



**ROYAL  
DE LUXE** NANTES

LIMERICK / September 2014

### **The famine of 1845**

My heart had closed in on itself like a stone.  
I could have plunged my fingers in and used it to crush the policeman's head,  
as he forced my family to leave our house.

There were about ten of them, all armed, against my father, my mother,  
my sister and sixteen year old me.  
For two years misfortune had infected Irish lands  
and seemed to revel in our sufferings.

It was 1845.  
Two years earlier we had been working the fields  
but were only allowed to eat the potatoes,  
all other crops being exported to our English neighbours.

I remember the day my father was ploughing the soil  
and saw the potatoes burst like new born baby's feet  
crushed by the blow of a hammer.

In a panic, he started to dig up the fields here and there.  
Then, seeming lost, terrible convulsions came over him  
as he ran from one place to another, then finally stopping, exhausted.  
His panting more hectic than an antelope's having escaped a lioness.

He stood looking at the landscape of little mangled feet, his legs weak.  
It was then that I understood, from his expression, that an unbelievable curse had  
just hit.  
Mildew!

Terror spread through all of Ireland,  
and I must say that from that moment we were treated like rats.  
Rats thrown out to sea,  
a pack of dogs lost on hidden roads  
that our tired knees abandoned along the way.

Starved carcasses were scattered along the pits.  
Some, who had been driven mad by hunger and despair, ate them.

I still remember the day, in 1845, when the police came to evict us, in front of my family,  
when my ulcerated father, who was protesting his loyalty towards the landlords,  
suddenly had his skull smashed by a bludgeon.

Seeing this I threw myself at the murderer and lost consciousness immediately,  
having no doubt received the same treatment.

Anyway, I never saw my sister or my mother again,  
and found myself amongst other compatriots  
building the Green Roads.

Simply put, I was given hard labour, building useless roads  
in the middle of nowhere, that led to nothing.

We would start new ones before finishing the ones before that:  
what was additionally useless was that none of them had any destination  
or any connection with the others. These were the Green Roads.

One morning a newspaper was passed round the prisoners.  
The paper in question was the great English journal "Punch".  
It simply stated that it was the poor people of Ireland  
who were the mildew of their own land and the misery of the Saxons.

These statements could neither extract nor excite any reaction from us.  
However, it was at this time that we learnt of a great Irish joy  
blown to us by the United States of America.

In the port of Cork, 1845,  
where the seagulls seemed as sad as our lost souls,  
the flags of two ships appeared :  
the Jamestown and the Macedonian, come from the Americas,  
were bringing food to the starving in Ireland.  
One could witness this unbelievable miracle on the docks of the city's harbour:  
The unloading of rations and food from these American ships,  
applauded by Irish hands  
from which seemed to emerge seagulls full of mystery;  
close by, one could see the loading of Irish cereal crops onto  
English ships under the protection of armed guards.  
The striking contrast saw the beginning of a blaze of hope for the Irish  
and their lack of potatoes.

A few years later, I had an amazing dream  
that projected me into the future:

I was in 2014 and had been dead for a long time.  
It rained potatoes that day.  
Of course, as people rushed around to collect them  
some fell on their heads.  
So they protected the children,

but anyone who wanted to cross the streets would end up with a sore skull.  
The weather reporters were in a panic and did not know how to tell people.  
For if it was raining potatoes in Munster,  
storms of carrots were forecast over Dublin  
and torrential cucumber rain in Cork.  
Not to mention the spaghetti tides floating in the bay of Dundalk.  
In Belfast, in the cars, windscreen wipers swept aside showers of peas.

This caused the roads to become slippery and accidents ensued.  
Fire-fighters wore mountaineering crampons,  
but when they saw the two pound lamb leg hail stones approaching the city,  
the government drafted in the army.  
The country was declared a disaster zone.  
Brussels sent in helicopters to help their European friends, the Irish,  
but wouldn't you know it...?  
When they realized that beef quarters had been forecast for the following week:  
It really was too much to ask.

There were, of course, some calm interludes, during which the streets were swept,  
roofs fixed on the houses where the injured were cared for.

In any case, Ireland will always escape to a garden of green grass, horses, endless  
cliffs and sad hearts, and will always sing together!

Music

**© Jean-Luc Courcoult, author/ director of the street theatre company Royal de  
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