

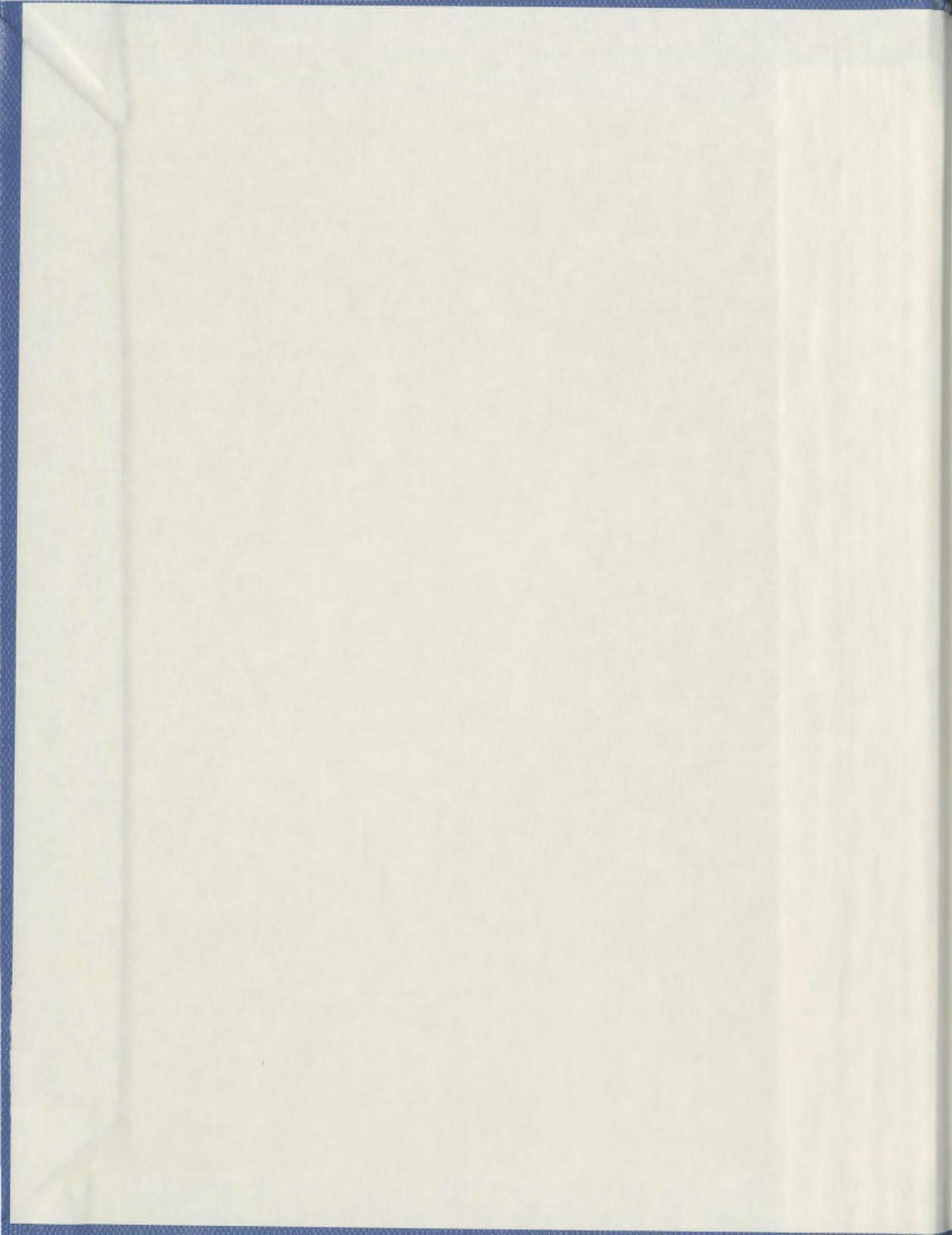
BRIAN FRIEL AND THE FIELD DAY THEATRE COMPANY:
A MARRIAGE OF ARTISTIC VISION AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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BRIAN FRIEL AND THE
FIELD DAY THEATRE COMPANY:
A MARRIAGE OF ARTISTIC VISION AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM

by

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School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the work of Irish playwright Brian Friel during the period in which he wrote plays specifically for the Field Day Theatre Company, a cultural enterprise he founded with actor Stephen Rea in 1980. Because Field Day is equally active in publishing political pamphlets as it is in producing plays, I use the texts of the fifteen pamphlets (outlined in Appendix A) as the main critical resource for analyzing Friel's dramatic efforts during the 1980's in order to establish a dialogue between the theatrical stage and the political arena. With the production of Dancing at Lughnasa in 1990 by the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, it becomes obvious that this dialogue has changed, if not ended, and the basic conclusion I have drawn is that although the decade spent with the Field Day Theatre Company provided Brian Friel with the material and space for the creation of his finest dramatic efforts to date, that era of artistic and cultural/political activism is over and Friel has moved on to a new stage in his career.

