Translations

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BRIAN FRIEL

Brian Friel was born in Northern Ireland in 1929, the son of a primary school principal and a postmistress. Friel's grandparents were illiterate Irish speakers and would serve as inspiration for the tension between rural and progressive Ireland throughout Friel's work. After an unhappy stint at the National Seminary, Friel attended a teacher's college in Belfast and taught for ten years. He transitioned to writing full time after publishing multiple short stories in *The New Yorker*. Friel was propelled to international success following the 1964 transfer of his play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* to Broadway. A Northern Irish Catholic Nationalist, Friel participated in an Irish civil rights march in 1972 during which British soldiers infamously short and killed fourteen civilians; the event became known as Bloody Sunday. Apart from *The Freedom of the City*, however, Friel largely avoided direct reference to politics in his work, choosing instead to focus on a broader sense of isolation and disenfranchisement. In 1980 Friel co-founded the Field Day Theatre Company in Northern Ireland, with *Translations* being the group's first production. Now considered one of the greatest playwrights and short story writers of all time, Friel earned multiple Tony, Olivier, and Drama Desk nominations and awards during his career, which spanned more than half a century. Friel was intensely private and rarely offered the public glimpses into his private life. He married Anne Morrison in 1954 and had five children—four daughters and one son. Friel died in 2015 in County Donegal at the age of 86.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The British Ordnance Survey forming the backbone of *Translation*'s plot was a real project undertaken in mid-nineteenth century Ireland to Anglicize place names. The British government also began implementing national schools throughout Ireland in the 1830s, which were financed by the state, free to attend, and taught only in English. The spread of such schools directly contributed to the sharp decline in local hedge schools. Maire's desire to move to America further reflects the mass migration of Irish immigrants to the United States at this time. The play also makes several references to potato blight, identified by a certain "sweet smell," foreshadowing the Great Famine of 1845-1849. At the end of the play, Hugh reminisces about marching to Sligo in 1798, referencing the historic Irish Rebellion against British rule of the same year.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Friel was a prolific writer whose career spanned more than fifty years. Notable works include *Faith Healer* and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, which ran for nine months on Broadway. A year before the premiere of *Translations*, Friel wrote one of his most well-known plays, *Aristocrats*, about the decline of a posh Irish family in County Donegal—the same Country in which *Translations* is set a century earlier. In 1990, Friel reinvigorated his career with the premiere of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, also set in the fictional town of Baile Beag, which won the Tony Award for Best Play and was adapted into a 1998 film starring Meryl Streep. With its focus on the search for identity, familial relationships, and the universality of everyday tragedies, Friel's oeuvre has often been compared to that of famed Russian playwright and author Anton Chekhov. During his career, Friel adapted some of Chekhov's work, including *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*. Friel maintained a friendship with poet and playwright Seamus Heaney, who was also from Northern Ireland and whose 1966 collection *Death of a Naturalist* is considered a seminal work of Irish poetry. In addition, many works from contemporary Irish playwright and filmmaker Martin McDonagh evoke the Irish language, history, and sense of isolation present in *Translations*, including McDonagh's Connemara trilogy—consisting of *The Lonesome West*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, and *A Skull in Connemara*—as well as two plays set in the Aran Islands: *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. Lastly, Hugh closes *Translations* by reciting from Virgil's Latin epic poem *The Aeneid*, which tells the story of the founding of Rome by refugees from the destroyed city of Troy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Translations*
- **When Written:** 1980
- **Where Written:** Ireland
- **When Published:** 1981 (premiered September 23, 1980)
- **Literary Period:** Modern
- **Genre:** Play
- **Setting:** The fictional Gaelic-speaking town of Baile Beag in County Donegal, Ireland in 1833
- **Climax:** Maire and Yolland kiss, causing Sarah to run off shouting for Manus
- **Antagonist:** Captain Lancey, British colonialism

EXTRA CREDIT

The Original Cast. The original Irish cast of *Translations* included future film star Liam Neeson in the role of Doalty.

Partly Based on History. Lieutenant Yolland is a fictionalized version of actual British military surveyor William Yolland, who participated in the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey of Ireland (but who, unlike in Friel's play, did not disappear on site). Captain Lancey, meanwhile, is based on Thomas Frederick Colby, the director of the Ordnance Survey.

PLOT SUMMARY

It is an afternoon in August of 1833 in the Irish-speaking town of Baile Bag in County Donegal, Ireland. In a hedge school situated in an old barn, Manus, a lame man in his late twenties or early thirties, is teaching Sarah, a waif-like young woman with a severe speech defect, to say her name. In the corner is Jimmy Jack Cassie, a bachelor in his sixties who loves reading Homer aloud in ancient Greek. With Manus' steady encouragement, Sarah is able to say her name.

Manus wonders where Hugh, his father and the school master, is. Sarah mimes rocking a baby and drinking, which Manus understands to mean that Hugh is at a pub following a christening. Maire, the local twenty-something milkmaid, enters and ignores Manus' attempt at a greeting. She and Jimmy have a brief conversation in Latin before Maire comments that she is even worse in English—a theatrical conceit becomes clear in this moment that the characters on stage are actually speaking Irish, even as an audience hears English. Doalty and Bridget, two more students in their twenties, enter noisily. Doalty brags that whenever the Red Coats put a surveyor pole down, Doalty moves it a few paces to assert "a presence." Bridget asks if anyone knows the name of **Nellie Ruadh's baby**, who was christened earlier that day. Maire tells Manus that he needs to apply for a job at the national school soon opening because it will put the hedge school out of business. To Maire's frustration, Manus refuses because Hugh wants the job. Bridget notes the new school will teach only in English. Hugh—a dignified yet shabbily dressed man who has clearly been drinking—finally arrives. As he addresses the class, he quizzes students on the Latin and Greek origins of certain words. Maire declares that they all should be learning English instead. Hugh brushes her off, noting that he has been asked to take over the new national school and run it as he sees fit.

Hugh's younger son, Owen, who has been living in Dublin for the past six years, enters. Manus attempts to talk with Maire, who coldly says he talked of their marriage once but, with the end of the hedge school, will soon have nothing. Owen then introduces everyone to Lieutenant Yolland and Captain Lancey, British soldiers in charge of mapping the Baile Beag area and for whom Owen is an interpreter. The stern, middle-aged Lancey then asks Owen—whom he mistakenly calls "Roland"—to translate as he addresses the group in English, saying that the British government is creating a new, comprehensive map of Ireland. Owen simplifies Lancey's grandiose language and makes it more palatable to the locals. As the others mingle, Manus confronts Owen about this, calling the project a military operation and demanding to know what's wrong with their current place names. He also asks if Owen will tell the soldiers that his name is not Roland, but Owen insists he is the same man regardless of what he is called.

A few days pass, and Owen and Yolland work to anglicize place names by approximating English sounds ("Cnoc Ban" would be "Knockban") or translating the Irish to English ("Cnoc Ban" would be "Fair Hill"). They then put the names into a "Name-Book," which is used for labeling new anglicized maps. While the two work in the hedge school and drink poteen, Manus enters. He refuses to speak in English in front of Yolland, much to Owen's annoyance. Yolland, oblivious, excitedly reveals he has been picking up some Irish words. Manus says men like Yolland confuse him and leaves. Owen reveals that Manus is lame because Hugh fell across his cradle when Manus was a baby. Yolland then asks Owen about the Donnelly twins, whom he says Lancey wants for questioning. Owen nonchalantly responds that the twins are fisherman. Yolland then asks about a nearby house that often has music coming from it. Owen responds that it is Maire Chatach's house.

When Hugh enters, Yolland remarks on the fascinating etymology of Irish names. Hugh tells Yolland that he must remember that words are only "signals" and do not last forever. Hugh leaves to see the local priest, though Owen warns that with all the new place names, he may get lost. Yolland declares that their project is eroding something in Irish culture. Owen grows frustrated with Yolland's romanticizing of Irish and tells the story of Tobair Vree, the name of a crossroads that derives from "tobair"—meaning well—and a corruption of the Irish name Bhriain. Owen believes Tobair Vree has already been "'eroded' beyond recognition." Yolland insists they preserve the name anyway, asserting that is what Owen—whom he calls Roland once again—wants, too. An angry Owen shouts that his name not Roland. The absurdity of the situation causes the men to suddenly explode in laughter.

An elated Manus enters and says he has been offered a job to start another hedge school. Maire arrives with a milk delivery. When Manus exits with his milk, Maire says there is going to be a dance tomorrow night at Tobair Vree and tells Owen to inform Yolland. Manus returns and offers to walk Maire home, but she decides to stay and have a drink. A drunk Yolland joyously recites the Irish words he has learned. Music swells, and the stage goes to black.

The following night, Maire and Yolland run on stage laughing and holding hands, having just left the dance. The two have a romantic scene in which neither understands what the other is saying. Regardless, they both repeat—in their respective tongues—that they simply "love the sound" of the other's speech. Yolland eventually begins listing the Irish names he has

learned through his work, reciting them to Maire as if they were a love letter. Yolland says he wants to live with Maire "always." She wonders what "always" means. They kiss. Sarah enters and, upon seeing them kiss, runs off shouting for Manus.

The following evening, Sarah and Owen sit in the schoolroom. Yolland has disappeared. When Manus enters with a bag of clothes, Owen tells him that by leaving now, Lancey will think Manus is involved in Yolland's disappearance. Manus reveals that he shouted at Yolland the night before upon seeing him with Maire. Before leaving, Manus addresses Sarah but without his earlier warmth. Sarah recites her name and begins to cry that she is sorry.

Owen asks Sarah where Hugh is. She again mimes rocking a baby, but Owen does not understand. Bridget and Doalty enter saying that more soldiers have arrived. Owen asks if they saw Yolland and Maire leave the dance together. Bridget says Owen should talk to the Donnelly twins. Doalty adds that he saw the twins' boat at the port on his way to the dance but that it was not there by the time he left. A distressed Maire enters, insisting that Yolland would not just leave, and that something must have happened to him. She asks if everyone heard about **Nellie Ruadh's baby**, who died in the middle of the night. She says she must go to the wake and leaves.

Lancey enters and says if the soldiers don't find Yolland within twenty-four hours, the soldiers will shoot all of the Baile Beag livestock. After that, the soldiers will evict residents and destroy their homes. Owen protests, but Lancey tells him to do his job and translate for everyone. Lancey then shouts at Sarah to tell him her name. She tries frantically but cannot. Doalty says that Lancey's camp is on fire. Lancey tells Owen he carries responsibility in all this and exits. Bridget then runs off to hide her animals. Owen tends to Sarah, insisting she was frightened and her speech will return. Sarah emphatically shakes her head and exits.

Owen exits as Hugh and Jimmy Jack enter, both drunk. Hugh reveals that he learned at the wake that a schoolmaster from Cork had been appointment to the national school. Jimmy drunkenly falls asleep. Hugh picks up the Name-Book as Owen returns with two bowls of tea. Owen snatches the book out of his hand, calling it his "mistake." Hugh points to the book and says they must learn the new names of where they live. Owen leaves to look for Doalty.

Maire enters. Hugh says he will teach her English, starting after the funeral. He warns her not to expect much, however, and that even with the right vocabulary and grammar, certain things will forever remain opaque. Maire asks what "always" means, but Hugh responds that it is a "silly" word. He then begins to recite from the *Aeneid*, telling the story of how the Romans destroyed Carthage. He trails off as the stage goes to black.

