

THE ARAN ISLANDS
BY JOHN M. SYNGE

PART II

ERASED



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Part II Erased

A set of erasure texts from *The Aran Islands* by John M. Synge

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The Aran Islands

a simple

absence of
consciousness

ever the strange simplicity

of fragments

gave

a darker side of life

The Aran Islands



Michael

son

to the United States

was

English as he

can

write

translated

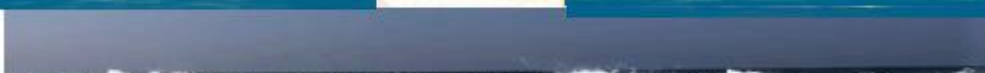


The Aran Islands

the surf



of spray
delirium



abating



to

die



The Aran Islands

the graveyard

of

afterwards

with

the priest and

the doctor

too late

for the loss

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He knows more than a few words of Gaelic. His favourite amusement is to stand behind the door with a stick waiting for any wandering pig or hen that may chance to come in, and then to assault and pursue them. There are two young kittens in the kitchen also, which he ill-treats without meaning to do them harm.

Whenever the old woman comes into my room with turf for the fire, he walks in solemnly behind her with a sod under each arm, deposits it on the back of the fire with great care, and then flies off round the corner with his long arms trailing behind him.

He has not yet received any official name

on the island, as he has not left the house, **but** he has a name usually applied to him by the children, 'little small-Michael.'

Now **and** then he is slapped, but for the most part the old woman ignores him.

One of 'the long-toothed hag' that lives in the dun and eats children, who are not good, spends half his day eating cold potatoes and drinking very strong tea, yet seems in perfect health.

An Irish letter has come to me from Michael, which I will translate it literally.

NOBLE PERSON

I write this letter

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with joy and pride that you found the way to the house of my father the day you were on the steamship. I am thinking there will not be loneliness on you, for there will be the fine beautiful Gaelic League, and you will be learning powerfully.

I am thinking there is no one in life walking with you now but your own self from morning till night, and great is the pity.

What way are my mother and my three brothers and my sisters, and do not forget white Michael, and the poor little child and the old grey woman, and Rory. I am getting a forgetfulness on all my friends and kindred.—I am your friend

It is curious how he accuses himself of forgetfulness after asking for all his family by name. I suppose the first home-sickness is wearing away, and he looks on his independent well being as a treason towards his kindred.

One of his friends was in the kitchen when the letter was brought to me, and, by the old man's wish, he read it out loud as soon as I had finished it. When he came to the last sentence he hesitated for a moment, and then omitted it altogether.

This young man had come up to bring me a copy of the 'Love Songs of Connaught,' which

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he possesses, and I persuaded him to read, or rather chant me, some of them. When he had read a couple I found that the old woman knew many of them from her childhood, though her version was often not the same as what was in the book. She was rocking herself on a stool in the chimney corner beside a pot of indigo, in which she was dyeing wool, and several times when the young man finished a poem she took it up again and recited the verses with exquisite musical intonation, putting a wistfulness and passion into her voice that seemed to give it all the cadences that are sought in the profoundest poetry.

The lamp had burned low, and another terrible gale was howling and shrieking over the island. It seemed like a dream that I should be sitting here among these men and women, listening to this rude and beautiful poetry that is filled with the oldest passions of the world.

The horses have been coming back for the last few days from their summer's grazing in Connemara. They are landed at the sandy beach where the cattle were shipped last year, and I went down early this morning to watch their arrival through the waves. The hooker was anchored at some distance from the shore, but I could see a horse standing at the gunwale