Chapter One focuses on Translations, produced as the inauguration of the Field Day Theatre Company in 1980, and the first set of pamphlets published in the volume Ireland's Field Day.

Chapter Two continues to examine the early period of Friel's association with Field Day. Although The Communication Cord is in many ways a response to much of the text of Translations, it remains firmly imbedded in the theatre company's cultural/political agenda and is, in my opinion, representative of a theatrical culmination in Friel's career.

Chapter Three looks at Making History (1988), a play more akin to the theoretical pamphlets in the second wave of Field Day publishing than it is to the dramatic brilliance of The Communication Cord. The play marks a significant shift in theatrical technique for Friel and is a sign of what is to come.

Chapter Four concerns the break-up of the Friel/Field Day association as the two can be seen as taking very different approaches to their previously shared goals. The final set of Field Day pamphlets are as fundamentally different from the first six in their theoretical and practical approach to the Irish situation, as Dancing at Lughnasa differs from Translations in both style and content.

Appendix A is a complete list of the Field Day pamphlets, with bibliographic references.

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PREFACE

The preface to the first publishing effort of the Field Day Theatre Company states that:

Field Day could and should contribute to the solution of the present crisis [in Northern Ireland] by producing analyses of the established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation. (vii)

The Field Day enterprise, whether in the form of theatrical performances, pamphlet publications or anthological compilations, is committed to challenging long enshrined views of Ireland, her people, her myths and her culture. To a degree, Field Day represents a way of progressively "rewriting Ireland" -- to use F.C. McGrath's phrase -- but more appropriately, Field Day's actions are not merely concerned with replacing old myths with new ones, but with analyzing and questioning the very validity of myth, history and cultural stereotypes within contemporary Irish society. Their 'deconstructive' actions -- and I use the term without the negative, nihilistic associations -- are permeated with a belief in rupture as a positive force, from which a fresh dialogue of change may emerge.

Although critical commentaries on the creation, productions and future of the Field Day Theatre Company have all, to varying degrees, seized upon this notion of alterity, only a few have examined the significance behind the name of this new cultural project. There is a programme note for Translations, the inaugural production of Field Day, which provides a germinating definition of the name chosen by originators Brian Friel and Stephen Rea for the theatre company:

Field Day: A day on which troops are drawn up for exercise in field evolution; a military review; a day occupied with brilliant or exciting events; a day spent in the field, eg by the hunt, or by field naturalists.

While the concepts of "evolution" and "review" certainly emphasize change, the militaristic turn of phrase is indicative of the multifaceted and sometimes oxymoronic nature of Field Day. While primarily a cultural enterprise, Field Day is also adamant in its desire to voice alternative opinions which never lose sight of contemporary political issues and which will combat the politically complacent status quo. Although this political framework is imbedded in the title "Field Day", the emphasis given to that political dimension varies. For example, Eric Binnie chooses to

highlight the idea of festival: a day spent away from normal activities, a day set aside for carnival and the inversion of the presumed natural order (305). The political nature of Binnie's definition is the carnilvalesque subtext which hints at questioning the powers that be and rupturing the status quo. Binnie sees that the overall result of the pamphlet side of Field Day activities "has been to raise the level of critical debate about issues which have for far too long been shrouded in blind, partisan myth" (307).

With reference to the theatrical dimension of Field Day, John Gray outlines the essential rejection of traditionalism in terms of the development and actions of the theatre company itself: it relies heavily upon touring in both Northern Ireland and the Republic; it rejects any fixed base and refuses to be tied to any one building; and it aims for transiency in both the aesthetic and practical sense (6). There seems to be little doubt that Field Day is determined not only to alter the cultural foundations which sustain many of the traditional prejudices that currently inhibit cultural and political harmony in Ireland; but to do so in a manner which mirrors the ideal of challenging and questioning, of continually re-examining and re-drawing the linguistic and cultural maps of Ireland.