CHARACTERS

Manus – Hugh's elder son and Owen's brother, Manus, works as an unpaid assistant to his father and occasionally steps in as teacher at the hedge school in Baile Beag. He is in his late twenties or early thirties, pale, thin, and has an air of intensity. He is also lame, which is eventually revealed to be the result of Hugh falling across Manus' cradle when Manus was a baby. Manus patiently and enthusiastically teaches Sarah to say her name in the opening moments of the play but later grows cold towards her. Manus also feels responsible for his father and, much to Maire's frustration, refuses to apply for a teaching position at the new national school because he does not want to compete with Hugh for the job. Though bilingual, Manus refuses to speak English in front of the British officers, revealing his resentment of British colonialism in Ireland. Engaged to Maire at the beginning of the play, a heartbroken Manus confronts her and Yolland after Sarah sees the two kissing. He is holding a rock in his hand at the time and shouts at the couple. When Yolland then goes missing, Manus flees Baile Beag despite Owen's warnings that this will make Manus seem suspicious.

Sarah – A waif-like woman who could be anywhere from seventeen to thirty-five years old, with a speech impediment so severe that she communicates primarily through gestures and grunts. Manus teaches her to say her name at the beginning of the play, and she thanks him with flowers. Sarah's attentiveness to Manus throughout the play suggests her affection for him, though his increasing coldness towards her suggests he does not feel the same way. Sarah sees Yolland and Maire kiss after a local dance and runs to tell Manus. When Yolland then goes missing, Sarah cries to Manus that she is sorry. Captain Lancey arrives and demands that Sarah tell him her name, but she finds she can no longer speak at all. Despite Owen's later assertion that she was simply frightened in the moment, Sarah emphatically shakes her head and leaves the stage for the final time. In this way Sarah represents the Gaelic-speaking people of Ireland, many of whom were only just finding their voice—that is, to read and write in their native tongue—when they were silenced forever by the British colonists.

Jimmy Jack Cassie – Nicknamed the "Infant Prodigy," Jimmy Jack is a bachelor in his sixties who is fluent in Latin and ancient Greek and attends classes at the Baile Beag hedge school for the company and intellectual stimulation. Jimmy Jack frequently recites Homer aloud, musing on the various proper translations of ancient Greek and the beauty of the goddess Athene. Though Jimmy Jack is initially a source of comic relief, at the end of the play he imagines marrying Athene and becomes despondent at his loneliness and isolation in the world. He represents nationalists who cling too closely to a mythic vision of the Irish past and, in doing so, are left behind by the inevitable wave of change overtaking the island.

Maire Chatach – The local milkmaid, Maire is a "strong-minded, strong-bodied" woman in her twenties with curly hair; her surname, in fact, literally means "curly-haired." She is a student at the hedge school and is initially betrothed to Manus. However, she grows frustrated with his refusal to apply for a job at the new national school—or to do seemingly anything to improve his station in life. The forward-thinking Maire insists that the hedge school will go out of business when the national school opens. She also wants to learn English, which she believes is far more useful than Greek or Latin and will help her when she moves to America to seek opportunities she cannot find in Ireland. Despite knowing only three words of English, Maire falls in love with a British soldier named Yolland. The two kiss after a local dance, setting in motion the chain of events that leads Manus to flee Baile Beag. Maire is utterly distraught after Yolland's disappearance, insisting he would not simply leave her.

Doalty – An "open-minded, open-hearted" student at the Baile Beag hedge school in his twenties, who arrives to class with Bridget. In one of the play's first suggestions of Irish resentment towards the British, Doalty tells Manus during class that he enjoys moving the Red Coats' surveyor poles around to confuse them and suggests a "presence"—his means of asserting his Irish identity in the face of colonialism. Despite this resentment, Doalty ultimately tells Owen that he thought Yolland to be a decent man and insists he had nothing to do with his disappearance. He does, however, suggest that he might know the whereabouts of the Donnelly twins, who are implied to be responsible.

Bridget – Another student at the Baile Beag hedge school her twenties. She is described as a plump, vain, yet good-natured person with "a countrywoman's cunning." She is learning to write and tells the other students the new laws about the national school, including that it will teach everything in English. Bridget frequently fears a "sweet smell" that foreshadows the impending Irish potato famine.

Hugh – The master of the hedge school and Manus and Owen's father, Hugh is described as a large, dignified yet shabbily dressed man in his early sixties who drinks heavily but never appears drunk. He peppers his speech with Latin and ancient Greek, frequently quizzing his students on the etymological origin of certain words. Early in the play, he confidently declares that he has been promised the position to lead the new national school. At the end of the play, however, he reveals that the job has been given to someone else. Despite his affection for dead languages and his initial refusal to teach his students English, Hugh ultimately declares that Baile Beag residents must learn the new names of where they live and make their new landscape their own. He calls words mere "signals" towards meaning and insists they do not last forever. As such, to cling too closely to irrelevant speech is to become trapped in the past. The final moments of the play feature Hugh reciting from the *Aeneid*, telling the story of the Romans' destruction of Carthage. It is unclear, however, if he means for the Irish to be the Romans, borne from the ashes of a ruined Troy, or if the Irish are like the Carthaginians facing the unstoppable might of the Roman—representing the British—empire.

Owen – Hugh's younger son and Manus' brother is in his twenties, handsome, and charming. Having left Baile Beag six years earlier, the bilingual Owen found great success as a businessman in Dublin. At the beginning of the play, he has returned to Baile Beag to serve as an interpreter for Captain Lacey and Lieutenant Yolland. When Lancey addresses the Irish locals, Owen simplifies his speech and makes the British Ordnance Survey seem more benevolent than it really is. At first, he also refuses to correct the British soldiers when they mistakenly call him "Roland," insisting to Manus that he is the same man regardless of his name. He works with Yolland to anglicize Gaelic place names by approximating English sounds or translating the Irish to English. Initially enthusiastic about this work, Owen resents Yolland's repeated romanticizing of the Irish language and refuses to believe that the Ordnance Survey is eroding Irish culture. Eventually, however, he comes to view his participation in the mapping project as a mistake. He reclaims his name—in a sense reclaiming his Irish identity—and by the end of the play refers to Irish place names in the original Gaelic in front of Lancey.

Captain Lancey – Captain Lancey is a middle-aged British soldier and the cartographer for the Ordnance Survey. He is more at ease with maps than people, and initially address the residents of Baile Beag as if they were children. He asks Owen to translate as he makes a grandiose speech about the importance of the mapping project, which he at first presents as somewhat beneficial for the Irish people. Later, however, when Yolland goes missing, Lancey's tone changes drastically. He asserts British power over Ireland as he tells locals that the soldiers will kill their livestock and evict residents if Yolland is not found within two days.

Lieutenant Yolland – The shy, gangling Lieutenant Yolland is a British soldier in his late twenties to early thirties and works with Owen to anglicize Irish place names throughout Baile Beag. Unlike his colleague Captain Lancey, Yolland develops a deep love for Irish culture and feels a strong sense of connection to Baile Beag. He even tells Owen that he fears their work is eroding Irish culture, and that he dreams of becoming fluent in Gaelic so he can better connect with the locals. He falls in love with Maire, despite not being able to have a full conversation with her, and the two share a kiss after a local dance. Later that night, Yolland goes missing. It is implied that the local Donnelly twins killed Yolland out of resentment towards British colonialism.

TERMS

Daniel O'Connell – A nineteen-century Irish nationalist and political leader known as "The Liberator." **Maire** invokes his name when demanding that **Hugh** teach his students English, saying that O'Connell declared the Irish language "a barrier to modern progress."

Hedge school – The name given to rural schools in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland, often held in barns and run by local educated men. The schools typically taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, and often included lessons in Greek and Latin. Students of different levels were all taught by the same master, who required a fee. Following the implementation of British national school system throughout Ireland in the 1830s, the number of hedge schools declined drastically.

Poteen – A traditional Irish alcohol distilled from potatoes or grain. **Hugh** frequently remarks on the power of a local woman's poteen, which **Yolland** becomes drunk on while working with **Owen** on the Name Book.

Sapper – A soldier who performs military engineering duties such as constructing and repairing roads, laying and clearing minefields, and other tasks that support troop movement and defense. Characters throughout *Translations* frequently refer to **Lancey**, **Yolland**, and the other British soldiers in the area as sappers.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

ALL TRANSLATION IS INTERPRETATION

Widely regarded as playwright Brian Friel's masterpiece, *Translations* takes place in mid-nineteenth century colonial Ireland. British soldiers have arrived in the fictional Irish-speaking town of Baile Beag to complete the country's first Ordnance Survey. This process, which requires translating Gaelic place names into English, sets the context for Friel's multi-layered meditation on language as a tool for both liberation and oppression. Above all, as the title suggests, the play explores what the act of translation—carrying meaning from one language to another—actually entails. The difficulty and frequent impossibility of such a process reveals all translation to be a form of interpretation, an attempt to signal toward meaning that always reflects the translator in some way.

The biggest example of translation is the play itself, which is written entirely in English. *Translations* requires viewers to accept that some characters are speaking "Irish" even as the audience hears (or reads) English. While Friel has noted that this is in part borne of necessity—few would be able to understand a play written in Irish—this theatrical conceit also allows the audience to clearly identify the difference between translations and original speech. This is apparent early in the play when Owen, a bilingual local who has come home after spending six years in Dublin, acts as a translator during discussions between the British officers Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland and the residents of Baile Beag. As Lancey explains the rationale behind the British Ordnance Survey, Owen simplifies Lancey's stilted, grandiose speech, taking care to make certain points more palatable to an Irish audience wary of colonial intrusion. For example, Lancey says, "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." Owen relates this as, "A new map is being made of the whole country." This moment creates a sense of comedic irony as Lancey looks at Owen in confusion at the abrupt rendering of Lancey's lengthy address. Owen's translation is not necessarily inaccurate, but it does reveal his desire to assuage residents' concerns and, as such, underscores the power of the translator to present information however he sees fit.

Friel further explores this sense of a translator's intention through Owen's work with Yolland, whom he helps render Baile Beag's map points into English either by approximating English sounds ("Cnoc Ban" would become "Knockban") or directly translating the Irish to English ("Cnoc Ban" would become "Fair Hill"). Owen delves into the etymological and apocryphal history of Irish words in an effort to find their English equivalent, only to find that this often does not, or cannot, exist.

In one illustrative moment, Owen points to a tiny beach known in Irish as Bun na hAbhann. "Bun is the Irish word for bottom," he tells Yolland, "And Abha means river. So it's literally the mouth of the river." Yolland responds that there is no equivalent English sound, causing Owen to reflect on their goal "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." Owen arrives at a solution with "Burnfoot"—a word that in many ways reflects the sound and sentiment of the original yet is ultimately something quite different. It is not possible to say whether this choice is more or less "correct" than a different translation. Because there often is not a one-to-one correlation between words in different languages, Friel suggests that translation is always an inherently subjective process.

The subjectivity of translation is complicated by the fact that *Translations* presents words as dependent upon their context. Hugh, Owen's father and the local hedge school master, calls

words merely "signals" in the sense that they point to meaning rather than contain it within themselves. This can be seen with the character of Sarah, a waif-like woman with a severe speech impediment who communicates primarily through gestures and grunts. In Act One, these attempts at communication are perfectly understood by Manus, Owen's elder brother. Take the following exchange that occurs after Manus wonders why Hugh is late to class (notably, Friel writes out Sarah's moments of mime as if they were an actor's lines, underscoring the fact that she is "speaking" despite her lack of verbal language):

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.

You may be sure. Which pub?

Sarah indicates.

Manus: Gracie's?

No. Further away.

