH:

An *expeditio* with three purposes. Purpose A: to acquire a testimonial from our parish priest—

(To YOLLAND)

a worthy man but barely literate; and since he'll ask me to write it myself, how in all modesty can I do myself justice?

(To OWEN)

Where did this

(*drink*)

come from?

OWEN:

Anna na mBreag's.

HUGH:

(To YOLLAND)

In that case address yourself to it with circumspection.

(And HUGH *instantly tosses the drink back in one gulp and grimaces.*)

Aaaaaaagh!

(*Holds out his glass for a refill.*)

Anna na mBreag means Anna of the Lies. And Purpose B: to talk to the builders of the new school about the kind of living accommodation I will require there. I have lived too long like a journeyman tailor.

YOLLAND:

Some years ago we lived fairly close to a poet—well, about three miles away.

HUGH:

His name?

YOLLAND:

Wordsworth—William Wordsworth.

HUGH:

Did he speak of me to you?

YOLLAND:

Actually I never talked to him. I just saw him out walking—in the distance.

HUGH:

Wordsworth? ... No. I'm afraid we're not familiar with your literature, Lieutenant. We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean. We tend to overlook your island.

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YOLLAND:

I'm learning to speak Irish, sir.

HUGH:

Good.

YOLLAND:

Roland's teaching me.

HUGH:

Splendid.

YOLLAND:

I mean—I feel so cut off from the people here. And I was trying to explain a few minutes ago how remarkable a community this is. To meet people like yourself and Jimmy Jack who actually converse in Greek and Latin. And your place names—what was the one we came across this morning?—Termon, from Terminus, the god of

boundaries. It—it—it's really astonishing.

HUGH:

We like to think we endure around truths immemorially posited.

YOLLAND:

And your Gaelic literature—you're a poet yourself—

HUGH:

Only in Latin, I'm afraid.

YOLLAND:

I understand it's enormously rich and ornate.

HUGH:

Indeed, Lieutenant. A rich language. A rich literature. You'll find, sir, that certain cultures expend on their vocabularies and syntax acquisitive energies and ostentations entirely lacking in their material lives. I suppose you could call us a spiritual people.

OWEN:

(Not unkindly; more out of embarrassment before YOLLAND)

Will you stop that nonsense, Father.

HUGH:

Nonsense? What nonsense?

OWEN:

Do you know where the priest lives?

HUGH:

At Lis na Muc, over near ...

OWEN:

No, he doesn't. Lis na Muc, the Fort of the Pigs, has become Swinefort.

(Now turning the pages of the Name-Book—a page per name.)

And to get to Swinefort you pass through Greencastle and Fair Head and Strandhill and Gort and Whiteplains. And

the new school isn't at Poll na gCaorach—it's at Sheepsrock. Will you be able to find your way?

(HUGH *pours himself another drink. Then:—*)

HUGH:

Yes, it is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception—a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying

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to ... inevitabilities.

(*To OWEN*)

Can you give me the loan of half-a-crown? I'll repay you out of the subscriptions I'm collecting for the publication of my new book.

(*To YOLLAND*)

It is entitled: 'The Pentaglot Preceptor or Elementary Institute of the English, Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Irish Languages; Particularly Calculated for the Instruction of Such Ladies and Gentlemen as may Wish to Learn without the Help of a Master'.

YOLLAND:

(*Laughs*)

That's a wonderful title!

HUGH:

Between ourselves—the best part of the enterprise. Nor do I, in fact, speak Hebrew. And that last phrase—'without the Help of a Master'—that was written before the new national school was thrust upon me—do you think I ought to drop it now? After all you don't dispose of the cow just because it has produced a magnificent calf, do you?

YOLLAND:

You certainly do not.

HUGH:

The phrase goes. And I'm interrupting work of moment.

(*He goes to the door and stops there.*)

To return briefly to that other matter, Lieutenant. I understand your sense of exclusion, of being cut off from a life here; and I trust you will find access to us with my son's help. But remember that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen—to use an image you'll understand—it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of ... fact. Gentlemen.

(*He leaves.*)

OWEN:

'An *expeditio* with three purposes': the children laugh at him: he always promises three points and he never gets

beyond A and B.

MANUS:

He's an astute man.

OWEN:

He's bloody pompous.

YOLLAND:

But so astute.

OWEN:

And he drinks too much. Is it astute not to be able to adjust for survival? Enduring around truths immemorially posited-hah!

YOLLAND:

He knows what's happening.

OWEN:

What is happening?

YOLLAND:

I'm not sure. But I'm concerned about my part in it.

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It's an eviction of sorts.

OWEN:

We're making a six-inch map of the country. Is there something sinister in that?

YOLLAND:

Not in—

OWEN:

And we're taking place-names that are riddled with confusion and—

YOLLAND:

Who's confused? Are the people confused?

OWEN:

—and we're standardizing those names as accurately and as sensitively as we can.

YOLLAND:

Something is being eroded.

OWEN:

Back to the romance again. All right! Fine! Fine! Look where we've got to.

(He drops on his hands and knees and stabs a finger at the map.)

We've come to this crossroads. Come here and look at it, man! Look at it! And we call that crossroads Tobair Vree. And why do we call it Tobair Vree? I'll tell you why. Tobair means a well. But what does Vree mean? It's a corruption of Brian—

(Gaelic pronunciation)

Brian—an erosion of Tobair Bhriain. Because a hundred-and-fifty years ago there used to be a well there, not at the crossroads, mind you—that would be too simple—but in a field close to the crossroads. And an old man called Brian, whose face was disfigured by an enormous growth, got it into his head that the water in that well was blessed; and every day for seven months he went there and bathed his face in it. But the growth didn't go away; and one morning Brian was found drowned in that well. And ever since that crossroads is known as Tobair Vree—even though that well has long since dried up. I know the story because my grandfather told it to me. But ask Doalty—or Maire—or Bridget—even my father—even Manus—why it's called Tobair Vree; and do you think they'll know? I know they don't know. So the question I put to you, Lieutenant, is this: what do we do with a name like that? Do we scrap Tobair Vree altogether and call it—what?—The Cross? Crossroads? Or do we keep piety with a man long dead, long forgotten, his name 'eroded' beyond recognition, whose trivial little story nobody in the parish remembers?

YOLLAND:

Except you.

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OWEN:

I've left here.

YOLLAND:

You remember it.

OWEN:

I'm asking you: what do we write in the Name-Book?

YOLLAND:

Tobair Vree.

OWEN:

Even though the well is a hundred yards from the actual crossroads—and there's no well anyway—and what the hell does Vree mean?

YOLLAND:

Tobair Vree.

OWEN:

That's what you want?

YOLLAND:

Yes.

OWEN:

You're certain?

YOLLAND:

Yes.

OWEN:

Fine. Fine. That's what you'll get.

YOLLAND:

That's what you want, too, Roland.

(Pause.)

OWEN:

(Explodes)

George! For God's sake! *My name is not Roland!*

YOLLAND:

What?