The salient questions for this thesis are, how does Friel -- emanator, director and playwright -- help define

and fit into the Field Day enterprise? What is the relationship between artist and cultural/political movement? Given that the guiding philosophy of the Field Day Theatre Company is one of change and continual energizing of intellectual debate, it is not surprising that the dramatic efforts of Brian Friel from Field Day's inauguration in 1980 to the production Making History in 1988, embodies exactly those ideals. What he seems to be questioning, both personally and publicly, is the artist's role in the culture he depicts, and the relative politicization of that depiction. The result, for Friel, is a struggle over the political nature of artistic creation. Ulf Dantanus accurately notes that since the foundation of Field Day, "there seems to be a significant shift [since the 1970's] in Friel's approach to his own subject matter ... [he] has increasingly pursued questions about the historical, political and linguistic identity of Ireland" (22). His formation of the theatre company with actor Stephen Rea marks the adoption of a more public, less private, drive to Friel's dramatic concerns and it is an adjustment with which Friel is not entirely comfortable.

A significant philosophical struggle emerges over the intersection of art, culture and politics in his diary entries during the writing of Translations:

May 22. But it is a political play -- how can that be avoided? If it is not political, what is it?

June 1. What worries me about the play -- if there is a play -- are the necessary peculiarities, especially the political elements. Because the play has to do with language and only language. And if it becomes overwhelmed by the political element, it is lost.

("Extracts" 58-59)

A continuing question for Field Day is how art and politics intersect, and although Rea "feels the pamphlets release the theatrical side of Field Day from being overtly political", Friel is far less assured of such artistic 'purity', and foresees assimilation between the two mediums of communication (Gray 7).

There is no doubt that, at one time, a symbiotic relationship existed between playwright and theatre company which was intellectually nourishing for both partners. Taken together, Translations (1980), The Communication Cord (1982) and Making History (1988) give dramatic expression to the cultural nationalism championed in the early Field Day pamphlet series which, in turn, offers commentary and insight into the dramatic vision of Friel during this period. These three plays embody a linguistic complexity and

dramatic intensity, unrivalled in Friel's earlier works, which is matched by the cultural/political galvanization attempted in the first twelve pamphlets.

With the premiere of Friel's latest play, Dancing at Lughnasa, at the Abbey Theatre in 1990, and the Field Day publication of Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature, there is a noticeable distancing between the political content of the Field Day pamphlets and the thematic concerns of Friel. It is a complicated shift; not only does Field Day reach beyond the geographic borders of Ireland to accommodate 'foreign' contributors to the pamphlet series, but as Seamus Deane notes in his introduction of the latest three essays, Field Day is seeking to establish parallels of the Irish situation within the global community.

As Field Day shifts its emphasis, so too does the dramaturgy of Friel. Dancing at Lughnasa relinquishes the intensely ironic linguistic 'play' of Translations and The Communication Cord, as well as the subversive treatment of traditional perceptions of history, mythology and heroism in Making History, in favour of a more nostalgic, melancholy atmosphere which moves away from a belief in the power of the spoken or written word. Physical movement rather than verbal interaction seems to be the preferred mode of communication: in Michael's words,

it is as if language had surrendered to movement -- as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. (Dancing at Lughnasa, II, 71)

In a recent Pratt Lecture, Field Day director Seamus Heaney posed the question of the role of the artist in a time of political crisis: "Should he become a megaphone for the general opinion, or should he quietly whisper his own doubts about the whole damn thing?" With Dancing at Lughnasa, it is as if Friel himself has relinquished his previously relentless struggle with linguistic and cultural which excited and inspired his drama of the 1980's and has, once again, shifted his approach to his subject matter by using non-linguistic devices such as dance in his dramatic efforts.

As Field Day moves into the wider realm of international critical theory and political science, Friel retreats toward the more private questions which dominated earlier works such as Philadelphia, Here I Come! (1965) and Lovers (1969). These shifts, or relocations, not only signal the end of a decade long relationship between Brian Friel as playwright and the Field Day Theatre Company as vehicle of cultural/political movement; but ironically, their dynamic

positioning also reaffirms both Friel and Field Day's commitment to independence, freedom and the absolute necessity for diversity and change.

Each of the following chapters will examine how the theatrical expressions of Brian Friel move within and beyond the context of Field Day during his ten year association with the company while highlighting the underlying struggle of the artist's role within a politically volatile culture. How Friel, as playwright, initially works in concert with the Field Day Pamphlet Series but then extricates himself and his work from the increasingly theoretical nature of the political voice of the theatre company will provide the scaffolding for an examination of how his dramaturgy changes.