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emotions that I have

I feel

I feel

sometimes, yet

sometimes

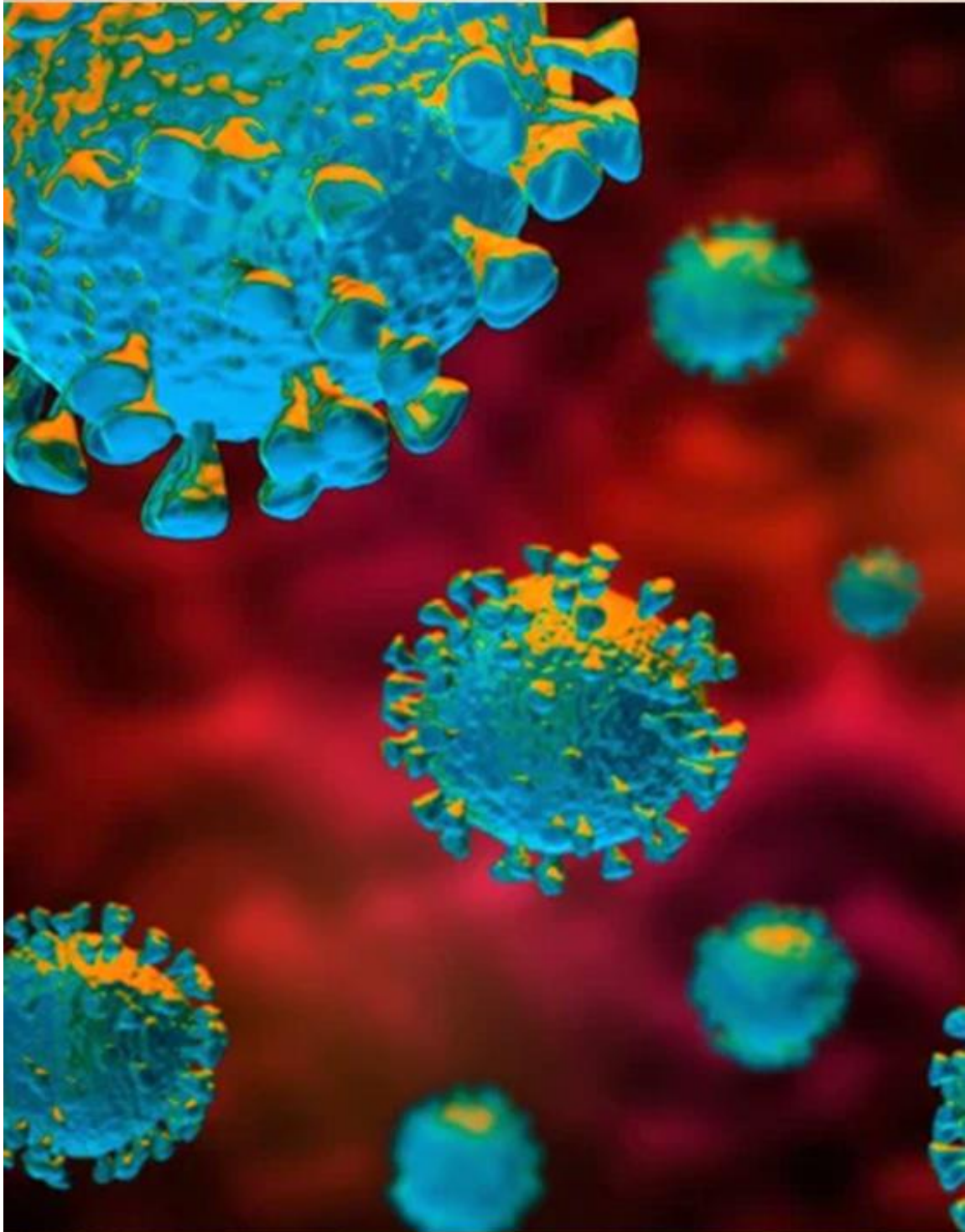
I

hear

from

another

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In some ways these men and women seem
strangely far away from me

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disillusion and to sum up in the expression of her grey-blue eyes the whole external dependency of the clouds and sea.

Our conversation is usually disjointed. One evening we talked of a town on the mainland. 'It isn't a quiet place,' she said. 'I wouldn't choose to live in it. It's a quiet place, and indeed I don't know the place that isn't.'

Another evening we talked of the people who live on the island or come to visit it.