OWEN:

(Softly)

My name is Owen.

(Pause.)

YOLLAND:

Not Roland?

OWEN:

Owen.

YOLLAND:

You mean to say—?

OWEN:

Owen.

YOLLAND:

But I've been—

OWEN:

O-w-e-n.

YOLLAND:

Where did Roland come from?

OWEN:

I don't know.

YOLLAND:

It was never Roland?

OWEN:

Never.

YOLLAND:

O my God!

(Pause. They stare at one another. Then the absurdity of the situation strikes them suddenly. They explode with laughter. OWEN pours drinks. As they roll about, their lines overlap.)

YOLLAND:

Why didn't you tell me?

OWEN:

Do I look like a Roland?

YOLLAND:

Spell Owen again.

OWEN:

I was getting fond of Roland.

YOLLAND:

O my God!

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OWEN:

O-w-e-n.

YOLLAND:

What'll we write—

OWEN:

—in the Name-Book?!

YOLLAND:

R-o-w-e-n!

OWEN:

Or what about Ol-

YOLLAND:

Ol-what?

OWEN:

Oland!

(And again they explode. MANUS enters. He is very elated.)

MANUS:

What's the celebration?

OWEN:

A christening!

YOLLAND:

A baptism!

OWEN:

A hundred christenings!

YOLLAND:

A thousand baptisms! Welcome to Eden!

OWEN:

Eden's right! We name a thing and—bang!—it leaps into existence!

YOLLAND:

Each name a perfect equation with its roots.

OWEN:

A perfect congruence with its reality.

(To MANUS)

Take a drink.

YOLLAND:

Poteen—beautiful.

OWEN:

Lying Anna's poteen.

YOLLAND:

Anna na mBreag's poteen.

OWEN:

Excellent, George.

YOLLAND:

I'll decode you yet.

OWEN:

(Offers drink)

Manus?

MANUS:

Not if that's what it does to you.

OWEN:

You're right. Steady—steady—sober up—sober up.

YOLLAND:

Sober as a judge, Owen.

(MANUS moves beside OWEN.)

MANUS:

I've got good news! Where's Father?

OWEN:

He's gone out. What's the good news?

MANUS:

I've been offered a job.

OWEN:

Where?

(*Now aware of YOLLAND.*)

Come on, man—speak in English.

MANUS:

For the benefit of the colonist?

OWEN:

He's a decent man.

MANUS:

Aren't they all at some level?

OWEN:

Please.

(MANUS *shrugs.*)

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He's been offered a job.

YOLLAND:

Where?

OWEN:

Well—tell us!

MANUS:

I've just had a meeting with two men from Inis Meadhon. They want me to go there and start a hedge-school. They're giving me a free house, free turf, and free milk; a rood of standing corn; twelve drills of potatoes; and—

(He stops.)

OWEN:

And what?

MANUS:

A salary of £42 a year!

OWEN:

Manus, that's wonderful!

MANUS:

You're talking to a man of substance.

OWEN:

I'm delighted.

YOLLAND:

Where's Inis Meadhon?

OWEN:

An island south of here. And they came looking for you?

MANUS:

Well, I mean to say ...

(OWEN punches MANUS.)

OWEN:

Aaaaagh! This calls for a real celebration.

YOLLAND:

Congratulations.

MANUS:

Thank you.

OWEN:

Where are you, Anna?

YOLLAND:

When do you start?

MANUS:

Next Monday.

OWEN:

We'll stay with you when we're there.

(To YOLLAND)

How long will it be before we reach Inis Meadhon?

YOLLAND:

How far south is it?

MANUS:

About fifty miles.

YOLLAND:

Could we make it by December?

OWEN:

We'll have Christmas together.

(Sings)

'Christmas Day on Inis Meadhon ...'

YOLLAND:

(Toast)

I hope you're very content there, Manus.

MANUS:

Thank you.

(YOLLAND holds out his hand. MANUS takes it. They shake warmly.)

OWEN:

(Toast)

Manus.

MANUS:

(Toast)

To Inis Meadhon.

(He drinks quickly and turns to leave.)

OWEN:

Hold on—hold on—refills coming up.

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MANUS:

I've got to go.

OWEN:

Come on, man; this is an occasion. Where are you rushing to?

MANUS:

I've got to tell Maire.

(MAIRE enters with her can of milk.)

MAIRE:

You've got to tell Maire what?

OWEN:

He's got a job!

MAIRE:

Manus?

OWEN:

He's been invited to start a hedge-school in Inis Meadhon.

MAIRE:

Where?

MANUS:

Inis Meadhon—the island! They're giving me £42 a year and ...

OWEN:

A house, fuel, milk, potatoes, corn, pupils, what-not!

MANUS:

I start on Monday.

OWEN:

You'll take a drink. Isn't it great?

MANUS:

I want to talk to you for—

MAIRE:

There's your milk. I need the can back.

(MANUS takes the can and runs up the steps.)

MANUS:

(As he goes)

How will you like living on an island?

OWEN:

You know George, don't you?

MAIRE:

We wave to each other across the fields.

YOLLAND:

Sorry-sorry?

OWEN:

She says you wave to each other across the fields.

YOLLAND:

Yes, we do; oh, yes; indeed we do.

MAIRE:

What's he saying?

OWEN:

He says you wave to each other across the fields.

MAIRE:

That's right. So we do.

YOLLAND:

What's she saying?

OWEN:

Nothing—nothing—nothing.

(To MAIRE)

What's the news?

(MAIRE *moves away, touching the text books with her toe.*)

MAIRE:

Not a thing. You're busy, the two of you.

OWEN:

We think we are.

MAIRE:

I hear the Fiddler O'Shea's about. There's some talk of a dance tomorrow night.

OWEN:

Where will it be?

MAIRE:

Maybe over the road. Maybe at Tobair Vree.

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YOLLAND:

Tobair Vree!

MAIRE:

Yes.

YOLLAND:

Tobair Vree! Tobair Vree!

MAIRE:

Does he know what I'm saying?

OWEN:

Not a word.

MAIRE:

Tell him then.

OWEN:

Tell him what?

MAIRE:

About the dance.

OWEN:

Maire says there may be a dance tomorrow night.

YOLLAND:

(To OWEN)

Yes? May I come?

(To MAIRE)

Would anybody object if I came?

MAIRE:

(To OWEN)

What's he saying?

OWEN:

(To YOLLAND)

Who would object?

MAIRE:

(To OWEN)

Did you tell him?

YOLLAND:

(To MAIRE)

Sorry-sorry?

OWEN:

(To MAIRE)

He says may he come?

MAIRE:

(To YOLLAND)

That's up to you.

YOLLAND:

(To OWEN)

What does she say?

OWEN:

(To YOLLAND)

She says—

YOLLAND:

(To MAIRE)

What-what?

MAIRE:

(To OWEN)

Well?

YOLLAND:

(To OWEN)

Sorry-sorry?

OWEN:

(To YOLLAND)

Will you go?