Sarah makes the exact same gesture to Owen towards the end of Act Three, but now its meaning has shifted entirely. She is saying not that Hugh is at a christening, but rather a wake:

Owen: I suppose Father knows. Where is he anyhow?

Sarah points.

Owen: Where?

Sarah mimes rocking a baby.

Owen: I don't understand — where?

Sarah repeats the mime and wipes away tears. Owen is still puzzled.

The same "language" in a different context has an entirely different meaning. Without knowledge of that context—without knowing what Sarah is signaling towards—Owen has no idea what Sarah is saying and is unable to *translate* her.

Friel thus suggests that not only is all translation inherently subjective, but *genuine* translation is, in fact, impossible: to pluck a word from its surrounding context is to rob it of what it once signaled towards, and, as such, to rob it of meaning. The words that Owen and Yolland insert into their "Name-Book" to denote locations on the Irish landscape represent not a carrying over of the Irish past into an English map but the development of an entirely different nomenclature. Translation, then, is both an act of destruction and creation, a process that inherently alters meaning in the name of moving closer to mutual understanding. Though concerned with morality and consequences of such an act, Friel's play ultimately refuses to offer any easy answers; instead, it revels in dissecting the mystery and paradox of human language.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY

In *Translations*, Irish culture is inextricable from Irish language; Gaelic at once reflects and shapes the Irish experience, and, it follows, is essential to the preservation of Irish identity. Friel explores the ways in which names are essential to the construction of this identity, presenting the destruction of one as invariably leading to the destruction of the other. While mourning this loss, however, the play does not entirely condemn it. Instead, *Translations* reveals that language can outlive the people and culture that created it. Friel's play ultimately suggests that the Irish must find a way to preserve their identity without clinging so tightly to an archaic, increasingly irrelevant speech that they become trapped in the past.

The connection between language and identity is established from the play's opening moments. Notably, the first thing Manus teaches Sarah to say is her own name, in effect teaching her to use language to affirm who she is. The importance of names is echoed throughout the play. At one point, for example, Yolland asks Owen about Maire, another one of Hugh's students and the local milkmaid. Owen responds that her name is Maire Chatach, and that Chatach means "curly-haired," making Maire's moniker a literal reflection of who she is. Lancey and Yolland also mistakenly call Owen "Roland"—an anglicized version of his name—for most of the play. At first, Owen displays a cavalier attitude towards this apparent sleight: "It's only a name," he tells Manus. "It's the same me, isn't it?" Eventually, however, Owen snaps at Yolland for his recurring mistake. Owen's anger and reclamation of his name in this moment represents the assertion of Irish identity. A man—or a point on a map—is not the same regardless of what it is called, because language gestures towards a sense of culture, history, and identity. Friel's focus on names, then, reveals how the broader plot of the play—the rewriting of Gaelic maps—contributes to the erasure of Irish culture.

Yolland says as much to Owen at one point, positing that something is being "eroded" by their work as they rob locals of the history—personal, cultural, anecdotal—embedded in the language of the world around them. In one poignant moment, Owen asks his father, who is going to visit the local priest, if he knows where he lives. Hugh begins to reply, "At Lis na Muc, over near…" before his son cuts him off: "No, he doesn't. Lis na Muc, the Fort of the Pigs, has become Swinefort. 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?" This moment makes clear that the Ordnance Survey has completely altered the once-familiar landscape of Baile Beag, resulting in a literal sense of loss and confusion for locals. On a symbolic level, this represents the displacement of Irish identity. By erasing historical meaning from the landscape, the new map destroys invaluable context by which the Irish

recognize and define themselves.

Of course, Yolland's talk of cultural erosion is not as simple as it first appears to be. For one thing, language is not necessarily a direct *reflection* of culture so much as a *product* of culture. For example, Hugh notes, somewhat jokingly, that the poetry and lyricism of the Irish language grew in direct response to the drudgery of Irish lives. In his estimation, the Irish language does not actually mirror the culture from which it has sprung. Furthermore, as Owen points out, place names have been being eroded for a very long time. He points to the example of Tobair Vree, the name of a local crossroads that derives from "tobair," meaning "well," and a corruption of the Irish name "Bhriain," an old man who died in the aforementioned well 150 years earlier. The well is now dried up, and Owen doubts any others in the area know the real origin of the name—which, he asserts, has already been "'eroded' beyond recognition." He wonders, then, what the point is of preserving an Irish name whose "meaning" has nothing to do with its actual origin. There are no easy answers in Friel's play, and Yolland assert that the meaning Tobair Vree has for current residents still matters. Regardless, *Translations* makes clear that even as one mourns the loss of culture, that culture itself was likely an erosion—or, perhaps, an evolution—of something that came before.

Because culture is constantly changing, language, too, must change in order to meaningfully signal to the world around it. Upon hearing of Yolland's desire to learn Irish, for example, Hugh tells the Lieutenant to remember that words "are not immortal." Despite his affinity for ancient Greek and Latin—both dead languages—Hugh believes that communities can become stagnant when language does not change to reflect new realities (and vice versa). Jimmy Jack, for example, an elderly bachelor and student of Hugh's with an intense affection for Homer and the ancient Greeks, only grows more detached from reality and more deeply entrenched in a fantasy of the past. Despite his erudition in the realm of ancient languages, he is largely presented as comic relief, a buffoon whose obsession with the past makes him increasingly irrelevant; he even goes so far as to shout "Thermopylae!" at the encroaching British army. In many ways, then, Jimmy Jack represents those who cling to a mythic vision of the Celtic past in an attempt to preserve current Irish culture.

Hugh, meanwhile, accepts that "a civilisation can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of…fact." This is exactly what Friel suggests the British have done to the Irish: made sure their language no longer reflects their landscape. As such, Hugh suggests that the only way any Irish culture can be preserved is through capitulation to the present, even if that means learning English. Indicating the Name-Book, he says to Owen, "We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home." With change comes loss, but a language and culture that clings too rigidly to the past will simply turn to dust. Instead, Friel's play suggests, a culture is preserved when its adherents learn to establish a home within an unfamiliar future.

THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

Beyond being a tool to define cultural identity, language is also, of course, a means of communication throughout *Translations*. However, words often prove an inadequate mode of expression, as characters reach towards speech that fails convey what they actually mean. Thus, even as the play asserts the power of language to both preserve and shape culture—as well as the importance of translation in interpreting that culture—it also suggests that language is ultimately an insufficient tool to communicate the breadth of human experience.

For Maire and Yolland, communication does not rely on language at all; they fall in love despite not being able to have a conversation with each other. At the start of Act Three, after having left a local dance together, the two have a deeply romantic scene in which neither understands what the other is saying. Regardless, they both repeat—in their respective tongues—that they simply "love the sound" of the other's speech. Words here are what matter, irrespective of what they mean. Indeed, unable to say what he wants, Yolland eventually begins simply listing the Irish names he has learned through his work on the Ordnance Survey, reciting them to Maire as if they were a love letter. For her part, Maire recites the only three English words she knows: water, fire, earth. All of these random words are understood by the other to be expressions of affection. The actual definitions behind them are entirely different from what the words mean in this moment. In this way, the play suggests that communication can transcend language.

Owen and Yolland come to a similar realization regarding the insufficiency of words to perfectly reflect the world around them. After their tense moment of confrontation over Yolland calling Owen "Roland," the two men burst into laughter at the absurdity of the situation and joke that they are in Eden: "We name a thing and — bang! It leaps into existence!" Owen remarks. Yolland replies, "Each name a perfect equation with its roots." Owen continues, "A perfect congruence with its reality." The men are being facetious, of course, because the difficulty of their translation project has revealed to them that a name is almost *never* in "perfect equation with its roots" or "a perfect congruence with its reality." Rather, language is presented as an inherently flawed attempt to give voice to meaning.

Because there is so much more to communication than language, Yolland realizes that even if he were to become fluent in Gaelic, he could never fully understand the Irish people. He says to Owen, "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?" Hugh echoes this thinking in

the final moments of the play upon agreeing to teach Maire English. "I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar," he says. "But will that help you to interpret between privacies? I have no idea. But it's all we have." This suggests that there is more to mutual understanding—and to translation—than simply knowing the right words to say. Just as certain moments can transcend the confines of language, speaking a shared vocabulary does not guarantee that actual communication will take place.

COLONIALISM AND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

As with much of Friel's work, the shifting political and cultural landscape of Ireland lies at the heart of *Translations*. The play takes place in 1833, a time when all of Ireland was under British control and had been for hundreds of years. The Ordnance Survey represents a moment of increased British interest in the island, and Friel uses this turning point in history to explore the mechanisms and effects of colonization on a small community. Colonization in *Translations* is ultimately presented as an oppressive, violent effort that robs individuals of their cultural identity and inserts another in its place.

Resentment towards British influence is established early in the play when Doalty, a lively twenty-something and another one of Hugh's students, brags about repeatedly moving the Red Coats' surveyor poles around to confuse them and assert "a presence"—that is, to assert that the Irish community in Baile Beag is not going anywhere. Manus similarly does not conceal his contempt for the British, speaking only Irish in front of Lancey and Yolland. When Owen asks his brother to "speak in English," Manus replies, "For the benefit of the colonist?" Both Doalty and Owen's actions are deeply political—an assertion of Irish identity and refusal to bow to the "colonizer."

Lancey, meanwhile, initially attempts to present the Ordnance Survey as a largely benevolent project, a means to provide the military with better information about Ireland and for taxation purposes. In his first meeting with Baile Beag residents, he even calls the British soldiers' presence "proof of the disposition of this government to advance the interests of Ireland." Upon Yolland's disappearance in Act Three, however, Lancey parts with niceties. He threatens to kill all livestock and evict residents if Yolland is not found—a reminder that Baile Beag is firmly under British control and that the locals' wellbeing is entirely in the hands of the colonizers. Lancey's threat is also a representation of the violence inherent to colonialism. When Owen, again acting as translator, balks at relaying such information to the locals, Lancey puts him in his place, saying: "Do your job. Translate." This is a reminder that however useful Owen has been to the British—and regardless of the power he possesses as a translator—he is still not considered an equal by men like Lancey.

Yolland, for his part, is far more sympathetic to the Irish than his colleague, going so far as to fall in love with both the Irish culture and a local Irish woman, Maire. The Lieutenant's disappearance—and implied death at the hands of the Donnelly twins—further suggests the limits of mutual understanding and translation in the face of colonial oppression.

Because language is inextricable from culture and carries with it such a sense of history, its destruction is a concerted effort by the British to bring the Irish into submission. It is no coincidence that the new national schools being installed across the country will teach only in English. They will also be free and ultimately spell the end for hedge schools like Hugh's. Maire recognizes this when she tells Manus that when a nearby national school opens, "this is finished: nobody's going to pay to go to a hedge-school."

Colonialism, it is implied, functions not only by violence but also by forcing the colonized to turn towards the culture of the colonizers to find success. As such, Friel touches upon the opportunity inherent to learning English. Maire desires to learn it so she can go to the United States, where she will have more economic opportunity than she does as a milkmaid in Ireland. Meanwhile, Manus' refusal to apply for a job at the new English-speaking school represents the fact that Irish nationalists will ultimately be left behind by the inevitable wave of change overtaking Ireland and again asserts the ultimate might of the colonizers.

Friel's decision to write his play in English is the ultimate signal that the colonizers, in this sense, won. The playwright has in fact said the "fundamental irony" of *Translations* is that it should have been written in Irish. The theatrical act of watching the play is itself a condemnation of imperialism, as it inherently highlights the fact that an entire people have been robbed of their language. The vast majority of an Irish audience would not be able to understand this play, which in large part celebrates the culture embedded in the Irish language, had the play actually been written in the Irish language.