'Father is a queer man,' she said. 'He was a kind man but a queer man. Priests is queer people, and I don't know who isn't.'

Then after a long pause she told me with seriousness as if speaking a thing that surprised herself and should surprise me, that she was very fond of the sea.

In our talk, which is sometimes part of the innocent realism of childhood, she is always impatiently eager to say the right thing and be engaging.

One evening I found her trying to light a fire in the little side room of her cottage, which is only a secondary fireplace. I went in to help her and showed her how to hold up a paper before the mouth of the chimney to make a draught, a method she had never seen. Then I told her of men who live alone in Paris and make their own fires that they may have no one to bother them.

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studies of
vague
reverence

influence

the

matter of the
little English

occasion to

English
speaking
when

assertive

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In

school where

knowledge

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method s

look

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quality

The Aran Islands

circumstances

in ordinary

I fell

and

doubted

after

the

opinion

I

was

passing through

The Aran Islands

the old man

waiting for

indescribable feeling

said

we do be afraid

to be

everything

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I had not yet seen them give to anything, then my bag was lifted in, and we were ready. Besides the four men of the crew a man was going with us who wanted a passage to this island. As he was scrambling into the bow, an old man stood forward from the crowd.

‘Don’t take that man with you,’ he said. ‘Last week they were taking him to Clare and the whole of them were near drowned. Another day he went to Inisheer and they broke three ribs of the curagh and they coming back. There is not the like of him for ill-luck in the three islands.’

‘The devil choke your old gob,’ said the man, ‘you will be talking.’

We set off. It was a four-oared curagh, and I was given the last seat so as to leave the stern for the man who was steering with an oar, worked at right angles to the others by an extra thole-pin in the stern gunwale.

When we had gone about a hundred yards they ran up a bit of a sail in the bow, and the pace became extraordinarily rapid.

The shower had passed over and the wind had fallen; but large, magnificently brilliant waves were rolling down on us at right angles to our course.

Every instant the steersman whirled us round with a sudden stroke of his oar, the prow reared up and then fell into the next furrow with a

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lifted above myself
manoeuvre to meet another
voice and
our destruction with
excitement

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one narrow escape

of

our

far more intimate
feeling

again

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able to understand



a nonsense ending



as

not

gibberish



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shall climb, he brought the conversation to the topic they are never weary of—**my views** on marriage.

He stopped as we **reached** the summit of the island, with the stretch of the Atlantic just visible behind him.

‘Whisper, noble person,’ he began; ‘do you never see **thinking** on the young girls?—The time I was a young man, the divil a one of them could I look on without **wishing** to marry her.’

‘Ah, probably,’ I answered, ‘but what are you’d be asking me?—What at all do you think of me yourself?’

‘O’lad, noble person, I’m thinking of you as being married.—When it was I’m telling you, a man who is not married is no better than an old jackass. He goes into his sister’s house, and into his brother’s house; he eats a bit in this place and a bit in another place, but he has no home for himself; like an old jackass **straying** on the rocks.’

I have left Aran. The steamer had a more than usually heavy cargo, and **t** after four o’clock when we sailed from Kil **o**.

Again I saw the three row boats **sink down** into the sea with a moment of inconceivable distress. It was a clear evening, and as we came out into the bay the sun stood like an