CHAPTER ONE

Translations: Language and Identity

On September 23, 1980 the Field Day Theatre Company held its inauguration into the Irish political and cultural arena with the production of Brian Friel's Translations, a play dedicated to the company's co-founder, Stephen Rea, and destined to become the touchstone for their future endeavours. Set in the 1830's when the British Army Engineer Corps carried out the mapping and renaming of Ireland under the banner of the Ordnance Survey, Translations portrays, on a number of dramatic levels, the crisis of dispossession: of language, of land, of identity and of political power. Despite the fact that it depicts many aspects of Ireland's history as an oppressed nation (linguistically, culturally and politically), Translations also addresses the continuing concerns of contemporary Irishmen and women who struggle with questions of language and identity. Since Translations was written for a particular theatre company, one which has a defined agenda and which has produced other provocative statements in the form of political pamphlets and an anthology of Irish literature, it is only reasonable that the text of the play, combined with an analysis of the first set of pamphlets, will provide the clues to the meaning and intent of the play.

In the twelve years since Translations first opened in 1980 at the Guildhall in Derry, Northern Ireland, critical approaches to how the play achieves its meaning have ranged from hermeneutic to psychoanalytic to post-colonial to etymological analyses. Regardless of such varied critical response there is surprising consensus about the dominant concern in the play. Critics agree that Translations communicates a struggle against the effects of colonial oppression which has entrenched certain cultural perceptions in a modern political climate, and which continues to manifest itself in terms of psychological, linguistic and political trauma. In "Brian Friel's Translations: National and Universal Dimensions", Wolfgang Zach states:

What, in fact, appears to be of central significance to [Friel] in Translations is the mapping of the Irish state of mind, caught as it is between the old Irish and the new English worlds, unable to resolve this conflict, but inevitably having to come to terms with it. (79-80)

Eitel F. Timm agrees with Zach's focus on this crisis of Irish consciousness in "Modern Mind, Myth and History: Brian Friel's Translations":

The play can be considered as [Friel's] most courageous and successful attempt at making those problems which result from the unbalanced relationship between myth and history, culture and language in the modern Irish mind, the central theme of his artistic presentation.

(447)

Even though all critical responses to Translations look at the question of language and 'the word' as the key to the cultural and political dilemmas in the play as well as in modern Ireland, I find it very curious that so few critics have concentrated on the process of naming in the play, inasmuch as Friel has pointedly chosen as an historical backdrop the Ordnance Survey of the early 19th century, which is overwhelmingly concerned with linguistic mapping of names (Ronald Rollins' essay "Friel's Translations: The Ritual of Naming" is a brief introduction to the topic.) Richard Pine maintains throughout his book on Brian Friel and Ireland's drama that "naming, for Friel, is the key to identity", but neither Pine nor Rollins ever examines the mechanics of nomenclature in any detail. It seems to me that one must at least begin at an etymological level, as Friel does himself, in order to grasp the larger issues at play in the Field Day debut. Translations is about names as the starting point for the evolution of identity, psyche,

knowledge, communication and -- of course -- language, and about how language is an inherently powerful system of both freedom and oppression.

In Field Day pamphlet Number 1, "A New Look At The Language Question", Tom Paulin argues that the history of a language is often the story of possession and dispossession. In it, Paulin traces both the English language and its American sibling through the linguistic self-respect asserted by the "quasi-divine authority" of both the Oxford English and Webster's Dictionary (8). The dictionary, to Paulin, is both book and sacred national object as it is one of the guardians of a nation's soul. The lack of such an object for the Irish language is indicative of that country's inability to separate, as the United States did, from the cultural, political, and economic terrorization by British colonizing powers. "One of the results of this enormous cultural impoverishment is a living, but fragmented speech, untold numbers of homeless words, and an uncertain or a derelict prose" (17). A provocative thesis indeed, Paulin's pamphlet is aimed at creating debate among intellectuals and politicians over the concept of the 'Irish language' -- something Paulin deliberately refrains from defining -- and his opinion that much of the blame for Ireland's present state of "confused opinions and violent politics" lies with the British dispossession of Ireland's

linguistic self-determination (16). The relationship between Paulin's pamphlet and Friel's play Translations is based upon the idea of homelessness and dispossession -- of words, emotions and cultures. Friel arbitrarily appoints 1833 as a moment in Irish history when the forces of colonial power, characterized in Captain Lancey's Ordnance Survey efforts, forcibly dislocate not only the people and community of the fictionalized Bally Beg, but also the national psyche and self-esteem of Ireland.

There are two 'caerimonia nominationis', or rituals of naming, in the first act of Translations. The first is an extremely personal and symbolic ritual between Sarah and Manus, as he coaches her into the speech act of self-naming:

MANUS: Once more -- just once more -- 'My name --' Good girl. Come on now. Head up. Mouth open.

