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Consequences of Anglicizing Gaelic Names

In *Translations*, the act of Anglicizing the regions in Ireland, by supplanting their Gaelic names with English labels, has both damaging and beneficial consequences on the Irish locals. More formally known as the British Army Ordinance Survey Operation, this act forms a social hierarchy that places the British Army at the top the Irish Catholic locals at the bottom. The Ordinance also supplants Irish culture that is rooted in both the locals and the original Gaelic names of the regions, despite efforts by the locals to preserve this culture. Furthermore, Yolland and Owen, the characters who directly create the English labels, struggle with their own identities as they perform this operation. However, this operation also symbolizes opportunity to the locals. Yet this benefit is small compared to the overall negative effects of this operation. Thus, the results and themes from supplanting the Gaelic names of locations in Ireland with English labels are mainly detrimental to Irish culture and identity.

In the beginning of the play, we already see British Army, agents of this ordinance, imposing political dominance and discrimination against the locals. Lancy reads from the British charter, “‘Ireland is privileged. No such survey is being undertaken in England. So this survey cannot be but received as proof of the disposition for this government to advance the interests of Ireland.’ My sentiments, too” (1.1.31). According to Lancy and the British charter, the ordinance is beneficial to Ireland by helping it undergo modern progress. The charter suggests that Ireland is better off than England because England does not have this survey. However, England does not need this operation because its entire nation is already Anglican and modernized! Furthermore, charter has an arrogant tone implying that the British sees themselves as superior, and thus, in order “to advance the interests of Ireland,” it must replace the Irish language and culture with its own.

This image of the British as superior than the Irish creates a social hierarchy, supported by the power of the organized British military over the unarmed, dispersed locals. The hierarchy consists of the British Army, such as Lancy, Yolland, and Owen, at the top and the rest of the locals at the bottom. Recognizing this social structure, Owen is partial to speaking English and affiliating with the British Army in the beginning of the play. He repeatedly requests that Manus to speak English throughout the play. For example, when Yolland speaks to Manus in English and Manus replies back in Irish, Owen asks Manus, “Can’t you speak English before your man?” (2.1.36) Owen tells Manus to “speak English” so that Yolland can understand him. However, Owen also addresses Yolland as Manus’s “man,” suggesting that Yolland is higher up on the social structure than Manus, and thus Manus should respect him.

The social hierarchy also allows the British to discriminate against the locals. Lancy tells the locals that the British plans to make a map of Ireland, saying, “A map is a representation on paper—a picture—you understand picture?—a paper picture—showing, representing this country—yes?—showing your country in miniature—a scaled drawing on paper” (1.1.30). Because the locals do not understand English, they do not know what Lancy is saying. Lancy speaks to them slowly and loudly, suggesting that the locals appear to him inferior and dim-witted. Lancy’s tactic clearly shows that he is

mocking the local's inability to speak English, ignoring the fact that he is in a Gaelic speaking country but cannot speak Gaelic himself.

In addition to creating a social hierarchy and discrimination, the ordinance also uproots the Irish culture and traditions. For example, Owen and Yolland supplant "Druim Dubh," meaning the "south end" containing a "ridge of rocks," to Drimduff (2.1.36). Similarly, "Bun na hAbhann," meaning "soggy, rocky, sandy ground where that little stream enters the sea..." becomes Burnfoot (2.1.35). These examples show that the Gaelic names contain historical significance, whereas the new names (Drimduff and Burnfoot) are trivial. Moreover, the English labels sound comical, which devalues and mocks the historical significance behind the Gaelic names of these regions.

Despite this cultural loss, most of the locals attempt to preserve their Gaelic heritage all throughout the play. From the first to the last scene, Jimmy continually = recites phrases from the classics in Greek and Latin. Similarly, Bridget and Doalty are horrified at the new National Education System, which makes all students learn and speak English in the public school classrooms. When Marie encourages Doalty to apply to the new national school, Bridget explains to Doalty:

...[E]verything's free in [these national schools]...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. (1.1.22)

Because the education is free in these schools, with the exception of textbooks, this incentive may seem enticing to a student like Bridget, who currently has to pay to be educated in Hugh's hedge school. Yet she is pessimistic about the idea of replacing her Gaelic dialect with the English language. Bridget mocks the "Buncrana people," another community of Irish peasants in Donegal, Ireland who had adapted to the English language. Thus, Bridget values preserving her Gaelic heritage over a free education and discourages those, such as Doalty, who may be attracted to the national school.