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I

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lonely

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lamentation

found

darkness

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skeletons of

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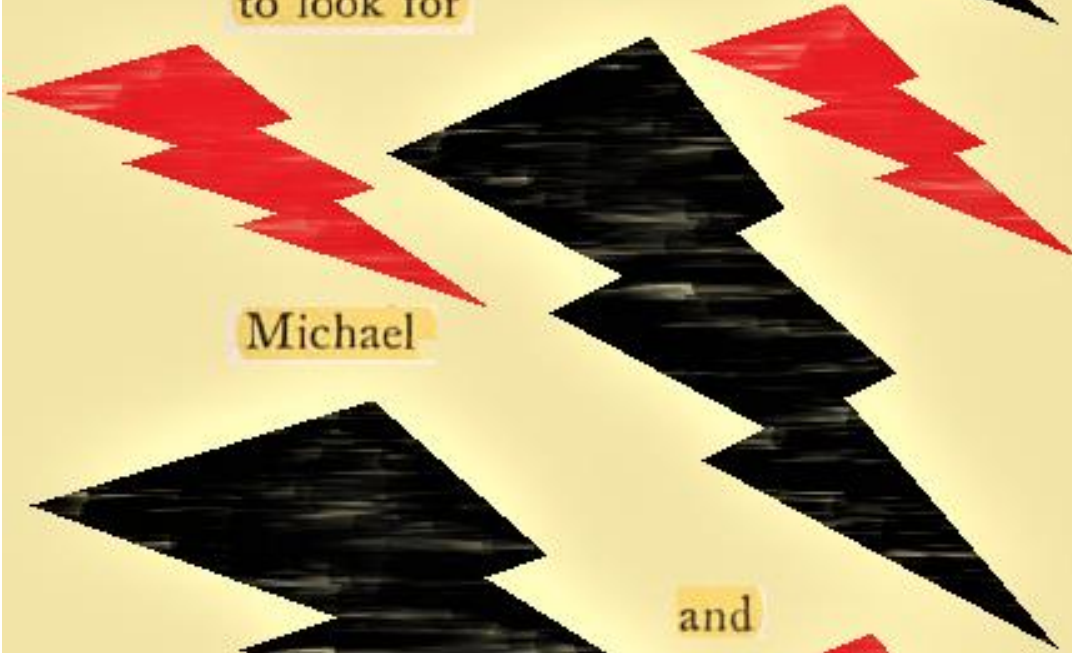
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thundering



to look for



Michael

and



not agree with him

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waiting for a train which was to start at midnight. When the train finally left me I went some time in the street, then wandered down **the** way, crowded with a large party of young men, some of whom were carrying boxes and parcels. It was a better **half-savage** than I had met in any other part of the island. I felt **excitement** among **a few** people from the mainland, and I got at last a carriage. One of the party had been a sailor, a young man from Connaught. There were some old men who had been sailors. The train started with a cheer and a rush, and I felt **the** rush **to** **excitement**. At several stations the train stopped, and I saw **the** rush **to** **excitement**. At several stations the train stopped, and I saw **the** rush **to** **excitement**. At several stations the train stopped, and I saw **the** rush **to** **excitement**.

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and in an instant the door was being open and the compartment was filled with shouting, shouting and sticks. — Dawn was made after a moment of uproar and the **soldiers** got out, but as they did so a pack of their women followed, thrust their bare heads and arms into the doorway, **cursing** and blaspheming **with** extraordinary rage.

As the train moved away a moment later these women set up a frantic **lamentation**. I looked out and caught a glimpse of the wildest heads **and** figures I have ever seen, shrieking and screaming, and waving their arms in air in the sign of the lullabies.

As the night went on they began crying out in the carriage windows, and I heard some of the words of **obscene** songs when the train stopped at a station.

In my own compartment the sailor would allow no one to sleep, and talked all night with sometimes a touch of **wit** or brutality, and always with a wonderful fluency, with wild temperament behind it.

The old man in the corner, dressed in a rough coat that had something of the appearance of a tarpaulin, talked all night, talking themselves in Gaelic. — The young girl beside me lost her shyness after a while, and set me pointing out the features of the country that were beginning to

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appear through the dawn as we drew nearer Dublin. She was delighted with the shadows of the trees—trees are rare in Connemara—and with the canal, which was beginning to reflect the morning light. Every time I showed her some new shadow she cried out with naïve excitement:

‘Oh, it’s lovely, but I can’t see it.’

This presence at my side contrasted sharply with the brutality that shook the harbor behind us. The whole spirit of the west of Ireland, with its strange wildness and reserve, seemed paying in this stage-train to pay a homage to the dead statesman of the east.