YOLLAND:

(To MAIRE)

Yes, yes, if I may.

MAIRE:

(To OWEN)

What does he say?

YOLLAND:

(To OWEN)

What is she saying?

OWEN:

Oh for God's sake!

(To MANUS *who is descending with the empty can.*)

You take on this job, Manus.

MANUS:

I'll walk you up to the house. Is your mother at home? I want to talk to her.

MAIRE:

What's the rush?

(To OWEN)

Didn't you offer me a drink?

OWEN:

Will you risk Anna na mBreag?

MAIRE:

Why not.

(YOLLAND *is suddenly intoxicated. He leaps up on a stool, raises his glass and shouts.*)

YOLLAND:

Anna na mBreag! Baile Beag! Inis Meadhon! Bombay! Tobair Vree! Eden! And poteen—correct, Owen?

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OWEN:

Perfect.

YOLLAND:

And bloody marvellous stuff it is, too. I love it! Bloody, bloody, bloody marvellous!

(Simultaneously with his final 'bloody marvellous' bring up very loud the introductory music of the reel. Then immediately go to black. Retain the music throughout the very brief interval.)

SCENE II

The following night.

This scene may be played in the schoolroom, but it would be preferable to lose—by lighting—as much of the schoolroom as possible, and to play the scene down front in a vaguely 'outside' area.

The music rises to a crescendo. Then in the distance we hear MAIRE and YOLLAND approach—laughing and running. They run on, hand-in-hand. They have just left the dance. Fade the music to distant background. Then after a time it is lost and replaced by guitar music. MAIRE and YOLLAND are now down front, still holding hands and excited by their sudden and impetuous escape from the dance.

MAIRE:

O my God, that leap across the ditch nearly killed me.

YOLLAND:

I could scarcely keep up with you.

MAIRE:

Wait till I get my breath back.

YOLLAND:

We must have looked as if we were being chased.

(They now realize they are alone and holding hands—the beginnings of embarrassment. The hands disengage. They begin to drift apart. Pause.)

MAIRE:

Manus'll wonder where I've got to.

YOLLAND:

I wonder did anyone notice us leave.

(Pause. Slightly further apart.)

MAIRE:

The grass must be wet. My feet are soaking.

YOLLAND:

Your feet must be wet. The grass is soaking.

(Another pause. Another few paces apart. They are now a long distance from one another.)

YOLLAND:

(Indicating himself)

George.

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(MAIRE nods: Yes-yes. Then:—)

MAIRE:

Lieutenant George.

YOLLAND:

Don't call me that. I never think of myself as Lieutenant.

MAIRE:

What-what?

YOLLAND:

Sorry-sorry?

(He points to himself again.)

George.

(MAIRE nods: Yes-yes. Then points to herself.)

MAIRE:

Maire.

YOLLAND:

Yes, I know you're Maire. Of course I know you're Maire. I mean I've been watching you night and day for the past—

MAIRE:

(Eagerly)

What-what?

YOLLAND:

(Points)

Maire.

(Points.)

George.

(Points both.)

Maire and George.

(MAIRE *nods*: Yes-yes-yes.)

I—I—I—

MAIRE:

Say anything at all. I love the sound of your speech.

YOLLAND:

(Eagerly)

Sorry-sorry?

(In acute frustration he looks around, hoping for some inspiration that will provide him with communicative means. Now he has a thought: he tries raising his voice and articulating in a staccato style and with equal and absurd emphasis on each word.)

Every-morning-I-see-you-feeding-brown-hens-and-giving-meal-to-black-calf—

(*The of it*)

—O my God.

(MAIRE *smiles*. She moves towards him. She will try to communicate in Latin.)

MAIRE:

Tu es centurio in—in—in exercitu Britannico—

YOLLAND:

Yes-yes? Go on—go on—say anything at all—I love the sound of your speech.

MAIRE:

—*et es in castris quae—quae—quae sunt in agro—*

(The futility of it)

—O my God.

(YOLLAND smiles. He moves towards her. Now for her English words.)

George—water.

YOLLAND:

‘Water’? Water! Oh yes—water—water—very good—water—good—good.

MAIRE:

Fire.

YOLLAND:

Fire—indeed—wonderful—fire, fire, fire—splendid—splendid!

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MAIRE:

Ah ... ah ...

YOLLAND:

Yes? Go on.

MAIRE:

Earth.

YOLLAND:

‘Earth’?

MAIRE:

Earth. Earth.

(YOLLAND still does not understand. MAIRE stoops down and picks up a handful of clay. Holding it out.)

Earth.

YOLLAND:

Earth! Of course—earth! Earth. Earth. Good Lord, Maire, your English is perfect!

MAIRE:

(Eagerly)

What-what?

YOLLAND:

Perfect English. English perfect.

MAIRE:

George—

YOLLAND:

That's beautiful—oh, that's really beautiful.

MAIRE:

George—

YOLLAND:

Say it again—say it again—

MAIRE:

Shhh.

(She holds her hand up for silence—she is trying to remember for one line of English. Now she remembers it and she delivers the line as if English were her language—easily, fluidly, conversationally.)

George, 'In Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoll.'

YOLLAND:

Good God, do you? That's where my mother comes from—Norfolk. Norwich actually. Not exactly Norwich town but a small village called Little Walsingham close beside it. But in our own village of Winfarthing we have a maypole too and every year on the first of May—

(He stops abruptly, only now realizing. He stares at her. She in turn misunderstands his excitement.)

MAIRE:

(To herself)

Mother of God, my Aunt Mary wouldn't have taught me something dirty, would she?

(Pause. YOLLAND extends his hand to MAIRE. She turns away from him and moves slowly across the stage.)

YOLLAND:

Maire.

(She still moves away.)

Maire Chatach.

(She still moves away.)

Bun na hAbhann?

(He says the name softly, almost privately, very tentatively, as if he were searching for a sound she might

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respond to. He tries again.)

Druim Dubh?

(MAIRE stops. She is listening. YOLLAND is encouraged.)

Poll na gCaorach. Lis Maol.

(MAIRE turns towards him.)

Lis na nGall.

MAIRE:

Lis na nGradh.

(They are now facing each other and begin moving—almost imperceptibly—towards one another.)

MAIRE:

Carraig an Phoill.

YOLLAND:

Carraig na Ri. Loch na nEan.

MAIRE:

Loch an Iubhair. Machaire Buidhe.

YOLLAND:

Machaire Mor. Cnoc na Mona.

MAIRE:

Cnoc na nGabhar.

YOLLAND:

Mullach.

MAIRE:

Port.

YOLLAND:

Tor.

MAIRE:

Lag.

(She holds out her hands to YOLLAND. He takes them. Each now speaks almost to himself/herself.)

YOLLAND:

I wish to God you could understand me.

MAIRE:

Soft hands; a gentleman's hands.

YOLLAND:

Because if you could understand me I could tell you how I spend my days either thinking of you or gazing up at your house in the hope that you'll appear even for a second.