SARAH: My ...

MANUS: Good.

SARAH: My ...

MANUS: Great.

SARAH: My name ...

MANUS: Yes?

SARAH: My name is ...

MANUS: Yes?

(SARAH pauses. Then in a rush.)

SARAH: My name is Sarah.

MANUS: Marvellous! Bloody marvellous! (I, 384)

In speaking her own name Sarah, the previously considered "dumb" girl of the community, breaks the verbal silence which heretofore dictated the nature of her own world, and unlocks -- what was to others -- a hidden landscape of memory and consciousness. Manus' statement that "now we're really started! Nothing'll stop us now!" (I, 385), reflects a belief that there exists within one's name, and the ability to speak that name, a power to act, to be, in accordance with one's quintessential nature.

The character of Sarah has caused much dissent among interpreters of Friel's Translations. In an early review of the play for the Times Literary Supplement, Seamus Heaney links Sarah's speech act and ultimate return to muteness with the symbolic figure of Cathleen Ni'Houlihan, "struck dumb by the shock of modernity". Richard Pine, however, strenuously disagrees with Heaney's analysis:

It would be wrong to regard her muteness as a symbol of Ireland ... Her silence is a private question of identity, not a public issue. (148)

Although I agree with Pine that Heaney is erroneous to view Sarah as simply symbolic within a revisionist context, Pine makes a similar error in restricting the perception of Sarah within the realm of the private psyche. Sarah's early scene is essentially a search for a renewed creation of the self in both personal and cultural dimensions. Her linguistic crisis, in naming and speaking, cannot be separated from the problem of Irish identity in Irish culture and the community at large. The 'problem' of Sarah must be seen at least partially in the post-colonial context within which both Friel and Field Day are operating: that concern over the state of "homelessness" of which Tom Paulin writes. He is referring to a crisis of words and language without the 'homing' device of a dictionary to offer a sense of place, but Friel is working with both a private and a public crisis of space -- the lack of any sense of belonging -- arising from the post-colonial process of "the abrogation of [the colonial] power and the appropriation of language and writing for new and distinctive usages" (Ashcroft, et al 6). Catherine Wiley best summarizes this complicated condition or process in relation to Sarah's character:

All relations, be they colonial, sexual, or familial, are established first in language: those who do not

have the power of naming are reduced to Other, and deprived of the authority to name themselves. (51)

Sarah is the Other in this play of Translations: she is both a disabled mute and a woman, she is both a Catholic peasant and Irish. (For a more detailed analysis of the sociological implications of this paradox of otherness, see Robert Smith's essay "The Hermeneutic Motion of Brian Friel's Translations" in the September 1991 issue of Modern Drama as it cogently details the influence of George Steiner's book After Babel on Friel's plays of translation.) The layers of physical, sexual, economic and national 'otherness' that constitute Sarah are perfect examples of how Friel 'criss-crosses' between boundaries in order to prevent any interpretation from becoming -- in the words of both Hugh O'Donnell and Richard Kearney -- "fossilized" into an either/or predicament.

Sarah's name, in the Irish context, is an anomaly next to the Bridgets, Doaltys and even the Maires of Friel's cast of characters, thereby adding to her character's 'otherness', but her voice, as it emerges from concealment and then is silenced at the end of the play, is also symbolic of the voice of Ireland -- so popularly seen as being effectively silenced by the colonizing power of the British. Sarah's name stands out among those of her stage

community because it is not a stereotypical Irish name, because it is infrequently spoken by the woman herself and, under the pressure of British authority, the woman is eventually dispossessed of her power, and right, to voice.

Sarah's self baptism is echoed in the offstage christening of Nellie Ruadh's baby in which the significance of naming takes on a deceptively comic dimension. We quickly learn that the identity of the father is unknown and the child's name will not only reflect its own identity but that of the father.

BRIDGET: Our Seamus says she was threatening she was going to call it after its father.

DOALTY: Who's the father?

BRIDGET: That's the point, you donkey you!

DOALTY: Ah.

BRIDGET: So there's a lot of uneasy bucks about Baile Beag this day.

DOALTY: She told me last Sunday she was going to call it Jimmy.

BRIDGET: You're a liar, Doalty.

DOALTY: Would I tell you a lie? Hi, Jimmy, Nellie Ruadh's aul fella's looking for you.