Similarly, Manus understands English but refuses to speak in it. As seen in the example above when Owen tells him to speak English, Manus upholds his disapproval of converting to the English language, responding to Yolland, one of the agents of Anglicizing the Gaelic names, in Irish even though he knows that Yolland cannot understand him.

Manus also expresses his distaste for the English language by refusing to teach at the new local national school. Because this is one of only chances of securing a sufficient salary for Marie to marry him, taking on this job may at first seem attractive. However, Manus argues that his "father has already applied for it" and doesn't want to take away Hugh's job offer (1.1.21). Yet, his tone of voice seems more apathetic than disappointed, and we can speculate that another motive may be because he does not want to encourage others to forget how to speak Irish, eventually losing a large part of their Gaelic heritage, by learning only English. Furthermore, Manus later accepts a job at a hedge school for a smaller salary than that given by the national school. His tone now appears enthusiastic, exclaiming to Owen, "I've got good news!" and even speaks in English so that Yolland can understand him (2.1.46). Thus, like Bridget, Manus chooses to maintain his Irish heritage over helping to Anglicize it and marry Marie.

Like Bridget and Manus, most of the locals do not act submissive to the British, despite the British political dominance and discrimination. In the examples above,

Marcus generally refuses to speak to Yolland in English and does not view or treat him as a superior. Another example is when Bridget and Doalty start snickering at Lancy when he tells them about the map, saying, “A map is a representation on paper—a picture—you understand picture?—a paper picture...” (1.1.30). Although they do not understand what he is saying, they laugh at Lancy’s awkward speech and do not show any respect for him. Finally, when Yolland and Owen discuss possible English labels for ordinance, Yolland tells Owen, “I was passing a little girl yesterday and she spat at me” (2.1.37). The fact that even a small child attempts to resist the British supports the argument that the locals are disgusted at with the British Army’s presence and dominance over their language and culture. This hatred and resistance persists through the end of the play, when Doalty tells Owen, “I’ve damned little to defend [ourselves against the British Army] but [Lancy’ll] not put me out without a fight. And there’ll be others who think the same as me” (3.1.63-4). According to Doalty, if needed, the locals will resort to violence to resist against British conquest and preserve their Gaelic heritage.

Nonetheless, despite the efforts of the locals to preserve their Irish culture, the British army continues to dominate. For example, in the same scene as mentioned above, Doalty suggests, “If we’d all stick together. If we knew how to defend ourselves.” However, Owen reminds him, “Against a trained army” (3.1.64). According to Owen, even if Doalty teams up with all the locals and fight against the British, they will not succeed against the British military strength. Yet by the end of the play, the hatred for the British and the desire to protect themselves still persists in the locals. The most evident reason is when Lancy highlight the cruelty and mercilessness of the British forces by threatening the locals with eviction and murdering of livestock if they don’t find Yolland.

In this scene, Lancy’s true attitude on how he views the locals surface. Unlike his polite manner earlier when he addresses the locals with “Good evening” and “sir” (1.1.30, 32), he now rudely asks Owen “Who’s that lout?” about Doalty. After Doalty informs him that his whole camp is on fire, Lancy threatens him, saying, “I’ll remember you Mr. Doalty...” (3.1.61). Furthermore, he tells the locals:

Commencing twenty four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg...If that doesn’t bear results, commencing forty-eight hours from now we will embark on a series of evictions and leveling of every abode in the following selected areas...If by then the lieutenant hasn’t been found, we will proceed until a complete clearance is made of this entire section... (3.1.61, 62)

Lancy’s threat to kill all the livestock and evict the locals, thus destroying their economy, food, and shelter, the basic needs for survival, clearly outweighs one missing person. This disproportioned penalty appear as another tactic for the British Army to suppress resistance from the locals and maintain its control. Furthermore, the fact that Lancy punishes the entire Irish community rather than trying to find the individual culprit (Manus in this case), suggests that Lancy views Irishmen not as individuals, but rather generalizes them into a group of inferior people. Thus, to Lancy, if one local rebels, this must imply that all the locals would rebel as well. These events highlight the success of the British Army to oppress any potential local uprising, thus foreshadowing a successful Anglicization operation for Ireland.