MAIRE:

Every evening you walk by yourself along the Tra Bhan and every morning you wash yourself in front of your tent.

YOLLAND:

I would tell you how beautiful you are, curly-headed Maire. I would so like to tell you how beautiful you are.

MAIRE:

Your arms are long and thin and the skin on your shoulders is very white.

YOLLAND:

I would tell you ...

MAIRE:

Don't stop—I know what you're saying.

YOLLAND:

I would tell you how I want to be here—to live here—always—with you—always, always.

MAIRE:

'Always'? What is that word—'always'?

YOLLAND:

Yes-yes; always.

MAIRE:

You're trembling.

YOLLAND:

Yes, I'm trembling because of you.

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MAIRE:

I'm trembling, too.

(She holds his face in her hand.)

YOLLAND:

I've made up my mind ...

MAIRE:

Shhhh.

YOLLAND:

I'm not going to leave here ...

MAIRE:

Shhh—listen to me. I want you, too, soldier.

YOLLAND:

Don't stop—I know what you're saying.

MAIRE:

I want to live with you—anywhere—anywhere at all—always—always.

YOLLAND:

'Always'? What is that word—'always'?

MAIRE:

Take me away with you, George.

(Pause. Suddenly they kiss. SARAH enters. She sees them. She stands shocked, staring at them. Her mouth works. Then almost to herself.)

SARAH:

Manus ... Manus!

(SARAH runs off. Music to crescendo.)

ACT THREE

The following evening. It is raining.

SARAH and OWEN alone in the schoolroom. SARAH, more waif-like than ever, is sitting very still on a stool, an open book across her knee. She is pretending to read but her eyes keep going up to the room upstairs. OWEN is working on the floor as before, surrounded by his reference books, map, Name-Book, etc. But he has neither concentration nor interest; and like SARAH he glances up at the upstairs room.

After a few seconds MANUS emerges and descends, carrying a large paper bag which already contains his clothes. His movements are determined and urgent. He moves around the classroom, picking up books, examining each title carefully, and choosing about six of them which he puts into his bag. As he selects these books:—

OWEN:

You know that old limekiln beyond Con Connie Tim's pub, the place we call The Murren?—do you know why it's called The Murren?

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(MANUS *does not answer.*)

I've only just discovered: it's a corruption of Saint Muranus. It seems Saint Muranus had a monastery somewhere about there at the beginning of the seventh century. And over the years the name became shortened to the Murren. Very unattractive name, isn't it? I think we should go back to the original—Saint Muranus. What do you think? The original's Saint Muranus. Don't you think we should go back to that?

(No response. OWEN begins writing the name into the Name-Book. MANUS is now rooting about among the forgotten implements for a piece of rope. He finds a piece. He begins to tie the mouth of the flimsy, overloaded bag—and it bursts, the contents spilling out on the floor.)

MANUS:

Bloody, bloody, bloody hell!

(His voice breaks in exasperation: he is about to cry. OWEN leaps to his feet.)

OWEN:

Hold on. I've a bag upstairs.

(He runs upstairs. SARAH waits until OWEN is off. Then:—)

SARAH:

Manus ... Manus, I ...

(MANUS hears SARAH but makes no acknowledgement. He gathers up his belongings. OWEN reappears with the bag he had on his arrival.)

OWEN:

Take this one—I'm finished with it anyway. And it's supposed to keep out the rain.

(MANUS transfers his few belongings. OWEN drifts back to his task. The packing is now complete.)

MANUS:

You'll be here for a while? For a week or two anyhow?

OWEN:

Yes.

MANUS:

You're not leaving with the army?

OWEN:

I haven't made up my mind. Why?

MANUS:

Those Inis Meadhon men will be back to see why I haven't turned up. Tell them—tell them I'll write to them as soon as I can. Tell them I still want the job but that it might be three or four months before I'm free to go.

OWEN:

You're being damned stupid, Manus.

MANUS:

Will you do that for me?

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OWEN:

Clear out now and Lancey'll think you're involved somehow.

MANUS:

Will you do that for me?

OWEN:

Wait a couple of days even. You know George—he's a bloody romantic—maybe he's gone out to one of the islands and he'll suddenly reappear tomorrow morning. Or maybe the search party'll find him this evening lying drunk somewhere in the sandhills. You've seen him drinking that poteen—doesn't know how to handle it. Had he drink on him last night at the dance?

MANUS:

I had a stone in my hand when I went out looking for him—I was going to fell him. The lame scholar turned violent.

OWEN:

Did anybody see you?

MANUS:

(Again close to tears)

But when I saw him standing there at the side of the road—smiling—and her face buried in his shoulder—I couldn't even go close to them. I just shouted something stupid—something like, 'You're a bastard, Yolland.' If I'd even said it in English ... 'cos he kept saying 'Sorry-sorry?' The wrong gesture in the wrong language.

OWEN:

And you didn't see him again?

MANUS:

'Sorry?'

OWEN:

Before you leave tell Lancey that—just to clear yourself.

MANUS:

What have I to say to Lancey? You'll give that message to the islandmen?

OWEN:

I'm warning you: run away now and you're bound to be—

MANUS:

(To SARAH)

Will you give that message to the Inis Meadhon men?

SARAH:

I will.

(MANUS picks up an old sack and throws it across his shoulders.)

OWEN:

Have you any idea where you're going?

MANUS:

Mayo, maybe. I remember Mother saying she had cousins somewhere away out in the Erris Peninsula.

(He picks up his bag.)

Tell Father I took only the Virgil and the Caesar and the Aeschylus because they're mine anyway—I bought them with the money I got for that pet lamb I

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reared—do you remember that pet lamb? And tell him that Nora Dan never returned the dictionary and that she still owes him two-and-six for last quarter's reading—he always forgets those things.

OWEN:

Yes.

MANUS:

And his good shirt's ironed and hanging up in the press and his clean socks are in the butter-box under the bed.

OWEN:

All right.

MANUS:

And tell him I'll write.

OWEN:

If Maire asks where you've gone ...?

MANUS:

He'll need only half the amount of milk now, won't he? Even less than half—he usually takes his tea black.

(Pause.)

And when he comes in at night—you'll hear him; he makes a lot of noise—I usually come down and give him a hand up. Those stairs are dangerous without a banister. Maybe before you leave you'd get Big Ned Frank to put up some sort of a handrail.

(Pause.)

And if you can bake, he's very fond of soda bread.

OWEN:

I can give you money. I'm wealthy. Do you know what they pay me? Two shillings a day for this—this—this—

(MANUS rejects the offer by holding out his hand.)

Goodbye, Manus.

(MANUS and OWEN shake hands. Then MANUS picks up his bag briskly and goes towards the door. He stops a

few paces beyond SARAH, turns, comes back to her. He addresses her as he did in Act One but now without warmth or concern for her.)

MANUS:

What is your name?

(Pause.)

Come on. What is your name?

SARAH:

My name is Sarah.