In the final moments of the play, Hugh translates a passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* that mirrors what is happening to the Irish. He says, "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." The *Aeneid* tells the story of the founding of Rome by refugees from the destroyed city of Troy. The "race" that springs "from Trojan blood" refers to the Romans, who would one day overthrow the ancient empire of Libya. It is unclear in this formulation, however, if Hugh means Ireland to be Carthage—the capitol of ancient Libya—or Rome. In this way, it is unclear if Hugh is accepting the colonial destruction of Ireland by the unstoppable British (akin to the Roman Empire) or if he is engaging in hope for an Irish rebirth. As Rome was borne from the ashes of Troy, so too may a new "race" be borne from the downfall of Ireland to

"overthrow some day" the British Empire. Ultimately, Hugh's final lines reflect the fate of *both* the Irish and the British. While acknowledging the colonial domination of Ireland by the British, these final words also foreshadow that English—as a language like any other—will itself one day change and become eroded; the British may find themselves under the same colonial siege to which they have subjected the Irish.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

NELLIE RUADH'S BABY

Throughout *Translations*, Nellie Ruadh's baby represents the Irish language and culture. The baby is born to a character who, like Gaelic, never actually appears on stage. The baby's first reference comes early in Act One, when Sarah mimes rocking a baby to Manus to indicate that Hugh is late to class because he is at the baby's christening. Shortly thereafter, Bridget asks her fellow students if they know what Nellie Ruadh has named her baby, reflecting the play's repeated emphasis on the connection between names and the assertion of identity. Students joke that Nellie will name it after the baby's father, who remains unknown—the baby is illegitimate, cut off from its paternal history. The baby's christening, then, reflects the impending renaming of all of Baile Beag with names from an illegitimate fatherland—that is, Britain. However, the baby dies only a few days later. At the end of the play, Sarah repeats her baby-rocking gesture to Owen, but this time she does so to indicate that Hugh is at the baby's wake. The message is clear: renaming the Irish landscape spells death for the Irish language. It is no coincidence that Yolland goes missing on the same evening that the baby dies, as the Lieutenant was the only British soldier who genuinely appreciated and wanted to preserve Irish language and culture. His disappearance the same night as Nellie's baby's death, then, further cements the impossibility of saving Gaelic in the face of the British colonial oppression.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Farrar, Straus and Giroux edition of *Translations* published in 1995.

Act 1 Quotes

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!

Related Characters: Jimmy Jack Cassie, Maire Chatach (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

This conversation occurs at the hedge school shortly after Maire's arrival. After a brief conversation with Jimmy in Latin, Maire reveals that she knows even fewer words in English. This is the play's first indication that the characters on stage are meant to be speaking Irish, even as the *actors* speak English. This theatrical conceit will continue throughout the play, creating moments of comedic irony as well as allowing the audience to hear the differences in meaning created by the process of translation. The fact that the play is written in English is also a nod to the success of the British colonialism that underscores the play's action; Friel once said the great irony of *Translations* is that, as a play celebrating the cultural history of the Irish language, it should have been written in Irish. The British effectively silenced Gaelic throughout the country, however, and a century and a half after the events of the play, few Irish audience members would be able to understand anything on stage were the characters actually speaking the language the play celebrates.

Maire will also repeat this nonsense phrase in Act 2 during her romantic scene with Yolland in an attempt to communicate her affection for him despite their inability to speak the same language.

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 [...] 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.

Related Characters: Doalty, Bridget (speaker), Manus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

While waiting for Hugh to arrive to the hedge school, Bridget elaborates on what she knows about the new national school soon opening nearby. The British began to implement such schools throughout Ireland in the 1830s, inevitably spelling death for rural, Irish-language hedge schools like Hugh's. Doalty's refusal to believe that the new schools will thrive will be proven wrong by history, and the national school system reveals one way in which colonialism suppresses native culture. The play will continue to develop the connection between language and cultural history, asserting that, by forcing the Irish population at large to be educated only in English, the national school system was effectively a tool to wipe out Gaelic and all the culture and history contained therein.

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.

Related Characters: Maire Chatach (speaker), Hugh, Manus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24-25

Explanation and Analysis

Upon his arrival at the hedge school, Hugh tells the class about his meeting with the British Captain Lancey, who is in charge of the Ordnance Survey. Hugh told Lancey that the Irish culture better pairs with the "classical tongues" of Latin and ancient Greek than it does with English. Maire rebukes Hugh's claim, quoting Irish political leader Daniel O'Connell and asserting that English would be far more useful to the class than either of those dead languages. The forward-thinking Maire is aware that going to America will afford her far more opportunities than she could find as a milkmaid in Baile Beag—and that to take advantage of those opportunities, she needs to know how to speak English. Many Irish people did in fact immigrate to the United States during the nineteenth century, and this moment reveals why many Irish residents would want to learn the language of the colonizer. Colonialism, Friel suggests here, functions in large part by forcing natives to embrace the culture of the colonizers if they wish to survive.

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 —

Related Characters: Manus, Maire Chatach (speaker), Hugh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Maire says this to Manus after he confronts her for not telling him that she was definitely leaving for America. This moment helps clarify the relationship between the two—revealing that they had been in a romantic relationship and were even discussing marriage—and also further establishes Maire's forward-thinking nature. Maire realizes that the implementation of the British national schools across the country will be end of hedge schools like Hugh's. Manus, meanwhile, seems incapable of taking steps to move his life forward, instead allowing his ambitions to be

constantly hampered by his father. Not embracing the future, Maire points out, has led to Manus being without a job and, ostensibly, without Maire. Because Maire is also the most eager of the hedge school students to learn English, this suggests on a broader level that people like Manus who cling too closely to a past Irish way of life will be left without prospects for the future.

Lancey: 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.

Related Characters: Hugh, Owen, Captain Lancey (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

After introducing Lancey and Yolland to the students in the hedge school, Owen says that he will translate as the British men address the room. Lancey's grandiose language establishes his pomposity, while Owen's much shorter, simpler translation creates a sense of comedic irony. The fact that both actors are actually speaking English allows the audience to hear exactly how Owen translates the Captain's lengthy address to be decidedly friendlier and more palatable to the locals. This underscores the inherent subjectivity of translation and establishes Owen's desire to minimize Irish concerns about the presence of the British. Lancey's speech, meanwhile, reveals his initial willingness to present the map project as at least nominally beneficial to the Irish. This will contrast with his tone in the final act of the play after Yolland goes missing, when Owen again is forced to translate as Lancey angrily asserts the dominance of the British over the Irish locals.

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

Owen: Shhhhh. Isn't it ridiculous? They seem 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?

Related Characters: Manus, Owen (speaker), Lieutenant Yolland, Captain Lancey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36-37

Explanation and Analysis

After Owen has introduced Lancey and Yolland to the Baile Beag locals, Manus confronts his brother about the fact that both British soldiers call Owen "Roland." Owen is initially nonchalant about the mistake, making excuses for the British and asserting that it does not matter what he is called because he is the same man regardless. He does not yet understand the deep connection between names and identity; this lack of understanding or care, in fact, is what initially allows Owen to unhesitatingly aid the British in their anglicization of Irish place names. As the play progresses, however, and Owen becomes more aware of the power names have to define and assert identity, he will grow resentful of his misnaming, eventually snapping at Yolland for the mistake and, in the process, effectively reclaiming his Irish identity.

Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

Owen: 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. [...] *(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?

Related Characters: Lieutenant Yolland, Owen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Act 2, Owen and Yolland discuss the process of "translating" a particular Irish place name for the Name-Book. While "Burnfoot" is an attempt to capture both the sound and sentiment of the original Gaelic, it is not an *exact* translation of "Bun na hAbhann." This does not mean Owen's choice for the Name-Book is wrong; on the contrary, this moment simply illustrates that there is rarely a one-to-one correlation between words in different languages, making translation an extremely difficult and ultimately subjective process. A translation is always a reflection of the translator, further underscoring that, as a British project, the new map will reflect colonialist sentiments.

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.

Related Characters: Lieutenant Yolland, Manus, Owen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Manus enters the hedge school while Owen and Yolland are working but speaks only in Irish in front of the men—meaning Yolland has no idea what Manus is saying. Manus' refusal to speak English reveals his resentment of the British presence in Baile Beag and comprises a political act of asserting Irish identity in the face of colonialism. This underscores the growing tension between the Irish and British that simmers in the background even as Yolland falls more deeply in love with Irish culture. Manus has no difficulty grasping the prejudice of men like Lancey, who view the Irish as inferior and as such have no qualms with destroying their language and culture. Yolland's appreciation of Ireland, on the other hand, contradicts with his entire reason for being in Baile Beag: he is trying to ingratiate himself into the same culture the map project is effectively erasing. Of course, Manus' insult seems to be lost on Yolland, who responds simply with, "sorry?" This moment thus also foreshadows the eventual confrontation between Manus and Yolland after the latter kisses Maire. Manus will again address Yolland in Irish, and Yolland will again fail to understand—responding once more with "sorry?"

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?

Related Characters: Lieutenant Yolland (speaker), Owen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Yolland, increasingly drunk on poteen, says this to Owen as they continue to work on the map. Despite his love of Ireland and desire to speak Irish, Yolland realizes that there is so much more to Irish culture than its language. This moment reflects the play's theme regarding the limits of language; even if Yolland were to become fluent in Gaelic, he would lack the shared context and experience that binds the people of Baile Beag into a community. Shared language, the play suggests, is not a guarantee that meaningful connection can or will occur. Hugh will echo this notion at the end of the play, when he tells Maire that even if he teaches her English, it may not be enough to truly communicate with an English-speaking culture.

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

Related Characters: Hugh, Owen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50-51

Explanation and Analysis

Hugh enters the hedge school while Owen and Yolland are working and declares his intention to speak with the local priest about his accommodations at the new national school (which he still assumes he will be put in charge of). Owen's speech here highlights just how drastically Baile Beag has changed in only a handful of days, creating a sense of poignancy on stage as Hugh is reduced to a sort of tourist in his own land. The rewritten Irish map has created a sense of loss and confusion for locals, unable to find their way in a newly unfamiliar landscape. As the play continues to establish the connection between language, culture, and identity, this confusion can be read symbolically as well. Irish identity is displaced by the erasure of Irish place names—and their historical and personal context.

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 civilisation can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of... fact.

Related Characters: Hugh (speaker), Lieutenant Yolland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Hugh responds to Yolland's effusive praise of the Irish language and expression of his desire to become a part of the community. Hugh's assertion that words signal towards meaning, rather than contain meaning within themselves, suggests that one-to-one translation is all but impossible. Plucked from its surrounding context, a word is robbed of what it once signaled towards, and, as such, no longer means anything at all. Despite his affinity for dead languages like Latin and ancient Greek, Hugh understands that cultures change and evolve, and a language must do so as well if it—or the culture it signals to—is to survive. His statement about the "landscape of fact" reflects exactly what the British are doing to the Irish with the Ordnance Survey: ensuring that the Irish landscape no longer reflects the Irish language, and, as such, that Irish people will need to turn towards English to literally and figuratively find their way in the world.

Owen: What is happening?

Yolland: I'm not sure. But I'm concerned about my part in it. 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 standardising those names as accurately and as sensitively as we can.

Yolland: Something is being eroded.

