



I LOOK TO MY HANDS folded over in my lap and can hear Schubert's distant music still rise and fall and release. When my fingernails grow to what would be considered a normal length, my hands begin to remind me of my father's. I look from my hands to the naked white wall in front of me and I visualize once again this squat bog triangle in the sky of my mind's eye, but I have come out from underneath and the triangle has transformed into the shape it would take if I

were behind it and looking on from the edge of the curve of coniferous trees to the rear of the two corrugated structures. I see a taller triangular shape, its apex in the cloud-grey sky and two base points connecting the small and taller structures below. I imagine the form this shape would take if I were to draw the converging arcs of the exploding spray of shotgun pellets and the clay pigeon, but in this instance I imagine the objects miss each other mid-air and I allow them to complete their crossing arcs down to their separate resting places on the bogland below. I then realize, sitting in my chair visualizing these two arcs crossing each other in the flatland sky, that I have drawn this form before on one of the acetate sheets I, in the evenings, sometimes place over my brother's photograph of my father's four workmen and me; so I stand, remove the needle from the record, walk to the bottom drawer of my desk and take out my slim plywood box containing these drawings.

I walk to the kitchen and notice still some gentle shafts of the reflected morning sun are meeting the walls. I lift from the section of wall to the right of the window I'd gazed out of not half an hour ago the aluminium-and-glass framed photograph my brother once took, and I slip it from its casing.

I return to my desk in the sitting room and lay the photograph beside the stack of acetate drawings

and begin, drawing by drawing, to place a sheet of acetate over my brother's ancient photograph until I find what it is I am looking for – those crossing arcs in miniature appearing and disappearing behind the small rise in the land towards the left-hand edge of the image.

I stand at my desk, looking down at this historic form.

'Hm,' I say.

Towards the background of the photograph I place myself high up in the space in the sky where the arcs of a clay pigeon and a poorly shot cluster of pellets slide past each other and, looking around from this imagined position, I piece together what is left on the land. In the distance below lies my father's sliver of bog, then, beyond, a line of poles holding two drooping lines of cables, running alongside the canal that bisects the low-lying single street of B——, with more rolling hills and farmland unfurling into the distance, all scattered with white-walled cottages issuing thin blue strings of smoke from their chimneys, and fields edged out with dense rectilinear hedges demarcating an array of townlands with three-, four- and five-syllable names: Derrynagalliagh, Derrynaskea, Derrymore, Derrymany, Derryneel. A silent murmuration of starlings casts up from a stand of sycamore extending out across the hinterlands.

The birds sweep to the left. To the right, though, I see nothing but an encroaching darkness. I swing back through to what remains, past the water tower and forlorn church spires, the line of poles that run up alongside the canal and past the bog that edges the town and the plains of pre-industrialized bogland below until I face west where the murmuration of starlings sweeps back down, dispersing and settling like falling tea leaves onto another stand of broad sycamores in the distance. Then, looking beyond the farthest end of the slight rise in the land, I see the yellow-beige model substation and pylon. To the rear of the substation I see the excitable young man stiff as a pole, he still toppling over and over while relaying the troubled journey of an ocean-going steamer delivering skinned Finnish trees to Limerick Port; and I remember, while standing here in my apartment in Bilbao, looking on at the tall crossing arcs in the sky to the left-hand edge of my brother's photograph, what this excitable young man said when he eventually stopped laughing at the good of himself and sat back down alongside me. Having leafed through to the end of the publication he was still grasping, he told me that before anything of the electrification scheme was possible that the State had sent an Irish forester to northern Finland, in advance of purchasing the trees they would use as electricity

poles, to ensure that the Finns had enough of the right size of tree for the scheme's use, and that before the State handed over millions of pounds for these trees, they wanted to make sure the Finns 'were not pulling the wool over their eyes'. I remember the excitable young man reading to me, from the back of the publication, extracts of letters the young forester had sent back to HQ in Ireland – they were written in the style of a penny thriller and this, as I sat back then on the edge of an expanse of bog, and as I stand now gazing down at the tall crossing arcs to the left-hand edge of my brother's photograph, triggered then, and triggers now views onto further landscapes, landscapes of the Finnish countryside covered in snow with multitudes of vertical black lines in forest-like arrangements laid upon it.

I picture that Irish forester in rural Finland, dressed in dark fur-lined clothing, on the edge of a vast white frigid lake fringed and cleaved with these tree-sized vertical black lines. He looks out over the land as his breath plumes before him. In the distance, towards the seeming middle of the frozen-over lake, lies an island, and the young forester with timber skis fastened to his feet, and with ski-sticks in his gloved hands, makes off onto this lake. He pulls a timber sled behind him, it tied to his waist with a length of pale rope. The sled, which is similar in shape to a

small boat, is full of provisions – a tent, his measuring equipment and some tinned rations. The young forester makes off as it begins to snow, inscribing a long smooth line into the virgin drifts as he goes. He passes through a thicket of vertical black lines to the other side of the island where in the distance he spies another larger island, one he believes to hold a more bountiful selection of suitable timber, so he rights his hat and reties his rope to his waist and makes off for the island in the distance. He builds a rhythm: left foot, right foot, left ski, right ski, they appearing below him on the snow, sinking an inch or two into the fresh crystals as he proceeds, metre by metre, across the expanses to the next island, whereupon, noticing that the light has fallen into a strange fabric of dark, he sets up camp, eats and by carbide torchlight describes his progress – in the first of many letters to be sent back to the electrification-office HQ for publication, letters that will find themselves read aloud one day by an excitable young man sitting on some poles to the rear of a substation adjacent to a Midlands' bog. The forester falls asleep in his tent in the midst of a circular arrangement of vertical black lines. That night, in the sky over his tiny camp, a multitude of silent fireworks from unknown sources explode, shower and explode again in spasms of colour and light illuminating the magnitudes of dark and white around him.