MANUS:

Just Sarah? Sarah what?

(Pause.)

Well?

SARAH:

Sarah Johnny Sally.

MANUS:

And where do you live? Come on.

SARAH:

I live in Bun na hAbhann.

(She is now crying quietly.)

MANUS:

Very good, Sarah Johnny Sally. There's nothing to stop you now—nothing in the wide world.

(Pause. He looks down at her.)

It's all right—it's all right—you did no harm—you did no harm at all.

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(He stoops over her and kisses the top of her head—as if in absolution. Then briskly to the door and off.)

OWEN:

Good luck, Manus!

SARAH:

(Quietly)

I'm sorry ... I'm sorry ... I'm so sorry, Manus ...

(OWEN tries to work but cannot concentrate. He begins folding up the map. As he does:—)

OWEN:

Is there a class this evening?

(SARAH nods: yes.)

I suppose Father knows. Where is he anyhow?

(SARAH points.)

Where?

(SARAH mimes rocking a baby.)

I don't understand—where?

(SARAH repeats the mime and wipes away tears. OWEN is still puzzled.)

It doesn't matter. He'll probably turn up.

(BRIDGET and DOALTY enter, sacks over their heads against the rain. They are self-consciously noisier, more ebullient, more garrulous than ever—brimming over with excitement and gossip and brio.)

DOALTY:

You're missing the crack, boys! Cripes, you're missing the crack! Fifty more soldiers arrived an hour ago!

BRIDGET:

And they're spread out in a big line from Sean Neal's over to Lag and they're moving straight across the fields towards Cnoc na nGabhar!

DOALTY:

Prodding every inch of the ground in front of them with their bayonets and scattering animals and hens in all directions!

BRIDGET:

And tumbling everything before them—fences, ditches, haystacks, turf-stacks!

DOALTY:

They came to Barney Petey's field of corn—straight through it be God as if it was heather!

BRIDGET:

Not a blade of it left standing!

DOALTY:

And Barney Petey just out of his bed and running after them in his drawers: 'You hours you! Get out of my corn, you hours you!'

BRIDGET:

First time he ever ran in his life.

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DOALTY:

Too lazy, the wee get, to cut it when the weather was good.

(SARAH *begins putting out the seats.*)

BRIDGET:

Tell them about Big Hughie.

DOALTY:

Cripes, if you'd seen your aul fella, Owen.

BRIDGET:

They were all inside in Anna na mBreag's pub—all the crowd from the wake—

DOALTY:

And they hear the commotion and they all come out to the street—

BRIDGET:

Your father in front; the Infant Prodigy footless behind him!

DOALTY:

And your aul fella, he sees the army stretched across the countryside—

BRIDGET:

O my God!

DOALTY:

And Cripes he starts roaring at them!

BRIDGET:

'Visigoths! Huns! Vandals!'

DOALTY:

'Ignari! Stulti! Rustici!'

BRIDGET:

And wee Jimmy Jack jumping up and down and shouting, 'Thermopylae! Thermopylae!'

DOALTY:

You never saw crack like it in your life, boys. Come away on out with me, Sarah, and you'll see it all.

BRIDGET:

Big Hughie's fit to take no class. Is Manus about?

OWEN:

Manus is gone.

BRIDGET:

Gone where?

OWEN:

He's left—gone away.

DOALTY:

Where to?

OWEN:

He doesn't know. Mayo, maybe.

DOALTY:

What's on in Mayo?

OWEN:

(To BRIDGET)

Did you see George and Maire Chatach leave the dance last night?

BRIDGET:

We did. Didn't we, Doalty?

OWEN:

Did you see Manus following them out?

BRIDGET:

I didn't see him going out but I saw him coming in by himself later.

OWEN:

Did George and Maire come back to the dance?

BRIDGET:

No.

OWEN:

Did you see them again?

BRIDGET:

He left her home. We passed them going up the back

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road—didn't we, Doalty?

OWEN:

And Manus stayed till the end of the dance?

DOALTY:

We know nothing. What are you asking us for?

OWEN:

Because Lancey'll question me when he hears Manus's gone.

(Back to BRIDGET.)

That's the way George went home? By the back road? That's where you saw him?

BRIDGET:

Leave me alone, Owen. I know nothing about Yolland. If you want to know about Yolland, ask the Donnelly twins.

(Silence. DOALTY moves over to the window.)

(To SARAH)

He's a powerful fiddler, O'Shea, isn't he? He told our Seamus he'll come back for a night at Hallowe'en.

(OWEN goes to DOALTY who looks resolutely out the window.)

OWEN:

What's this about the Donnellys?

(Pause.)

Were they about last night?

DOALTY:

Didn't see them if they were.

(Begins whistling through his teeth.)

OWEN:

George is a friend of mine.

DOALTY:

So.

OWEN:

I want to know what's happened to him.

DOALTY:

Couldn't tell you.

OWEN:

What have the Donnelly twins to do with it?

(Pause.)

Doalty!

DOALTY:

I know nothing, Owen—nothing at all—I swear to God. All I know is this: on my way to the dance I saw their boat beached at Port. It wasn't there on my way home, after I left Bridget. And that's all I know. As God's my judge. The half-dozen times I met him I didn't know a word he said to me; but he seemed a right enough sort ...

(With sudden excessive interest in the scene outside.)

Cripes, they're crawling all over the place! Cripes, there's millions of them! Cripes, they're levelling the whole land!

(OWEN moves away. MAIRE enters. She is bareheaded and wet from the rain; her hair in disarray. She attempts to appear normal but she is in acute distress, on the verge of being distraught. She is carrying the milk-can.)

MAIRE:

Honest to God, I must be going off my head. I'm halfway here and I think to myself, 'Isn't this can very light?' and I look into it and isn't it empty.

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OWEN:

It doesn't matter.

MAIRE:

How will you manage for tonight?

OWEN:

We have enough.

MAIRE:

Are you sure?

OWEN:

Plenty, thanks.

MAIRE:

It'll take me no time at all to go back up for some.

OWEN:

Honestly, Maire.

MAIRE:

Sure it's better you have it than that black calf that's ... that ...

(She looks around.)

Have you heard anything?

OWEN:

Nothing.

MAIRE:

What does Lancey say?

OWEN:

I haven't seen him since this morning.

MAIRE:

What does he *think*?

OWEN:

We really didn't talk. He was here for only a few seconds.

MAIRE:

He left me home, Owen. And the last thing he said to me—he tried to speak in Irish—he said, 'I'll see you yesterday'—he meant to say 'I'll see you tomorrow.' And I laughed that much he pretended to get cross and he said 'Maypoll! Maypoll!' because I said that word wrong. And off he went, laughing—laughing, Owen! Do you think he's all right? What do *you* think?

OWEN:

I'm sure he'll turn up. Maire.

MAIRE:

He comes from a tiny wee place called Winfarthing.

(She suddenly drops on her hands and knees on the floor—where OWEN had his map a few minutes ago—and with her finger traces out an outline map.)