Related Characters: Lieutenant Yolland, Owen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52-53

Explanation and Analysis

After Hugh exits, Yolland confesses to Owen his increasing unease with the role they are playing in renaming the Irish landscape. The process of translating Gaelic to English has revealed to Yolland the depth of history and culture embedded within the Irish language; as such, he begins to feel that in re-writing place names they are effectively erasing Irish culture. Friel emphasizes this connection between language, identity, and culture throughout the play, suggesting that the Ordnance Survey ultimately robbed the Irish people of their ability to recognize themselves in their landscape. Of course, Friel complicates this notion of translation as inherently destructive immediately after this moment with Owen's example of Tobair Vree.

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?

Related Characters: Owen (speaker), Lieutenant Yolland

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Owen brings up the example of Tobair Vree in response to Yolland's concerns about their participation in the erosion of Irish culture through the Ordnance Survey. Tobair Vree derives from "tobair," meaning "well," and a corruption of the Irish name "Bhriain"—an old man who died in the aforementioned well 150 years earlier. The trivial origin of the name is a story unknown to most locals; what's more, the name itself is already an erosion of something that came before. This complicates Yolland's romantic notion of an Irish past that the mapping project is allegedly eroding. It also echoes Hugh's assertion that words are not "immortal." In Owen's estimation, language and culture are constantly changing and evolving, and little is gained by clinging to the past for the past's sake.

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.

Related Characters: Lieutenant Yolland, Owen (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Yolland insists that they preserve the name Tobair Vree in the Name-Book and says that is what "Roland" wants, too. Already frustrated by Yolland's repeated romanticizing of the Irish language, Owen finally confronts Yolland about misnaming him. In Act 1, Owen was nonchalant about being called Roland, telling Manus that it did not matter because he was the same man regardless of what he was called. In this moment, however, Owen contradicts that earlier statement and affirms that names do, in fact, matter, and are a meaningful way to define and assert identity. The implications of this realization will eventually cause Owen to denounce the map project and to call his own involvement in it a mistake. By rejecting the name given to him by the British and reclaiming his own, Owen is also asserting his Irish identity in the face of colonialism.

Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

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'?

[...]

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'?

Related Characters: Lieutenant Yolland, Maire Chatach (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

After leaving a local dance together, Maire and Yolland have a deeply romantic scene in which neither understands the words the other is saying yet grasps the other's meaning entirely. Indeed, both Maire and Yolland assert that they "know" what the other is saying. This reveals the difference between words and meaning as well as the communication's ability to transcend traditional language. The fact that Maire and Yolland repeat the exact same phrases in their respective tongues throughout the scene further highlights their deep connection and increases the poignancy of the fact that they do not actually know the other's language. After Yolland's subsequent disappearance, Maire will ask Hugh what the word "always" means; Hugh will tell her it is a silly word; indeed, its invocation in this scene tragically proves meaningless.

Act 3 Quotes

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.

Related Characters: Manus (speaker), Maire Chatach, Lieutenant Yolland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

While preparing to flee from Baile Beag, Manus tells Owen and Sarah about the confrontation he nearly had with Yolland and Maire the previous night after Sarah told him about their kiss. Angry and hurt, Manus initially meant to attack Yolland but found himself unable to follow through. Instead, he shouted at Yolland in Irish. His insult proved useless, however, just as all the other times he tried to snub Yolland flew right over the Lieutenant's head. Manus has spoken in Irish in front of the British soldiers throughout the play as a means to assert his identity and resist colonialism. Yet every time—including in this moment—an oblivious Yolland has deflated Manus' insults by simply responding "sorry?" Yolland even misunderstands Manus' final attempt to fight back, with the implication being that fighting *for* Irish *in* Irish is already a lost cause. Manus seems to recognize that he has lost not only Maire, but also the fight against British oppression.

Owen: How are you? Are you all right?

Sarah nods: Yes.

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

Sarah shakes her head.

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.

Related Characters: Sarah, Owen (speaker), Captain Lancey

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Moments before this interaction, Lancey had shouted as Sarah to tell him her name—the first thing Manus taught her to say. Sarah found herself unable to answer Lancey's question, and Owen now attempts to comfort her. Sarah has represented Ireland throughout the play, as she is just learning to find her voice in a language soon to be rendered obsolete. Lancey, meanwhile, has been a symbol of colonial oppression. Unable to say her name, Sarah can no longer assert her identity. Her ultimate assertion that she will not speak again thus suggests that the Irish, too, have forever been silenced by the British.

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.

Related Characters: Owen, Hugh (speaker)

Page Number:

Explanation and Analysis

This scene occurs towards the end of Act 3, as Owen prepares to find Doalty and gain more information about Yolland's disappearance. Owen has rejected the Name-Book at this point, calling his involvement in the whole Ordnance Survey a mistake. Hugh, on the other hand—having now lost the position at the national school, many of his students, and one of his sons—has come to accept the English language's seemingly inevitable dominion in Ireland. His assertion here that they all must learn the new names is in keeping with his prior speech to Yolland that civilizations grow stagnant when they become trapped in an irrelevant language. As such, Hugh suggests that, if they wish to keep any Irish culture alive at all, they must bow to their new, English-speaking reality. The "landscape of fact" has changed, and they must do the same if they are to survive.

Hugh: 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 ...

Related Characters: Hugh (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

In the final moments of the play, Hugh translates a passage from Virgil's epic Latin poem *The Aeneid*. This tells the story of how refugees from the destroyed city of Troy founded Rome, and Hugh's quote here mirrors what is happening to the Irish. The "race" that springs "from Trojan blood" refers to the Romans, who would one day "come forth for Lybia's downfall." Whether Hugh means for Rome to represent the Irish or the British remains unclear. However, if the latter, this quote implies Hugh's acceptance of Ireland's colonial destruction at the hands of the British Empire. If he means for Rome to represent Ireland, on the other hand, his words suggest hope that, just as Rome was borne from the ashes of Troy, so too may a powerful, conquering "race" arise from Ireland's downfall. Either way, Hugh's final lines suggest that even the English language will eventually change, as all languages do, and that the British may one day find themselves facing the loss of their own culture at the hands of colonizers as well.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

It is an afternoon in late August of 1833 in the Irish-Speaking townland of Baile Bag/Balleybeg in County Donegal, Ireland. Manus and Sarah are in a hedge school situated in a dusty old barn, full of disused farm instruments alongside the students' stools and benches and table for the school master.

Friel's initial stage directions establish the simplicity and poverty of the Baile Beag hedge school. Hedge schools were common in nineteenth century Ireland and were often the only source of education for rural citizens.

Manus, the school master's older son, is in his late twenties or early thirties with shabby clothes and an air of intensity. An aspiring teacher, he is also lame and works as an unpaid assistant for his father. At the moment he is teaching Sarah (who sits on a stool with a slate on her knees) how to speak. Sarah, who is waiflike and somewhere between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five, has a speech defect so severe that she communicates through gestures and grunts. In the corner reading Homer in ancient Greek is "the Infant Prodigy" Jimmy Jack Cassie, an unmarried man in his sixties who wears heavy clothing and attends evening classes for stimulation and company.

It will be revealed later in the play that Manus' disability is the result of his father tripping over his cradle when he was a baby. Even this early moment, however, hints at the ways Manus' father controls his son's life and ultimately hampers his professional ambitions. Sarah, meanwhile will come to represent the country of Ireland itself—learning to speak a language soon to be rendered obsolete by the British. This moment also establishes Jimmy Jack's erudition and ultimately doomed obsession with the ancient world.

Manus holds Sarah's hand as he calmly instructs her to repeat phrases after him. She is reluctant, but with Manus' steady encouragement she is able to say, "my name is Sarah." Both are joyous. Jimmy enthusiastically reads aloud from Homer in both Greek and English, telling the story of the goddess Athene transforming Odysseus into an old man. He jokes with Manus about his love for "flashing eyed" Athene.

The fact that the first thing Manus teaches Sarah to say is her own name reflects the play's theme regarding the connection between language and the assertion of identity—a connection soon to be further explored through the Irish Ordnance Survey. Jimmy's obsession with the past is further established as well, and he will return to his love for Athene in the final moments of the play.

Manus looks out the window and wonders aloud where "he" (someone yet unknown) is. Sarah mimes that the man is probably drinking at a pub following a baby's christening. With the man out drinking, Manus prepares to teach the class himself; it is now clear he was talking about his father, the school master. As he prepares the materials for class, Jimmy continues to read aloud, alternating between ancient Greek and English, stopping once to ask Manus the proper translation of a phrase. Sarah shyly gives Manus a bunch of flowers that she had hidden in the barn before class. Manus gets Sarah to say the word "flowers," then kisses the top of her head.

Sarah's gestures, though not language in the traditional sense, are nevertheless an important means of communication. She will repeat the same gestures in Act 3, though with an entirely different meaning. This moment also establishes Sarah's deep affection for Manus, which will inform her actions throughout the play.

A "strong-minded, strong-bodied" woman in her twenties named Maire enters. Manus feels awkward that she saw him kissing Sarah and he comments on having seen Maire harvesting hay. Maire ignores him and sits on a stool next to Jimmy. The two converse briefly in Latin, before Maire comments that she is even worse in English, knowing only three words. She proceeds to say a memorized line of "English" aloud—"in Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoll"—though with an odd accent and without knowledge of the words she is saying. Maire continues to ignore Manus and asks Jimmy if he knows what the phrase means, but he responds that the only English word he knows is "bosom."

Although the actors speak in English, within the world of the play, the characters are speaking Irish—and most characters, in fact, do not know how to speak English at all. Manus feels awkward for being caught kissing Sarah's head because, it will soon be revealed, he is betrothed to Maire. The latter, meanwhile, will repeat her one English phrase in a romantic moment with Lieutenant Yolland.

Manus apologizes for not seeing Maire the previous night, saying he had been called upon to write a letter for a local woman. This woman dictated as Manus wrote, but she got so absorbed in her own story that she forgot who she was dictating to and insulted Manus and his father. This makes Maire laugh. She then notes that English soldiers will be coming to give her a hand with the hay, though she won't understand a word they are saying.

This scene begins to clarify the romantic relationship between Maire and Manus. This is also the play's first indication of the presence of British soldiers, whom Maire notes she cannot communicate with—foreshadowing the many moments of miscommunication that will take place between the British and Irish throughout the play.

Doalty and Bridget, two students in their twenties, enter noisily. Doalty carries a surveyor's pole and does an imitation of the drunken school master. Doalty says that whenever the Red Coats put a surveyor pole down, he picks it up and moves it a few paces to confuse them and assert "a presence." Jimmy recites Latin and Manus beats Doalty to translating it.

Doalty's entrance suggests the growing Irish resentment towards the British soldiers' presence on the island. His prank is a means of asserting his Irish identity in the face of British colonialism.

Everyone settles down for class, and Bridget asks if anyone knows the name of **Nellie Ruadh's baby**, who was christened earlier that day. Manus asks where the Donnelly twins are, and Bridget begins to answer before commenting on the squeakiness of her slate. She practices writing while Doalty works on multiplication.

Nellie Ruadh's baby becomes a symbol of the Irish language, with its christening representing the impending renaming of the Irish landscape by the British. This is also the play's first mention of the Donnelly twins, who are later implied to play a role in the disappearance of the British officer Yolland. The fact that Bridget appears evasive in talking about the twins immediately suggests that they are involved in something illicit.

Manus walks around the school room to check in with each student. Upon reaching Maire, she says that the "passage money" came the previous night. She then tells Manus he needs to apply for a job at the national school that is soon opening, because it will put the hedge school out of business. He says he cannot apply because his father already has. Sarah is listening behind his shoulder.

