

Kevin McNeilly

Synge on Inishmaan

Each year I come back, others pass away.
The old fade slowly into vague figments,
and with them whole geographies of words.
The young with enough English emigrate;

cramming duffles with coarse dark bread, they go
by curragh to Kilronan (now port-of-call
for commercial travellers), then by steamer
on to Galway, or worse America.

Attrition worries native speech backwards
to the sheer, cropped tailbone of these islands.
Population reaches its point of no
return. Here they think me fond, a dreamer.

Parcelled stone-meadows prove too difficult,
homemade soil reducing to salty crud.
Only the middle-aged choose to stay put,
their flesh toughed up by kelp and sand and sea.