(I, 391-392)

However, this humorous identification of name with parentage, and the ridiculous possibility that the father could indeed be Jimmy Jack Cassie -- a sixty year old, comically nicknamed "Infant Prodigy" -- takes a fatal turn. Falling hard upon the news in the final act of Translations that Nellie's child died in the night, Sarah's voice also dies:

OWEN: If Yolland hasn't been got by then, they will ravish the whole parish.

LANCEY: I trust they know exactly what they've got to do. (Pointing to Bridget) I know you. I know where you live. (Pointing to Sarah) Who are you? Name!

(Sarah's mouth opens and shuts, open and shuts. Her face becomes contorted.) What's your name? (Again Sarah tries frantically.)

OWEN: Go on, Sarah. You can tell him.

(But Sarah cannot. And she knows she cannot. She closes her mouth. Her head goes down.)

(III, 440)

The death of Sarah's voice and Nellie's child are personal, even private, signs of what is occurring on a national scale. Because of Yolland's mysterious disappearance, the

British Army is "levelling the whole land" and the impending rape of the Irish countryside, in turn, becomes a signifier for the most tragic death -- that of the Gaelic language and the Irish sense of nationhood.

The character who bears witness to all the levels of dispossession and death is Hugh O'Donnell, the spiritual father figure in the play. He is the natural father of both Manus and Owen, he is present and instrumental at the offstage baptism, and he is the schoolmaster, the patriarch of the student's education. Despite his often drunken demeanour, he is very much akin to the fathers of the great classical dynasties such as the House of Atreus and the Trojan empire. His own name is syntactically linked to two other great Irish fathers -- Hugh O'Neill, the semi-mythologized leader of the great O'Neill dynasty, and Daniel O'Connell, the famous father of Catholic emancipation. In fact, the historical Earl Hugh O'Donnell fought along side Hugh O'Neill to unify the Irish tribes in the 16th century, and their famous 'flight' signalled the end of tribal authority in Ireland and the surrendering of political power to the English. Friel's Hugh O'Donnell is portrayed, although passive in his reaction to the British soldiers, as a great patriarch, falling victim to forces beyond his control.

In the Old Testament sense of the 'Father', Hugh is certainly the character closest to omniscience in his linguistic heteroglossia. Hugh O'Donnell speaks the four languages at play in Translations: Greek, Latin, Gaelic and English. He is the speaker of many 'Words', in the Judeo-Christian sense, as he imparts knowledge to all his students, including those seated in the audience. He speaks the philosophy of the play in two significant passages:

We must learn those new names ... We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home ... it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language ... we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilize. (III, 444)

As pointed out earlier, this passage, and even the rhetoric employed, is reiterated in Richard Kearney's Field Day pamphlet Number 5, "Myth and Motherland", as a directive against the continued enshrinement of a static historical perspective:

We must never cease to keep our mythological images in dialogue with history; because once we do we fossilize.

That is why we will go on telling stories, inventing and re-inventing myths, until we have brought history home to itself. (80)

Both Hugh O'Donnell and the pamphlet have an adamant, even militant tone in their directives for survival. There is an agreement between Friel and Kearney that the Irish people have no choice but to become accustomed to change and adaptation.

If Hugh could be considered as a pseudo Judeo-Christian God, then Owen is a version of Adam. The beginning of Act II, scene i, in which Owen and Yolland have positioned themselves in the hedge schoolroom with all the instruments of linguistic and cultural colonization -- new, blank maps, church registries, "various reference books", the darkly ominous "Name-Book", poteen and some cups -- is a rather black parody of the biblical Eden scene when Adam names the beasts: a moment in time when the word equalled the nature of the thing. Owen's name, and its mercurial nature, is a fascinating study of, once again, how names do in fact reflect one's identity. Owen has as many identities as he has names and therefore, as some would argue, has no true identity or sense of self. As 'Rolland', the erroneously named British servant, he acts as traitor to his Gaelic heritage, as mistranslator of the deceptively harmless

orders of the Ordnance Survey, and then as a deadly accurate translator of the orders for direct violence and subjugation of his homeland. The scene in which he renames the places on the geographic map speaks volumes about the character of Owen as he rebaptizes himself as 'Oland'. He not only denies his true name, firstly in the acceptance of the British mistake and secondly in his newly created name, but he also loses any true sense of himself or his identity. The character of Owen is placed in a moment of personal crisis similar to the political crisis of his entire community, thus linking him to both the historical and the contemporary crisis of the modern Irish mind, described by Eitel Timm and Tom Paulin, existing in that precarious state of being in two places at once, and feeling at home in neither.