The British began to implement a national school system throughout Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century. Free for students and taught only in English, these schools did indeed lead to the end of the hedge school system and were another mechanism of colonialism. This scene also further establishes Manus' deference to his father. It will also soon be revealed that Maire is discussing the money required for her move to America.

Bridget off-handedly mentions soldiers making maps while talking about the "sweet smell," indicating crop rot. Maire grows annoyed, asserting that the potatoes have never failed in Baile Beag. Talk returns to the new national school; the new laws say children must attend from the age of six until at least twelve, and that people don't have to pay for anything except their books. This seems outrageous to Doalty. Bridget adds that all lessons will also be taught in English.

Bridget's repeated references to the "sweet smell" foreshadow the potato blight known as the Great Famine that devastated Ireland in the 1840s. The elaboration of the new national school system reaffirms its potential to decimate both the presence of hedge schools throughout Ireland as well as knowledge of the Irish language.

Manus' father, Hugh—a large, dignified yet shabbily-dressed man—enters carrying a stick. He has clearly been drinking, though he does not appear drunk, and explains that he was celebrating following the christening of **Nellie Ruadh's baby**. As Hugh speaks, he quizzes the room on the Latin and Greek etymological origins of certain words and phrases, such as "caerimonia nominationis"—which Maire correctly responds means "the ritual of naming." Hugh also asks where the Donnelly twins are; after a brief pause, Bridget says they're probably at "the turf" before changing the subject to how much she owes Hugh for lessons.

This moment establishes both Hugh's alcoholism and his penchant for ancient languages. The mention of Nellie Ruadh's baby in conjunction with "naming" reaffirms the connection between names and the establishment of identity. Bridget's quick changing of the subject regarding the Donnelly twins again suggests she is hiding some knowledge about them; given their later implied involvement in Yolland's disappearance, they may be participating in illicit anti-British activities at this moment as well.

Hugh tells Manus to get him a cup of tea and then address the class. He says that on his "perambulations"—which Maire responds means his walk—he met Captain Lancey of the Royal Engineers. Lancey, who is in charge of surveying the area, told Hugh that some of his equipment and horses have gone astray. Lancey also said he speaks only English and was surprised the Baile Beag townspeople did not; Hugh responded that they could not properly express themselves in English.

The fact that Lancey speaks only one language makes him appear less educated than the Irish peasants he seeks to "civilize" through the Ordnance Survey. Hugh's comment, meanwhile, creates a sense of comedic irony, given that the actor portraying him would, in fact, be speaking English in this moment.

As Hugh quizzes Bridget on Latin conjugations, Maire gets to her feet and asserts they should all be learning English. She says that the "Liberator" Daniel O'Connell called Irish a "barrier to modern progress," and Maire agrees that it is far more useful than Greek or Latin—especially because she is going to America after the harvest. Hugh responds that he discussed the new national school with the local Justice of the Peace, who invited him to take it over when it opens and run it as he runs the hedge school.

Maire is clearly forward-thinking and understands that English will afford her more opportunities than Irish ever could. This underscores another way in which colonialism functions and effectively forces people to abandon their culture in order to survive. Many Irish citizens did indeed immigrate to the United States at this point in history as well.

Hugh's younger son, Owen, enters. He is in his twenties, handsome, charming, and dressed like a city man. He enthusiastically greets everyone, remarking that even after six years nothing has changed. Owen confirms that he now owns multiple shops in Dublin and has six servants. He says he travelled from Dublin with Lieutenant Yolland, one of the sappers in charge of re-naming places in Baile Beag. He has also brought Captain Lancey, the British cartographer in charge of the area.

This is the play's first introduction of Owen, whose actions will forever change the landscape of Ireland. His success in Dublin—where a significant amount of English was spoken at this time in history—reveals that Ireland is already changing quickly while remote, Irish-speaking places like Baile Beag are left behind.

Before bringing the men in, Owen remarks to Sarah that she is a new face in the classroom. After a brief pause she responds with her name. Before letting the men in, Owen says he is now on their payroll. Sarah excitedly tells Manus that she "said it," but he ignores her, too interested in his brother. Owen says he is acting as their interpreter.

The fact that Sarah has grown increasingly confident in expressing her Irish identity makes her ultimate silencing at the hands of the British all the more tragic. Already her accomplishment is overshadowed by Owen's entrance.

Hugh has everyone frantically tidy the room. Manus approaches Maire and remarks that she should have told him she was definitely leaving Ireland. Maire responds that though Manus talked to her about getting married, he has no solid job nor home and refused to apply to work at the new school—and, as such, he now has nothing.

Maire and Manus' relationship is further clarified. It is clear that the forward-thinking Maire is frustrated that Manus seemingly refuses to do anything to better his station in life or to embrace progress in Ireland.

Owen returns with the two British soldiers: Captain Lancey, a middle-aged man who seems uneasy around foreigners, and the shy, gangling Lieutenant Yolland, who is in his late twenties or early thirties. Lancey bluntly asks Owen—whom he mistakenly calls "Roland"—if the Baile Beag residents speak any English. Lancey proceeds to address the group as if they were slow-witted children, over-enunciating as he explains that his job to create a map of the county. Owen tells Lancey to simply speak normally and let him translate.

This scene introduces both Lancey and Yolland and establishes the latter's impatience with the locals. Lancey clearly views Baile Beag as backwards and uncivilized. He represents oppressive British colonialism and prejudice towards the Irish.

Lancey says that the queen's government is creating a new comprehensive map of Ireland, complete with topographic details, to provide the military with better information and for taxation purposes. Owen translates the gist of everything Lancey says, though he simplifies Lancey's grandiose language and makes it more palatable to the Irish locals. Owen asks if the group wants to hear Yolland speak; Maire asks if Yolland has anything to say, which Owen translates to Yolland as "she's dying to hear you." Yolland stumbles over his words, saying he feels foolish for not knowing the language—which Owen translates as "he wants me to teach him Irish"—and that he has fallen in love with the country.

Lancey's grandiose language again underscores his sense of superiority over the Irish, even as he initially attempts to present the mapping project as beneficial for locals. Owen's translation is not necessarily inaccurate, but it does reflect his desire to make the project appear less threatening. Unlike his colleague, Yolland is quickly established as more sympathetic to the Irish. This is also the first interaction between Yolland and Maire, albeit through the medium of Owen.

As the others mingle, Manus confronts Owen about mistranslating the soldiers' words. Manus says that the undertaking sounds like a "military operation" and demands to know what is "incorrect" about their current place names. Owen responds that they will be "standardized," which Manus understands to mean "changed into English." Manus also asks if Owen will ever tell the soldiers that his name is, in fact, not Roland. Owen insists it does not really matter since he is the same man regardless of what he is called Manus watches as Owen confidently returns to the rest of the group, while Sarah stares at Manus.

Because Manus speaks English, he is able to understand everything Lancey just said and grasp the threat the project poses to Irish identity. Owen's nonchalance about being misnamed by the British reflects that he does not yet grasp the important link between names and identity. Sarah's staring ends the act on an ominous note and foreshadows the fact that she will silently watch other important moments unfold.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

It is a few days later, and the "sappers" have proceeded with mapping much of the area. Owen is primarily doing Yolland's job, which is to anglicize the names of everything from rocks to streams by approximating English sounds ("Cnoc Ban" would be "Knockban") or directly translating the Irish to English ("Cnoc Ban" would be "Fair Hill"). The names are then put into a "Name-Book," which is used for labeling everything in new anglicized maps.

This passage clarifies exactly how the process of re-naming Baile Beag works. It also reveals a mechanism of British colonialism, as English begins to literally reshape the Baile Beag landscape in the official record.

It is a late afternoon on a hot day. On stage is a clothes line, as well as a large blank map on the floor, which Owen consults enthusiastically. Yolland sits on the floor, appearing completely at ease in his new surroundings. A bottle of poteen is nearby.

Yolland has fallen even more in love with the Irish and their culture. Poteen is a strong traditional Irish liquor often made from distilled potatoes.

Owen points to a tiny beach and tries to get Yolland to pronounce the Irish properly as "Bun na hAbhann," which means "mouth of the river." Yolland says there is no equivalent English sound; Owen consults the church registry, which lists multiple names for the beach, each of which either refers to a different place or doesn't capture the meaning of the Irish: Owenmore, Binhone, Banowen. Owen reflects that they must use a name that properly describes "tiny area of soggy, rocky, sandy ground where that little stream enters the sea" and arrives at Burnfoot.

This moment reveals the difficulty inherent to translation. "Burnfoot" is an attempt to capture the sound and sentiment of the original Irish yet is ultimately something quite different than "Bun na hAbhann." Owen's choice is not necessarily any more or less "correct" than a different translation; without a one-to-one correlation between all words in different languages, translation is a subjective process.

Yolland again mistakenly calls Owen "Roland" before revealing that Lancey thinks they are not working fast enough, since the sappers leave at the end of the week. Yolland proudly asserts that he stood up to Lancey, saying they can't rename the country in a week.

The British continue to misname Owen, in effect denying him his Irish identity. Even so, this scene further establishes Yolland's sympathy for the Irish and how that contrasts with the typical cultural imperialism that Lancey exhibits. Lancey clearly fails to appreciate the nuances of the Irish language, and as such, doesn't understand the difficulty in translating Irish to English.

Manus enters. When Yolland asks if he needs them to leave, Manus says no, but he responds in Irish (spoken on stage as English), much to Owen's annoyance. Owen and Yolland discuss the name of a beach, and Yolland excitedly reveals he has been picking up some Irish words. He enthusiastically wishes he were fluent and offers to send Manus some oranges they got in from Dublin. Manus again responds in Irish. Owen scolds him, but Manus responds (again in Irish) that he thought Yolland wanted to learn, and he says that Owen should hide the bottle they are drinking from before their father arrives. He also says that while he can understand people like Lancey, people like Yolland confuse him.

Manus' refusal to speak English in front of Yolland is a political act—a means to assert his Irish identity and express his resentment towards British colonialism. While Manus can grasp the narrow-minded prejudice of men like Lancey, Yolland's love for the language he is destroying is a confusing character trait.

After Manus leaves, Yolland asks Owen if his brother has been crippled since birth. Owen reveals that Hugh fell across Manus' cradle when he was a baby, and that Manus has felt responsible for their father ever since. He lives on the odd shilling Hugh gives him, and as such he has no money to marry. Owen remarks that, unlike Manus, he got out of town in time. Yolland pours himself another drink, though Owen warns that the alcohol is strong.

Owen's story reveals that, however unintentionally, Hugh has been holding Manus back since he was a baby. Manus has been caught in the stagnant world of Baile Beag. Owen, meanwhile, recognized the lack of opportunity and moved to Dublin—a place that not coincidentally contains many English speakers. This further associates English with progress and again underscores how colonialism functions by denying native people opportunities to succeed utilizing their own language and culture.

As the two return to their work, Yolland reveals that a little girl spat at him yesterday. He asks Owen about the Donnelly twins, whom he says Lancey wants for questioning. Owen nonchalantly responds that the Donnelly twins are great fisherman and probably stole someone's nets.

The little girl represents the growing Irish resentment towards the British colonizers and their mapping project. The subsequent mention of the Donnelly twins again foreshadows their implied involvement in anti-British activities and Yolland's eventual disappearance.

Owen is working on "Druim Dubh," which means "Black Ridge." Thus far, they have renamed every Dubh "Duff," so he thinks they should continue for consistency, but is not sure if they should use "D-r-u-m" or "D-r-o-m." Yolland asks about a house above their camping spot. Owen responds that it is the house of Maire Chatach, and that "Chatach" means "curly-haired." Yolland says he often hears music coming from the house, and Owen suggests he stop by one evening. Yolland asks if Owen thinks he could live in Ireland, declaring it "heavenly." Owen scoffs, responding that it's "the first hot summer in fifty years," and that Yolland could not handle the winter.