In addition to creating British dominance and uprooting Gaelic culture, the ordinance also affects the individual agents who create the new English labels to replace

the original Gaelic names. For example, Yolland, a British Lieutenant, falls in love with the land and longs to stay. He tells Owen that “when heard Jimmy Jack and your father recite and your father swapping stories about Apollo and Chuchulians, and Paris and Ferdia—as if they lived down the road—I thought I knew perhaps I could live here...” (2.1.40). Thus, Yolland is attracted to the old Gaelic culture and coexisting with the locals. By caring about the land, Yolland begins to try and preserve some of the Gaelic names, such as Tobair Vree.

Likewise, Owen’s attitude on his own identity also changes, though more gradually. Throughout most of the play, the British calls Owen “Roland.” When Manus exclaims that “Roland” isn’t even his name, he replies to Marcus, “Owen—Roland—what the hell. It’s only a name. It’s the same me, isn’t it?” (1.1.31) Owen initially shows apathy towards his new name and argues that he is still the same person, and thus do not lose his identity even as his name changes. Thus, applying this concept to the surrounding geography, Owen originally does not feel any cultural or identity loss by supplanting the Gaelic names of the regions with English labels. Yet throughout his job translating for the British Army and Anglicizing the Gaelic names of regions in Ireland, he struggles with which side he is on—the locals or the British. For example, when he first translates Lancy’s announcement about the new British Ordinance Survey Operation, Owen alters the meanings of the conversation between the locals and Yolland/Lancy. Manus observes this, saying, “You weren’t saying what Lancy was saying!” Owen replies, “Uncertainty in meaning is incipient poetry’—who said that?” Manus answers back, “There was nothing uncertain about what Lancy said: it’s a bloody military operation, Owen!” (1.1.32) Owen avoids Manus’s accusation on translating Lancy’s speech. This action suggests that Owen may want to Anglicize the different regions in Ireland, but he knows that this would uproot the Irish Gaelic language and culture, potentially causing some of the locals to be angry. Furthermore, he appears to sense Lancy’s arrogance and superiority, such as when Lancy speaks slowly and loudly to the locals. AS a result, Owen may feel uncomfortable reporting Lancy’s true meaning in his speech.

Another example is when Yolland and Owen are discussing possible names with which to replace the Gaelic names of the regions in Ireland and Yolland asks Owen to keep the name “Tobair Vree,” Owen claims that Tobair Vree stems from a dead man...

OWEN: ...whose trivial little story nobody in the parish remembers...

YOLLAND: Except you.

OWEN: I’ve left [this parish].

YOLLAND: You remember it... [Keeping the name Tobair Vree] is what you want, too, Roland.

(Pause)

OWEN (*Explodes*) George! For God’s sake! My name is not Roland! (2.1.44)

In this scene, Owen claims that the Gaelic names do not have any important or sentimental historical value to the locals. Owen claims that “nobody in the parish remembers” the significance behind the name “Tobair Vree” after just elaborating on the story about how this name was founded! Yolland recognizes this contradiction, arguing that Owen remembers the significance of the Gaelic tradition behind this name, but he tries to hide it. This irony suggest that Owen tries to appear and believe himself to be partial to the British Army because it advances his social status. For example, as a

translator, the British views him as superior to the locals, and Owen tells Yolland that he has left the parish and is now part of the British Army. Yet we see Owen struggle with his identity, exploding at Yolland, “*My name is not Roland!*” Despite his claim that he has left the locals (saying “I’ve left [this parish]”), a part of him still remembers the history behind Tobair Vree, wants to preserve his Gaelic culture, and longs to be called Owen. Thus, as the play progresses, Owen’s earlier claim to Marcus, saying, “It’s only a name. It’s the same me, isn’t it?” becomes contradictory. In fact, by the end of the play, Owen changes his support from the British Army to the locals.