The name Owen does not resonate with the classical, biblical or Celtic mytho-historical allusions like the names Sarah and Hugh. Instead, 'Owen' is a name which is part of the very geography the character Owen is working to change and irrevocably alter. Obviously, this parallel strengthens the comparison between Owen's identity crisis and that of Ireland herself. In Act II, scene i, with books and maps strewn about the floor, Owen and Yolland are in the hedge school drinking poteen and changing names. They are struggling with 'Bun na hAbhann' -- the place which, ironically, Sarah is from -- and Yolland discovers that in

the church registry, the place is named "Banowen". Owen, impervious to the connection to his own name, says: "That's wrong ... The list of freeholders calls it Owenmore -- that's completely wrong: Owenmore's the big river at the west end of the parish" (410). In the end, he removes the "owen" altogether, and Bun na hAbhann becomes Burnfoot in the Name Book. Owen changes his own name as easily as he changes place names. The re-christening of Owen from Rolland to the composite Oland is certainly "A christening! A baptism!", but the Eden in which "we name a thing and --bang -- it leaps into existence! Each name a perfect equation with its roots" is no longer (II, i, 422). Remember, the two 'namers' are under the influence of "Lying Anna's poteen" and the new names they create, both personal and geographic, are indeed lies and not indicative of the roots from which they spring. Owen is a trickster god in that he is unaware at this point of the inherent power in the process of re-naming, or the process of colonization in which he is involved.

There are layers and layers of irony in the character and the name of Owen. One could argue that his self-naming is quite accurate because Oland is a combination of the Irish Owen and the English Rolland. Owen is kin to the river Owenmore in that he flows between two cultures. He acts as a translator among the English and the Irish, for profit, but

with no obvious allegiance to either side. It is not until the Romantic, sentimental, Wordsworthian side of his doppelganger-like personality is murdered, that Owen 'wakes up' to the harsh realities of the situation. The psychological connection between Rolland/Owen and Yolland is portrayed in the fact that Yolland expresses the concerns and dilemmas which one might expect from Owen himself:

YOLLAND: He knows what's happening.

OWEN: What is happening?

YOLLAND: I'm not sure. But I'm concerned about my part
in it. It's an eviction of sorts.

OWEN: We're making a six-inch map of the country. Is
there something sinister in that?

YOLLAND: Not in --

OWEN: And we're taking place-names that are riddled
with confusion and --

YOLLAND: Who's confused? Are the people confused?

OWEN: -- and we're standardizing those names as
accurately and as sensitively as we can.

YOLLAND: Something is being eroded.

OWEN: Back to the romance again.

(II, i, 419-420)

Friel holds up the romanticized notions of Yolland toward Irish life and history as a sacrificial lamb to the new realism expressed by Hugh. It is strikingly dramatic that it is the unseen Irish Donnelly twins, and not the British, who murder the Gaelic 'wanna-be' Yolland. In this way, Friel plays with traditional perceptions of both Irish and English attitudes, contributing to the inversion and rupture of stereotypes. As a result, the Ordnance Survey does in fact become the "bloody military operation" which Manus originally described it as and the "eviction" Yolland feared:

LANCEY: Commencing twenty-four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg ... At once ... If that doesn't bear results, commencing forty-eight hours from now we will embark on a series of evictions and levelling of every abode in the following selected areas --
(III, 439)

In the passage which follows, Owen must verbally translate the names of the places to be 'levelled' from his own English 'standardizations' back to the original Gaelic; and, as Burnfoot returns to Bun na hAbhann, it is only so that it may be effectively destroyed. These violent repercussions

are what finally awaken Owen to the horror of the Survey and his role in its actions. It is too late to prevent the levelling of the land and the language, and Owen's final rejection of the process and the theatrical symbol of colonial appropriation -- the Name Book -- is, appropriately, in a symbolic dimension. He cannot undo his actions, but in abandoning the Name-Book on the floor of the hedge school after Lancey has interrogated Sarah into silence, he does symbolically acquiesce to the ramifications of what he deluded himself into believing was a simple cartographic exercise.

The name Friel has chosen for the instrument of violent colonization, Captain Lancey, cannot be ignored in this context. The lance, the sword and the rifle are instruments of power and oppression for the mono-linguistic English forces, and Captain Lancey is the embodiment on the stage of the military might and the rhetorical weakness of that colonizing power. He speaks only one language but has the power to destroy many. Friel's distaste of the British lust for power comes through in his portrayal of Lancey as a simpleton who asserts his dominance through threats of physical might over the students of language in the hedge school. Owen, the prodigal son of the Irish father, is implicated in Friel's condemnation by his association with Lancey and what Lancey represents, the power of the sword.