This scene further elaborates on the subjectivity and difficulty of translation. Yolland's noticing of Maire foreshadows his love for her. The fact that Maire's last name means curly-haired ties into the play's theme regarding the connection between names and identity—"Chatach" is a literal marker of who Maire is. Owen begins to resent Yolland's romanticization of Ireland.

Doalty rushes in looking for Manus. He asks Yolland how he is; Yolland attempts to thank Doalty for something, but Doalty says he cannot understand "a word" he is saying. He proceeds to tell Manus two men are asking for him, and they rush off. Yolland tells Owen that he was attempting to thank Doalty for cutting a pathway through the long grass outside his tent that morning. He proceeds to say that before coming to Ireland, he was supposed to have a job in Bombay but he missed the boat. He joined the army and was posted to Dublin, which sent him to Baile Beag—where he realizes he is much happier to be. Owen asks if he believes in fate.

Despite having learned a few words of Irish, Yolland still cannot communicate with the Baile Beag locals. Nevertheless, it appears his connection to the land is stronger than the confines of language. The men asking for Manus, it will soon be revealed, are offering him a job to start a new hedge school.

Yolland says Lancey is similar to his own father in that he is meticulous in his dedication to his work. Yolland's father was born the day the Bastille fell in 1789, and he believes that event shaped his life by granting him a sense of endless possibilities. Yolland, however, lacks his father's energy. He tries to describe the feeling of arriving in Baile Beag to Owen, saying it was like entering into a "consciousness" that is "at its ease and with its own conviction and assurance." Hearing Jimmy Jack and Hugh talk about the ancient Greeks as if they lived locally made Yolland feel like he could fit in in Baile Beag. Even so, he says that if he learned to speak Irish, he would still always be an outsider to the private "language of the tribe."

Yolland seems unaware of the irony in his father's story: Bastille Day marked a turning point in the French Revolution and is a celebration of French nationalism. Having a strong national identity, Yolland implies, is essential to feeling a sense of possibility—yet Yolland is denying that national identity from the Irish through the Ordnance Survey. Yolland also understands the limits of language in this moment, realizing that much of communication and mutual understanding occurs beyond the confines of a shared spoken language.

Hugh enters in clothes "for the road," with an air of energy and alertness almost to the point of self-parody. He asks for a "drop" of poteen and greets Yolland in Latin. Hugh then translates his words to English, remarking that they sound "plebian" in this language.

Colonial narratives often paint the colonizers as "civilizing" natives; in this moment, however, Hugh asserts the English language is low class or common.

Hugh continues to drink. He says he is going to see the local priest and then the builders of the new school to talk about his living accommodations there. Yolland says that he once lived close to a poet named William Wordsworth; Hugh responds that he is not familiar with him, seeing as the Irish "tend to overlook" British literature.

Hugh's dismissal of Wordsworth again underscores his view regarding the apparent lowness of the English language. William Wordsworth was one of the most famous English Romantic poets, and his name would likely be familiar audiences watching the play—adding an element of comedy to this moment.

Yolland tells Hugh how "Roland" (i.e. Owen) is teaching him Irish. He says again how remarkable Baile Beag is for conversing in Greek and Latin, and he remarks on the fascinating etymology of Irish place names. Hugh responds that Gaelic is "a rich language" and "a rich literature" that reveals the Irish to be spiritual people. An embarrassed Owen tells him to stop and asserts that Hugh does not know the way to the priest's now that many place names have been changed: for example, Lis na Muc (the Fort of the Pigs) is now Swinefort.

Owen reveals that the mapping project has altered the once-familiar landscape of Baile Beag, resulting in a sense of loss and confusion for locals like Hugh. By erasing much of the historical meaning from the landscape, the new map displaces Irish identity, destroying context by which the Irish recognize and define themselves.

Hugh ignores Owen and continues telling Yolland how rich the Irish language is, positing it as a response to the drudgery of their lives. He asks Owen for some money, asserting he will repay him with proceeds from the forthcoming publication of an elaborately-titled book about languages. Hugh tells Yolland that, even as he learns to speak Irish and to better connect with the locals, he must remember that words are only "signals" and "are not immortal"; what's more, a society can get trapped in a language that "no longer matches that landscape of fact."

Hugh believes the Irish language to be a product of Irish culture rather than its mirror image. This distance between a language and cultural complicates the notion that destroying a language completely erodes the culture that created it. Hugh also asserts that languages must evolve with culture in order for either to survive in an ever-changing world.

After Hugh exits, Owen remarks that his father is pompous. Yolland, however, thinks he has a point: in creating a map of Ireland, he posits, they are taking part in an "eviction of sorts" and that "something is being eroded" in the process of standardizing place names. Owen grows frustrated with Yolland's continued romanticizing of Ireland and tells the story of Tobair Vree: this is the name of a crossroads that comes from "tobair" (meaning "well") and a corruption of the Irish name "Bhriain," an old man who died in the well 150 years earlier. Owen only knows the story because his grandfather told him; the well is now dried up, and he doubts any others in the area know the real origin of the name—which has been "eroded beyond recognition." As such, Owen feels that to hold onto the name is meaningless. Owen argues about what to put in the Name-Book, but Yolland insists they use "Tobair Vree," asserting that that is what Owen—whom he calls Roland once again—really wants, too.

This conversation between Yolland and Owen reflects the debate at the core of Translations*: that is, whether translation is a creative or destructive act, a means to increase mutual understanding or a process that invariably erodes meaning. Friel ultimately does not arrive at an answer, and both men in this moment make valid, complicated arguments. Regardless,* Translations *suggests that all culture was likely an erosion—or, perhaps, an evolution—of something that came before.*

Owen explodes at Yolland, shouting that his name is Owen, not Roland. Yolland is shocked, and the absurdity of the situation suddenly causes them to laugh. An elated Manus enters and says he has news; Owen asks him to speak English for Yolland, whom Manus refers to as "the colonist." Manus has been offered a job to start another hedge school on Inis Meadhon, an island fifty miles south. Owen congratulations Manus and insists he and Yolland stay with him when they get to the island. Yolland makes a toast to Manus and holds out his hand; Manus takes it and they shake.

By taking back his name, Owen is reasserting his Irish identity. Manus continues to reveal resentment towards British colonialism in Ireland, but the two men appear to reach a sort of truce—one that will be abruptly broken soon when Yolland begins a romance with Maire.

Maire arrives with a milk delivery. Manus tells her the news and attempts to thank her for something, but Maire interrupts him by handing him his milk, saying she will need the can she brought it in back. Manus goes upstairs to empty the can. Owen then reintroduces Maire and Yolland, acting as their translator as Maire speaks "Irish" (though the actors continue to speak in English). Maire says there is going to be a dance tomorrow night at Tobair Vree; Yolland gets excited upon hearing a familiar place name, though Owen asserts to Maire that Yolland has no idea what she is saying. Maire tells Owen to tell Yolland about the dance, and Manus returns with the empty milk can and offers to walk Maire home. Maire instead decides to have a drink with Owen and Yolland. A drunk Yolland joyously recites the Irish words he has learned and calls poteen "bloody marvelous." At this cue, reel music swells and the stage goes to black.

Maire's continued coldness towards Manus reflects the disintegration of their romantic relationship, even as Manus attempts to rekindle things with his announcement; it is clear that his new job is too little too late for Maire. Yolland and Maire's romance, meanwhile, begins to blossom despite their inability to have a real conversation, suggesting that communication is possible even without a shared language. The fact that Maire rejects Manus' offer to walk her home in favor of remaining with Yolland and Owen further reveals that she is choosing the Lieutenant over Manus. Yolland's joy in this moment makes his later disappearance all the more tragic.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

It is the following night, and the stage is set to make clear that down front is "a vaguely 'outside' area." Music continues to play as Maire and Yolland run in laughing and holding hands, having just left the dance. They "talk," though, because of their language barrier, neither actually knows what the other is saying. Yolland says he has been watching Maire day and night. Maire tells Yolland to "say anything at all" because she "loves the sound of" his speech. Yolland frustratedly looks around for something to help them communicate and tells Maire how he watches her feed the hens every morning. Maire attempts to communicate in Latin, and Yolland repeats Maire's previous line exactly—telling her to "say anything at all" because he loves "the sound of" her speech.

The romance of this scene again reveals how communication transcends the confines of language. Maire and Yolland are able to understand their affection for one another without ever grasping the actual meaning behind the other's words. The fact that the actors speak English throughout the entire scene allows the audience to hear that both are unknowingly saying the same thing—adding a sense of dramatic irony and underscoring the deep connection between the two.

Latin proves useless, so Maire repeats the three English words she knows: fire, water, Earth. Yolland grows excited to hear her speaking English and tells her it is "perfect." Maire then repeats the one phrase she knows: "In Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoll." Yolland excitedly says that's where his mother comes from until he realizes Maire cannot understand him; he stops abruptly, and Maire worries she said something "dirty."

Yolland understands Maire's three English words as her attempt to communicate in his language—and, as such, are a deeply romantic gesture. Maire repeats the nonsense phrase she said in Act One; the fact that she fears she said something dirty adds more comedic irony to the scene.

Maire moves away from Yolland, who begins to recite all the Irish names he has learned so far. Maire stops and turns towards him. She joins in reciting Irish names and holds her hands out to Yolland, who takes them in his own. They proceed to speak "almost to himself/herself," saying very similar phrases without knowing it as they profess their affection for each other. Yolland says he wants to live with Maire "always." She wonders what "always" means, before repeating roughly the same phrase Yolland said in Irish. They kiss. Sarah enters, sees them, and runs off shouting for Manus. Music crescendos.

Once again, Yolland and Maire understand these words, however random they appear, to be expressions of affection. The definitions behind the words are irrelevant, entirely different from what they mean in this moment. The scene ends on an ominous note, however, with Sarah once again watching something momentous unfold. This time, however, she uses her new-found ability to speak to call for Manus—a man who will inevitably be angry and devastated by what Sarah tells him.

ACT 3

The following evening, it is raining outside as Sarah and Owen sit in the schoolroom—Sarah with a book in her lap and Owen with his map. Both are distracted and look towards the stairs. Manus descends with a bag of clothes and begins urgently selecting books from around the room as Owen reflects on a place called "The Murren" being a corruption of "Saint Muranus"; Owen believes they should return to the original name. Manus attempts to tie his bag of clothes shut but everything spills out instead. With Manus close to tears, Owen runs to get him a different bag. Sarah attempts to speak to Manus but he ignores her.

Manus' entrance and distraught manner suggests that he knows about Maire and Yolland and will be leaving Baile Beag. The presence of rain contrasts with the summer heat present in Acts One and Two and reflects the darkened tone of the play from this moment on. Owen's desire to revert "The Murren" to its "original" name reflects that even Irish place names are often a corruption—or a translation—of something that came before.

Manus asks if Owen will be around a while longer, and he instructs Owen to tell those in Inis Meadhon—where he has been hired to start a new hedge school—that he still wants the job but will be gone for three or four months. Owen says Manus is being stupid and suggests that, by leaving Baile Beag now, Lancey will think he is "involved"—in what it is not yet clear. As such, Owen encourages Manus to wait a few days, asserting that Yolland (who it becomes clear at this point has gone missing) probably just went to visit one of the islands or got drunk and the search party will find him soon enough.