Come here till you see. Look. There's Winfarthing. And there's two other wee villages right beside it; one of them's called Barton Bendish—it's there; and the other's called Saxingham Nethergate—it's about there. And there's Little Walsingham—that's his mother's townland. Aren't they odd names? Sure they make no sense to me at all. And Winfarthing's near a big town called Norwich. And Norwich is in a county called Norfolk. And Norfolk is in the east of England. He drew a map for me on the wet strand and wrote the names on it. I have it all in my head now: Winfarthing—Barton Bendish—Saxingham Nethergate—Little Walsingham—Norwich—Norfolk.

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Strange sounds, aren't they? But nice sounds; like Jimmy Jack reciting his Homer.

(She gets to her feet and looks around; she is almost serene now. To SARAH)

You were looking lovely last night, Sarah. Is that the dress you got from Boston? Green suits you.

(To OWEN)

Something very bad's happened to him, Owen. I know. He wouldn't go away without telling me. Where is he, Owen? You're his friend—where is he?

(Again she looks around the room; then sits on a stool.)

I didn't get a chance to do my geography last night. The master'll be angry with me.

(She rises again.)

I think I'll go home now. The wee ones have to be washed and put to bed and that black calf has to be fed ... My hands are that rough; they're still blistered from the hay. I'm ashamed of them. I hope to God there's no hay to be saved in Brooklyn.

(She stops at the door.)

Did you hear? Nellie Ruadh's baby died in the middle of the night. I must go up to the wake. It didn't last long, did it?

(MAIRE leaves. Silence. Then.)

OWEN:

I don't think there'll be any class. Maybe you should ...

(OWEN begins picking up his texts. DOALTY goes to him.)

DOALTY:

Is he long gone?—Manus.

OWEN:

Half an hour.

DOALTY:

Stupid bloody fool.

OWEN:

I told him that.

DOALTY:

Do they know he's gone?

OWEN:

Who?

DOALTY:

The army.

OWEN:

Not yet.

DOALTY:

They'll be after him like bloody beagles. Bloody, bloody fool, limping along the coast. They'll overtake him before night for Christ's sake.

(DOALTY returns to the window. LANCEY enters—now the commanding officer.)

OWEN:

Any news? Any word?

(LANCEY moves into the centre of the room, looking around as he does.)

LANCEY:

I understood there was a class. Where are the others?

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OWEN:

There was to be a class but my father—

LANCEY:

This will suffice. I will address them and it will be their responsibility to pass on what I have to say to every family in this section.

(LANCEY indicates to OWEN to translate. OWEN hesitates, trying to assess the change in LANCEY's manner and attitude.)

I'm in a hurry, O'Donnell.

OWEN:

The captain has an announcement to make.

LANCEY:

Lieutenant Yolland is missing. We are searching for him. If we don't find him, or if we receive no information as to where he is to be found, I will pursue the following course of action.

(He indicates to OWEN to translate.)

OWEN:

They are searching for George. If they don't find him—

LANCEY:

Commencing twenty-four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg.

(OWEN stares at LANCEY.)

At once.

OWEN:

Beginning this time tomorrow they'll kill every animal in Baile Beag—unless they're told where George is.

LANCEY:

If that doesn't bear results, commencing forty-eight hours from now we will embark on a series of evictions and levelling of every abode in the following selected areas—

OWEN:

You're not—!

LANCEY:

Do your job. Translate.

OWEN:

If they still haven't found him in two days time they'll begin evicting and levelling every house starting with these townlands.

(LANCEY reads from his list.)

LANCEY:

Swinefort.

OWEN:

Lis na Muc.

LANCEY:

Burnfoot.

OWEN:

Bun na hAbhann.

LANCEY:

Dromduff.

OWEN:

Druim Dubh.

LANCEY:

Whiteplains.

OWEN:

Machaire Ban.

LANCEY:

Kings Head.

OWEN:

Cnoc na Ri.

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LANCEY:

If by then the lieutenant hasn't been found, we will proceed until a complete clearance is made of this entire section.

OWEN:

If Yolland hasn't been got by then, they will ravish the whole parish.

LANCEY:

I trust they know exactly what they've got to do.

(Pointing to BRIDGET.)

I know you. I know where you live.

(Pointing to SARAH.)

Who are you? Name!

(SARAH's mouth opens and shuts, opens and shuts. Her face becomes contorted.)

What's your name?

(Again SARAH tries frantically.)

OWEN:

Go on, Sarah. You can tell him.

(But SARAH cannot. And she knows she cannot. She closes her mouth. Her head goes down.)

OWEN:

Her name is Sarah Johnny Sally.

LANCEY:

Where does she live?

OWEN:

Bun na hAbhann.

LANCEY:

Where?

OWEN:

Burnfoot.

LANCEY:

I want to talk to your brother—is he here?

OWEN:

Not at the moment.

LANCEY:

Where is he?

OWEN:

He's at a wake.

LANCEY:

What wake?

(DOALTY, who has been looking out the window all through LANCEY's announcements, now speaks—calmly, almost casually.)

DOALTY:

Tell him his whole camp's on fire.

LANCEY:

What's your name?

(To OWEN)

Who's that lout?

OWEN:

Doalty Dan Doalty.

LANCEY:

Where does he live?

OWEN:

Tulach Alainn.

LANCEY:

What do we call it?

OWEN:

Fair Hill. He says your whole camp is on fire.

(LANCEY rushes to the window and looks out. Then he wheels on DOALTY.)

LANCEY:

I'll remember you, Mr Doalty.

(To OWEN)

You carry

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a big responsibility in all this.

(He goes off.)

BRIDGET:

Mother of God, does he mean it, Owen?

OWEN:

Yes, he does.

BRIDGET:

We'll have to hide the beasts somewhere—our Seamus'll know where. Maybe at the back of Lis na nGradh—or in the caves at the far end of the Tra Bhan. Come on, Doalty! Come on! Don't be standing about there!

(DOALTY does not move. BRIDGET runs to the door and stops suddenly. She sniffs the air. Panic.)

The sweet smell! Smell it! It's the sweet smell! Jesus, it's the potato blight!

DOALTY:

It's the army tents burning, Bridget.

BRIDGET:

Is it? Are you sure? Is that what it is? God, I thought we were destroyed altogether. Come on! Come on!

(She runs off. OWEN goes to SARAH who is preparing to leave.)

OWEN:

How are you? Are you all right?

(SARAH nods: Yes.)

OWEN:

Don't worry. It will come back to you again.

(SARAH shakes her head.)

OWEN:

It will. You're upset now. He frightened you. That's all's wrong.

(Again SARAH shakes her head, slowly, emphatically, and smiles at OWEN. Then she leaves. OWEN busies himself gathering his belongings. DOALTY leaves the window and goes to him.)

DOALTY:

He'll do it, too.

OWEN:

Unless Yolland's found.

DOALTY:

Hah!

OWEN:

Then he'll certainly do it.

