

Brian Friel

'Translations'

Optional Reading

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 comfortable 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 idyllic - to him it is perfectly normal to speak these tongues. He

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 Atréidao 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.)

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!

(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, Manu, 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, Manu. 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 jiggered up constant! (Suddenly and momentarily, as if in spasm, JIMMY stands to attention and salutes, his face raised in pained ecstasy: MANUS laughs. 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 biotioi malista hedeto'—what's that, Manu?

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: Flow-ers.

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 faigata?*

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?

(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

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 barter 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 yours hear what she called it? Did you, Sarah?

(*SARAH grins. 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 Satures 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 *cui puitre* - 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

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 swoop books, talk quietly, etc.*)

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?

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.

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 Buncrana 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.)

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 caermonia nominatonis - 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.)

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 Alaimn: '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

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 vercund - 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: *Coniugo* - 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.

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—*diavolo—diavolo*—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 '*aplastos 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 revolting 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? Jacobite, quid agit? Are you well?

JIMMY: Fine. Fine.

OWEN: And Bridget! Give us a kiss. Aaaaah!

BRIDGET: You're welcome, Owen.

OWEN: It's not—? Yes, it is Maire Charach! 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 mBréag's . . .

DOALTY: Not there, Owen.

OWEN: Why not?

DOALTY: Her poreen'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 foolless 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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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—divertete*—Where were we?  
 DOALTY: Three items of information, Master. You're at Item B.  
 HUGH: Indeed—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 'aplesios 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. Aaaaah!  
 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 poreen'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?

MARRÉ: 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?

(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?—respond—respond!

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.)

SARAH: I said it, Mannus!

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

MANNUS: 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!*

(MANNUS goes to MAIRE who is busy tidying.)

MANNUS: You didn't tell me you were definitely leaving.

MAIRE: Not now.

HUGH: Good girl, Bridget. That's the style.

MANNUS: You might at least have told me.

HUGH: Are these your books, James?

JIMMY: Thank you.

MANNUS: 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.

MANNUS: I can always . . .

MAIRE: What? Teach classics to the cows? Agh—

(MAIRE moves away from MANNUS. 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 sly, 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 *agua 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: *Nome 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. 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.

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 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 quer.*) Please—please.

HUGH: And we, gentlemen, we in turn are happy to offer you our friendship, our hospitality, and every assistance that

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 tear. DOALTY and BRIDGET are relieving their giggling. SAKAH is staring at MANUS.)*

## 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 stajfs 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 caps, 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?