It gradually becomes clear to the audience that Yolland has mysteriously disappeared and that Manus is leaving Baile Beag for a period of time to avoid being implicated. Owen recognizes that his leaving could of course have the opposite effect.

Manus reveals that he had planned to violently confront Yolland the night before and was holding a rock in his hand when he saw Yolland standing on the side of the road smiling with Maire. At that moment he lost the will to get close to the couple and instead "shouted something stupid" in Irish—meaning Yolland did not even understand the insult; instead, he simply kept repeating, "Sorry?" It was "the wrong gesture in the wrong language," Manus notes.

Manus has spoken in Irish in front of the British soldiers throughout the play as a means to assert his identity and resist colonialism. It is the ultimate insult in this moment, then, that his final attempt at rebellion is completely misunderstood by Yolland; Manus seems to recognize that he has lost not only Maire, but also the fight against British oppression.

Manus again asks Owen to give his message to Inis Meadhon; Owen repeats that it will be suspicious if Manus leaves now, so Manus turns to Sarah, who says she will give the message for him. Manus says he is going to Mayo, and leaves Owen detailed instructions for helping Hugh get by without him. Owen asks about Maire and offers Manus money, but Manus ignores both gestures. Before leaving, Manus addresses Sarah but without the "warmth or concern" he showed in Act 1. Sarah recites her name and where she lives, then begins to softly cry. Manus says she did "no harm" and kisses her head "as if in absolution." He leaves as Sarah repeats that she is sorry.

Manus lacks the kindness, hopefulness, and enthusiasm he displayed towards Sarah in the beginning of the play. His language here, though nearly an exact repetition of his words in Act One, now reveals his sense of defeat and despair. This reflects Hugh's earlier assertion that words are dependent on their context— that they are merely signals. The context of Manus' world has changed entirely, making his language take on different meaning.

Owen asks Sarah if there is class tonight and where Hugh is. She mimes rocking a baby, but Owen does not understand the gesture. Bridget and Doalty enter loudly and say that fifty more soldiers have arrived and are looking around extremely closely. They say that Hugh and a crowd "from the wake" were in the pub and went outside when they heard the soldiers making a commotion. Hugh started shouting at the soldiers that they were things like "huns" and "vandals." Jimmy simply shouted "Thermopylae!"

Sarah makes the same gesture she made for Manus in Act One—here, however, she is saying that Hugh is at a wake rather than a christening. This again reflects the notion that language is dependent upon its context. Thermopylae refers to the famous battle in which three hundred Spartans ultimately faced off against the Persian Empire. In Jimmy's formulation, the Spartans represent the Irish standing strong against the British. The Spartans were defeated, however, and Jimmy's shout reveals his obsession with the past to the point of making himself irrelevant.

Owen asks Bridget and Doalty if they saw Yolland and Maire leave the dance together. They confirm that they did, but that they did not see them return. Bridget says she did not see Manus following them but saw him returning alone later. Owen asks if they saw Manus stay until the end of the dance, but they don't know anything; Owen says he is asking because he knows Lancey will question him once he finds out that Manus has left. Bridget insists she knows nothing about Yolland and that Owen should ask the Donnelly twins. Owen asks about the Donnellys, insisting Yolland is his friend and he wants to know what happened, but Doalty is evasive. After more prodding Doalty swears he knows nothing apart from the fact that he saw the Donnellys' boat at the port on his way to the dance and it was not there by the time he left.

The possibility of Yolland simply being lost grows increasingly unlikely, especially upon Bridget's mention of the Donnelly twins, who have been suggested to be associated with illicit anti-British activities throughout the play. Doalty reveals that the twins' boat was no longer at port, which makes Yolland's fate appear all the more grim.

Maire enters carrying her milk can, clearly in distress. She asks if Owen has heard anything. She says that Yolland dropped her at home and mistakenly said in Irish "I'll see you yesterday" instead of "tomorrow," then went off laughing. Maire says Yolland is from a small place called Winfarthing and drops to the floor to point it out on Owen's map. She points out the surrounding towns, deeming their names very odd but nice sounding, "like Jimmy Jack reciting his Homer."

Yolland's final moment with Maire is again one in which communication transcends language. Maire's recitation of English place names reaffirms that the English language sounds just as odd to the Irish as the Irish language sounds to the English.

Maire insists Yolland would not just leave, and as such that something must have happened to him. She looks at her hands and is ashamed of their roughness; she hopes she won't have to work with hay in Brooklyn. She asks if everyone heard about **Nellie Ruadh's baby**, who died in the middle of the night. She says she must go to the wake and leaves.

Maire's assertion that Yolland would not leave her implies that he has been killed. Meanwhile, the death of Nellie Ruadh's baby represents the death of the Irish language and culture in the face of colonial oppression.

Doalty agrees with Owen that Manus was a fool to leave and that the army will be after him. Lancey enters and tells Owen he will address the class, each member of which must then pass on what he says. With Owen acting as his translator once again, Lancey says they are looking for Yolland, and if they don't find him within twenty-four hours they will shoot all the livestock in "Ballybeg" until someone comes forward. After that they will evict residents and destroy their houses. Owen protests, but Lancey tells him to do his job and "translate." Lancey begins to list the townlands they will destroy, using their English names. Owen uses their Irish names as he relays the information to the others.

Lancey has abandoned any attempts to portray the presence of British soldiers as beneficial to the Irish. Instead, he asserts the might of the British colonizer. The fact that he scolds Owen reveals that Lancey sees Owen as an Irishman and not an equal, regardless of how much work Owen did for the British. Owen's use of Irish place names is a subtle rebuke of Lancey and an attempt to reassert Irish identity.

Lancey points at Sarah and shouts at her to tell him her name. She tries frantically but cannot, so Owen answers for her. Doalty looks out the window and calmly says that Lancey's camp is on fire. Lancey asks Owen who Doalty is and where he lives; Owen tells him the Irish name of Doalty's home, but Lancey insists on knowing "what we call it." He tells Owen he carries responsibility in all this and exits.

Owen again attempts to undermine Lancey by saying the Irish name of Doalty's town. Lancey's response, however, again asserts the might of the colonizer over Ireland.

Bridget confuses the smell of burning tents with the "sweet smell" of potato blight, then runs off to hide her animals. Owen tends to Sarah, insisting she was only frightened and her speech will come back. Sarah emphatically shakes her head and leaves.

The "sweet smell" again foreshadows the potato blight that will devastate Ireland—and, presumably, spell the end of Baile Beag—in a few years' time. Sarah's ultimate inability to speak, presumably ever again, represents the ultimate silencing of the Irish people by the British.

Doalty says "they" did the same thing when his grandfather was young, and laments how Owen is being treated after all the work he has done. Doalty declares that if they stuck together they could defend their land and that "the Donnelly twins" could fight against a trained army. He says he "might know something" about their whereabouts after Owen talks to Lancey, then he leaves.

Doalty reveals that the British have treated the Irish poorly for a long time, and that many Irish people refuse to give in regardless of the strength of their enemy. His parting words seem to solidify the suspicion that the Donnelly twins were involved in Yolland's disappearance, and that it was motivated by the twins' anti-British sentiment.

Owen puts the Name-Book on top of a pile. It falls to the floor, and he decides to leave it where it is. He goes upstairs as Hugh and Jimmy Jack enter, both drunk. Hugh talks as if the class were full, calling on students as usual to identify the Latin origins of certain words as he speaks. He reveals that, at the wake, the Justice of the Peace told him that a schoolmaster from Cork had been appointment to the national school.

Owen has lost faith in the mapping project. Hugh has become a tragic figure, having lost his students and job by clinging to the Irish language.

Hugh shouts for Manus to bring him tea. Jimmy says he is marrying Athene and he and Hugh jokingly talk about the wedding. Jimmy becomes more serious as he says he needs companionship and suddenly begins to cry. He then drunkenly falls asleep. Hugh picks up the Name-Book that had fallen to the floor as Owen enters with two bowls of tea. Hugh reads the English names aloud, but Owen snatches the book out of his hand calling it "only a catalogue of names." He then calls it his "mistake" and tries to wake Jimmy.

Hugh and Jimmy's drunken interaction shows that Hugh does not yet know that Manus has left, and that Jimmy's obsession with the past veers into delusion. Owen definitively rebukes his involvement in the Ordnance Survey, though his dismissal of the importance of the Name-Book rings hollow; he knows now, more than ever, how important names are to the establishment and preservation of identity.

Hugh points to the book and says they must learn the new names for "where we live." He says that people are not shaped by the "literal past" but rather the "images of the past embodied in language." They must continue to renew those image or risk becoming fossilized. As Owen leaves to look for Doalty, Hugh tells him that it is "a form of madness" to remember everything.

Having lost nearly everything, Hugh has finally accepted that, in order for Irish culture to survive, his people must find a way to express themselves in the English language. His final words to Owen suggest that it is not wise, nor possible, to preserve every element of the past, and that some things must be forgotten in order to move forward.

Hugh looks at the sleeping Jimmy and reminisces about the twenty-three miles "to Sligo" they marched going into battle in 1798—both with "the *Aeneid* in their pockets." Hugh had recently married his now deceased wife. He points out the heroism of having to leave her as well as his infant son. Upon stopping in a pub, however, grew homesick—just like Ulysses—for their "own" and dreamed of "older, quieter things." They marched back.

Hugh is referring to the Irish Rebellion of 1798 against the British. Ulysses refers to the hero of Homer's epic poem The Odyssey, who spent ten years trying to return home after the Trojan War. Hugh has dreamed not of a life of violent rebellion, but of simply being able to preserve his home—which is threatened by the destruction of Irish language and culture.

Maire enters, saying she left but couldn't remember where she was going. Hugh says he will teach her English, starting after the funeral. He warns her not to expect much, and that even with the "available words" and "available grammar" she may not be able to "interpret between privacies."

Hugh reflects the play's theme of the limits of language; there is more to mutual understanding than simply knowing the right words to say, and sharing a spoken language does not guarantee that communication will occur. The fact that he won't begin working with Maire until after the funeral again connects Nellie Ruadh's baby to the Irish language, which Hugh would like to lay to rest before moving on to teach English.

Maire asks Hugh what the English word "always" means. Hugh translates it from Greek and Latin, and says it is a "silly word." Maire insists that when Yolland returns he will come "here," where he "was happiest."

Maire is referring to the word Yolland said to her before his disappearance. Hugh has already asserted that words are not "immortal," which is why he considers "always" to be a silly concept.

Jimmy has awoken and sits beside Maire. He explains that in Greek "endogamein" means "to marry within the tribe," while exogamein means the opposite—and that crossing "those borders" makes people angry. He muses whether Athene is mortal enough or he godlike enough for their marriage to "be acceptable" to their respective communities.

Jimmy's words reflect not just his imaginary marriage to Athene, but, of course, Maire and Yolland's relationship.

Hugh begins to recite the story of an ancient city that Juno loved above all others and had wanted to be "the capital of all nations." But the Trojan race sought to overthrow "these Tyrian towers" and proud kings sought to bring about "Lybia's downfall." Hugh's words get confused, and he says he will begin again. The lights begin to dim as he repeats the story, about the goddess Juno who loved one city above all others. Yet proud Trojan kings were born who would "come forth for Lybia's downfall." He trails off and the stage goes to black.

Hugh is reciting from Virgil's epic Latin poem The Aeneid, which tells the story of how refugees from the fallen city of Troy founded Rome. It is unclear if Hugh means for the Irish to be the Romans—a people group who will rise from destruction to conquer the world—or if they are Lybia, destroyed by the might of the Roman Empire, here representing the British.

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