DOALTY:

When my grandfather was a boy they did the same thing.

(Simply, altogether without irony)

And after all the trouble you went to, mapping the place and thinking up new names for it.

(OWEN busies himself. Pause. DOALTY almost dreamily.)

I've damned little to defend but he'll not put me out without a fight. And there'll be others who think the same as me.

OWEN:

That's a matter for you.

DOALTY:

If we'd all stick together. If we knew how to defend ourselves.

OWEN:

Against a trained army.

DOALTY:

The Donnelly twins know how.

OWEN:

If they could be found.

DOALTY:

If they could be found.

(He goes to the door.)

Give me a shout after you've finished with Lancey. I might know something then.

(He leaves.)

(OWEN picks up the Name-Book. He looks at it momentarily, then puts it on top of the pile he is carrying. It falls to the floor. He stoops to pick it up—hesitates—leaves it. He goes upstairs. As OWEN ascends, HUGH and JIMMY JACK enter. Both wet and drunk. JIMMY is very unsteady. He is trotting behind HUGH, trying to break in on HUGH's declamation. HUGH is equally drunk but more experienced in drunkenness: there is a portion of his mind which retains its clarity.)

HUGH:

There I was, appropriately disposed to proffer my condolences to the bereaved mother ...

JIMMY:

Hugh—

HUGH:

... and about to enter the *domus lugubris*—Maire Chatach?

JIMMY:

The wake house.

HUGH:

Indeed—when I experience a plucking at my elbow: Mister George Alexander, Justice of the Peace. ‘My tidings are infelicitous,’ said he—Bridget? Too slow. Doalty?

JIMMY:

Infelix—unhappy.

HUGH:

Unhappy indeed. ‘Master Bartley Timlin has been appointed to the new national school.’ ‘Timlin? Who is Timlin?’ ‘A schoolmaster from Cork. And he will be a major asset to the community: he is also a very skilled bacon-curer!’

JIMMY:

Hugh—

HUGH:

Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! The Cork bacon-curer! *Barbarus hic ego sum quia non intelligor ulli*—James?

JIMMY:

Ovid.

HUGH:

Procede.

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JIMMY:

‘I am a barbarian in this place because I am not understood by anyone.’

HUGH:

Indeed—

(*Shouts*)

Manus! Tea! I will compose a satire on Master Bartley Timlin, schoolmaster and bacon-curer. But it will be too

easy, won't it?

(*Shouts*)

Strong tea! Black!

(*The only way JIMMY can get HUGH's attention is by standing in front of him and holding his arms.*)

JIMMY:

Will you listen to me, Hugh!

HUGH:

James.

(*Shouts*)

And a slice of soda bread.

JIMMY:

I'm going to get married.

HUGH:

Well!

JIMMY:

At Christmas.

HUGH:

Splendid.

JIMMY:

To Athene.

HUGH:

Who?

JIMMY:

Pallas Athene.

HUGH:

Glaukopis Athene?

JIMMY:

Flashing-eyed, Hugh, flashing-eyed!

(He attempts the gesture he has made before: standing to attention, the momentary spasm, the salute, the face raised in pained ecstasy—but the body does not respond efficiently this time. The gesture is grotesque.)

HUGH:

The lady has assented?

JIMMY:

She asked *me*—I assented.

HUGH:

Ah. When was this?

JIMMY:

Last night.

HUGH:

What does her mother say?

JIMMY:

Metis from Hellespont? Decent people—good stock.

HUGH:

And her father?

JIMMY:

I'm meeting Zeus tomorrow. Hugh, will you be my best man?

HUGH:

Honoured, James; profoundly honoured.

JIMMY:

You know what I'm looking for, Hugh, don't you? I mean to say—you know—I—I—I joke like the rest of them—you

know?—

(Again he attempts the pathetic routine but abandons it instantly.)

You know yourself, Hugh—don't you?—you know all that. But what I'm really looking for, Hugh—what I really want—companionship, Hugh—at my

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time of life, companionship, company, someone to talk to. Away up in Beann na Gaoithe—you've no idea how lonely it is. Companionship—correct, Hugh? Correct?

HUGH:

Correct.

JIMMY:

And I always liked her, Hugh. Correct?

HUGH:

Correct, James.

JIMMY:

Someone to talk to.

HUGH:

Indeed.

JIMMY:

That's all, Hugh. The whole story. You know it all now, Hugh. You know it all.

(As JIMMY says those last lines he is crying, shaking his head, trying to keep his balance, and holding a finger up to his lips in absurd gestures of secrecy and intimacy. Now he staggers away, tries to sit on a stool, misses it, slides to the floor, his feet in front of him, his back against the broken cart. Almost at once he is asleep. HUGH watches all of this. Then he produces his flask and is about to pour a drink when he sees the Name-Book on the floor. He picks it up and leafs through it, pronouncing the strange names as he does. Just as he begins, OWEN emerges and descends with two bowls of tea.)

HUGH:

Ballybeg. Burnfoot. King's Head. Whiteplains. Fair Hill. Dunboy. Green Bank.

(OWEN snatches the book from HUGH.)

OWEN:

I'll take that.

(In apology.)

It's only a catalogue of names.

HUGH:

I know what it is.

OWEN:

A mistake—my mistake—nothing to do with us. I hope that's strong enough
(tea).

(He throws the book on the table and crosses over to JIMMY.)

Jimmy. Wake up, Jimmy. Wake up, man.

JIMMY:

What—what-what?

OWEN:

Here. Drink this. Then go on away home. There may be trouble. Do you hear me, Jimmy? There may be trouble.

HUGH:

(Indicating Name-Book)

We must learn those new names.

OWEN:

(Searching around)

Did you see a sack lying about?

HUGH:

We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home.

(OWEN finds a sack and throws it across his shoulders.)

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OWEN:

I know where I live.

HUGH:

James thinks he knows, too. I look at James and three thoughts occur to me: A—that it is not the literal past, the ‘facts’ of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. James has ceased to make that discrimination.

OWEN:

Don't lecture me, Father.

HUGH:

B—we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilize. Is there no soda bread?

OWEN:

And C, Father—one single, unalterable ‘fact’: if Yolland is not found, we are all going to be evicted. Lancey has issued the order.

HUGH:

Ah. *Edictum imperatoris*.

OWEN:

You should change out of those wet clothes. I've got to go. I've got to see Doalty Dan Doalty.

HUGH:

What about?

OWEN:

I'll be back soon.

(As OWEN exits.)

HUGH:

Take care, Owen. To remember everything is a form of madness.

(He looks around the room, carefully, as if he were about to leave it forever. Then he looks at Jimmy, asleep again.)