The final scene that sparks Owen’s transition to supporting the locals result from Lancy’s mercilessness and cruelty at the end of the play. In the same scene when Lancy threatens to evacuate the locals and kill their livestock, Owen translates the speeches between Lancy and the locals. When Owen hears Lancy’s threats, he is shocked, protesting, “You’re not [evicting all the locals]--!” However, Lancy quickly retorts back, “Do your job. Translate” (3.1.61). According to Lancy, Owen’s job as a translator does not place him equal with the rest of the British Army. Despite his fluency in English, Owen still remains a local and at a lower level on the social hierarchy. Furthermore, Lancy snaps at Owen in the same tone as when he threatens the locals. The fact that Lancy treats Owen the same way as he treats the locals further separates Owen’s identity from the British Army and connects it more with the locals. Lancy’s devaluing of Owen’s job as a translator contradicts Owen’s own respect and pride founded on his role *as* a translator. Thus, although Owen initially works to Anglicize the Gaelic names and translate for the British Army, he eventually shifts his identity away from the British Army and towards the locals.

So far, we have seen damaging consequences and identity shifts resulting from the British Ordinance Survey Operation. However, the transition to the English language and culture is also beneficial to the locals. For example, Marie supports learning English. She tells Hugh,

I’m talking about [Daniel O’Connell], 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. I want to be able to speak English because I’m going to America as soon as the harvest’s all saved. (1.1.26)

Marie views the English language as a source of opportunity and mobility. By learning to speak English and saving enough money, she can immigrate to America for a better life. Her rationale stems from that of Daniel O-Connell, activist for Irishmen’s civil and social rights, and founder of the Catholic Association and the same National Education system that horrifies Bridget and Doalty. At the same time when Marie considers learning English in the early 19th century, O-Connell passes the Catholic Emancipation, removing political oppression on the Catholics. By then, English has become the foundation for the political government, commerce, and emigration away from poverty. In contrast, the Gaelic language, along with the classics such as Greek and Latin, was viewed as backwards and “a barrier to modern progress.” With this historical context in mind, it is clear why Marie may be drawn to learning English and Anglicizing the Gaelic culture.

Similarly, the British Army and locals represent modern progress (or the English language) and backwardness (or the Gaelic language) respectively. For example, Marie

tells Manus, “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” (1.1.29). Marie refuses to marry Manus because he does not have economic security and is poor. Earlier, we learned that Manus is against teaching English at the new school to preserve the Gaelic culture and that his father had already applied for the job. Thus, Manus remains without a salary, and Marie, who values social and economic opportunity over her Gaelic language and culture, chooses Yolland instead. This context analogizes Manus, a poor anti-English local, to the backward Gaelic language, and Yolland, a socially high ranked British Lieutenant, to the progressive English language.

Like Owen, Marie attempts to cross the social and political tensions away from the Irish to the British Army. Yet this action increases tensions between both sides, leading to Yolland’s death and Lancy’s threat to evict the locals and kill their livestock. Jimmy asks Hugh, “Do you know the Greek word *endogamien*? It means to marry within the tribe. And the word *exogamein* means to marry outside the tribe. And you don’t cross those borders casually—both sides get very angry” (3.1.68). Although Jimmy is literally speaking about himself crossing boundaries between the mortals and gods to marry the Greek goddess Athena, his speech accurately describes Marie’s attempt to cross the boundary between Irish and British culture to marry Yolland. The fact that the British Army uproots the Gaelic language and culture by Anglicizing the names of the locations in Ireland and imposing political and social power over the locals create tension between the locals and the British Army. Thus, Marie’s attempt to cross this boundary, by supporting the English language and attempting “to marry outside the tribe” to a British Lieutenant, cause “both sides [to] get very angry.”

Anglicizing the Gaelic names in Ireland by the British Army has both damaging and beneficial consequences. However, its disadvantages clearly prevail throughout the play, creating political dominance and discrimination, a social hierarchy, and an uprooting of the Gaelic language and culture. However, as this ordinance survey progresses, we see characters, such as Owen and Marie, struggle with their desires to progress against social barriers, choose between their Gaelic heritage and modern progress with the English language, and find their identities. In Act 2, Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare asks, “What’s in a Name?” Initially, the audience may wonder about this same question. Like Owen in the beginning of the play, some of us may feel apathetic towards merely changing the names of the different regions in Ireland. Yet, by the end of the play, like Owen, our attitudes will have, for the most part changed, after seeing the intense damage and conflicts that result from this ordinance.

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