The road to Sligo. A spring morning. 1798. Going into battle. Do you remember, James? Two young gallants with pikes across their shoulders and the *Aeneid* in their pockets. Everything seemed to find definition that spring—a congruence, a miraculous matching of hope and past and present and possibility. Striding across the fresh, green

land. The rhythms of perception heightened. The whole enterprise of consciousness accelerated. We were gods that morning, James; and I had recently married *my* goddess, Caitlin Dubh Nic Reactainn, may she rest in peace. And to leave her and my infant son in his cradle—that was heroic, too. By God, sir, we were magnificent. We marched as far as—where was it?—Glenties! All of twenty-three miles in one day. And it was there, in Phelan's pub, that we got homesick for Athens, just like Ulysses. The *desiderium nostrorum*—the need for our own. Our *pietas*, James, was for

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older, quieter things. And that was the longest twenty-three miles back I ever made.

(*Toasts JIMMY.*)

My friend, confusion is not an ignoble condition.

(MAIRE *enters.*)

MAIRE:

I'm back again. I set out for somewhere but I couldn't remember where. So I came back here.

HUGH:

Yes, I will teach you English, Maire Chatach.

MAIRE:

Will you, Master? I must learn it. I need to learn it.

HUGH:

Indeed you may well be my only pupil.

(*He goes towards the steps and begins to ascend.*)

MAIRE:

When can we start?

HUGH:

Not today. Tomorrow, perhaps. After the funeral. We'll begin tomorrow.

(*Ascending*)

But don't expect too much. I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret between privacies? I have no idea. But it's all we have. I have no idea at all.

(*He is now at the top.*)

MAIRE:

Master, what does the English word 'always' mean?

HUGH:

Semper—per omnia saecula. The Greeks called it 'aeí'. It's not a word I'd start with. It's a silly word, girl.

(*He sits. JIMMY is awake. He gets to his feet. MAIRE sees the Name-Book, picks it up, and sits with it on her knee.*)

MAIRE:

When he comes back, this is where he'll come to. He told me this is where he was happiest.

(*JIMMY sits beside MAIRE.*)

JIMMY:

Do you know the Greek word *endogamein*? It means to marry within the tribe. And the word *exogamein* means to marry outside the tribe. And you don't cross those borders casually—both sides get very angry. Now, the problem is this: Is Athene sufficiently mortal or am I sufficiently godlike for the marriage to be acceptable to her people and to my people? You think about that.

HUGH:

Urbs antiqua fuit—there was an ancient city which, 'tis said, Juno loved above all the lands. And it was the goddess's aim and cherished hope that here should be the capital of all nations—should the fates perchance allow that. Yet in truth she discovered that a race was springing from

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Trojan blood to overthrow some day these Tyrian towers—a people *late regem belloque superbum*—kings of broad realms and proud in war who would come forth for Lybia's downfall—such was—such was the course—such was the course ordained—ordained by fate ... What the hell's wrong with me? Sure I know it backways. I'll begin again.

Urbs antiqua fuit—there was an ancient city which, 'tis said, Juno loved above all the lands.

(*Begin to bring down the lights.*)

And it was the goddess's aim and cherished hope that here should be the capital of all nations—should the fates perchance allow that. Yet in truth she discovered that a race was springing from Trojan blood to overthrow some day these Tyrian towers—a people kings of broad realms and proud in war who would come forth for Lybia's downfall ...

Black

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Back matter

GREEK AND LATIN USED IN THE TEXT

" (Homer, *Odyssey*, XIII, 420):

(*Lit.*) 'But the grey-eyed goddess Athene then replied to him'

(Homer, *Odyssey*, XIII, 423–4):

(*Lit.*) '... but he sits at ease in the halls of the Sons of Athens ...'

' (Homer, *Odyssey*, XIII, 429):

(*Lit.*) 'As she spoke Athene touched him with her wand'

(Homer, *Odyssey*, XIII, 433):

(*Lit.*) 'She dimmed his eyes'

: (*Lit.*) flashing-eyed Athene

' (Homer, *Odyssey*, XIV, 1):

(*Lit.*) 'But he went forth from the harbour ...'

' (Homer, *Odyssey*, XIV, 3–4):

(*Lit.*) '... he cared very much for his substance ...'

Esne fatigata?: Are you tired?

Sum fatigatissima: I am very tired

Bene! Optime!: Good! Excellent!

Ignari, stulti, rustici: Ignoramuses, fools, peasants

Responde—responde!: Answer—answer!

: a god

: a goddess

Nigra fere et presso pinguis sub vomere terra

Land that is black and rich beneath the pressure of the plough

cut putre: crumbly soil

adsum: I am present

sobrietate perfecta: with complete sobriety

sobrius: sober

ave: hail

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caerimonia nominationis: ceremony of naming

: to dip or immerse

baptisterium: a cold bath, swimming-pool

Gratias tibi ago: I thank you

studia: studies

perambulare: to walk through

verecundus: shame-faced, modest

conjugo: I join together

acquiesco, acquiescere: to rest, to find comfort in

procede: proceed

Silentium!: Silence!

diverto, divertere: to turn away

: unfillable cask

Jacobe, quid agis?: James, how are you?

Festinate!: Hurry!

Gaudeo vos hic adesse: Welcome

Nonne Latine loquitur?: Does he not speak Latin?

opus honestum: an honourable task

Quantumvis cursum longum fessumque moratur

Sol, sacro tandem carmine vesper adest:

No matter how long the sun delays on his long weary course

At length evening comes with its sacred song

expeditio: an expedition

Tu es centurio in exercitu Britannico: You are a centurion in the British Army

Et es in castris quae sunt in agro: And you are in the camp in the field

Ignari! Stulti! Rustici!: Ignoramuses! Fools! Peasants!

domus lugubris: house of mourning

infelix: unlucky, unhappy

Bararus hic ego sum quia non intelligor ulli: I am a barbarian here because I am not understood by anyone

procede: proceed

edictum imperatoris: the decree of the commander

desiderium nostrorum: longing/need for our things/people.

pietas: piety

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Semper—per omnia saecula: Always—for all time.

: always

: to marry within the tribe

: to marry outside the tribe

Urbs antiqua fuit: There was an ancient city

late regem belloque superbum: kings of broad realms and proud in war

SELECT CHECKLIST OF WORKS

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<i>Lovers</i> , New York, Farrar, Straus &Giroux, 1968; London, Faber &Faber, 1969
<i>Crystal and Fox</i> , London, Faber &Faber, 1970; New York, Farrar, Straus &Giroux, 1970 (in <i>Two Plays</i>)
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<i>The Gentle Island</i> , London, Davis Poynter, 1973
<i>The Freedom of the City</i> , London, Faber &Faber, 1974; New York, Samuel French, 1974
<i>The Enemy Within</i> , Newark, Delaware, Proscenium Press, 1975; Dublin, Gallery Press, 1979
<i>Living Quarters</i> , London, Faber &Faber, 1978
<i>Volunteers</i> , London, Faber &Faber, 1979
<i>Faith Healer</i> , London, Faber &Faber, 1980; New York, Samuel French, 1980
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NOTES

1 (For the convenience of readers and performers unfamiliar with the language, roman letters have been used for the Greek words and quotations in the text. The originals, together with the Latin and literal translations, appear on pp. 449–50.)

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