Hugh, in contrast to Lancey and the Donnelly twins, presents the only possible non-violent answer to the linguistic oppression in operation. Just as he continually renews the vitality of Greek and Latin texts to his students, he also consents -- however unwillingly -- to teach Maire how to speak English and, therefore, adapts to the new linguistic power of the British.

Words are signals, counters. They are not immortal ... it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of ... fact. (III, 445)

Just as the Trojan empire fell to the Athenians and the House of Atreus became cursed, Hugh's dynasty, like Sarah's name, suffers from mortality. Friel purposely places his community in a state of flux to emphasize what he views as the undeniably dynamic nature of history, language and politics. To believe anything is 'written in stone' is to ignore an essential element of change. The entire community of Bally Beg undergoes rupture and change throughout its period of translation: Maire prepares to emigrate, Manus flees his home, Owen is left doubting his previously considered 'simple' role in the Survey, and Hugh is faced

with an emptying schoolhouse and no new position at the National School.

Significantly, as Hugh's life falls into disarray, so too do his abilities as a linguistic 'master':

kings of broad realms and proud in war who would come forth for Lybia's downfall -- such was -- such was the course -- such was the course ordained -- ordained by fate ... What the hell's wrong with me? Sure I know it backwards. I'll begin again. (III, 447)

These are prophetic words in that as Hugh is attempting to translate the fall of Carthage to the Romans from Virgil's Aeneid, his power and control over his own language fails him. As Hugh is stripped of his linguistic power, Friel weaves another parallel between the destruction of the parish lands due to the murder of Yolland, and the rape of the Irish culture and society by the very same colonizing forces. But the fact that Hugh will "begin again" reflects Friel's own political belief that language can still possess the power to change and to solve problems, but only after the problems of linguistic mistranslation and misinterpretation can be accepted and, although not easily remedied, at least acknowledged.

Despite the sometimes confusing and enigmatic games Friel and Owen play with names and the final anarchical statements of Hugh O'Donnell, Translations is not merely an argument for the confused state of the Irish language. Rather, it portrays the flexible power of language to both dispossess and possess. Friel does not seem to support the existential belief that language has no meaning; rather, it is its inherent meaningfulness that Friel wishes to dramatize as a political statement about the potential for language -- names, words, phrases -- to accomplish change as well as destruction. Friel demands an awareness of those words as instruments of change:

I think that the political problem of this island is going to be solved by language ... not only the language of negotiation across the table but the recognition of what language can do for us.

("The Man" 21)

The condition of language is not an 'either/or' situation of the 'bad' dispossession which accompanies the colonization process, or the 'good' repossession toward which post-colonial societies struggle in an attempt to wrest themselves out from under the restraints and complications of both political and linguistic colonizing forces. Instead,

it is a 'both/and' situation, for both the writer and the reader, in that the ambiguous language of a deliberately enigmatic text is a road toward fresh knowledge; and, language is the only weapon sufficiently powerful and subversive to bring about the necessary transmutation, transformation or translation. In this way, Friel is not merely having fun with a game of nomenclature and its subsequent language, he is advocating a very serious re-evaluation of the power of language and the written word. This becomes clear when one recalls that Friel has set his drama in the imaginary setting of Baile Baeg/Ballybeg. In creating a new geographic space on the dramatic stage, Friel not only ruptures open the Irish landscape in order to allow for a new space in which language may function, but he also avoids the territorial aggrandizement for which he is blatantly accusing the British. The imaginary place of Baile Baeg is the site where language can be re-evaluated and re-empowered.

Translations, then, is situated in a state of hesitation, oscillating between several possible meanings where language resists our efforts to take from it a single, tyrannical meaning. As Richard Pine notes, the contemporary Irish mind is ambivalent and bifurcated and in the case of Translations, we have to decide whether or not resolution matters, whether or not the conclusion of the play

successfully resolves the dilemma of cultural decline under the weight of colonial repression. I would argue that the validity of the idea of the 'both/and' of the homeless mind, or nation, rests in its activity, its struggle to hold in some balance the opposing tensions which would otherwise demand a choice of 'either/or'. Beginning with the name, Friel weaves a drama of language and meaning which re-establishes the connections between the word and its significance. He does not treat the value of names lightly but rather with deadly seriousness. In doing so, he is asserting that language in Ireland does have power but need not be the tool of political power mongers; instead, it can be the instrument of change and progress. However, progress and change can only be constructive once the tensions involved are made clear. There is no doubt that the tensions Friel is dramatizing are English vs. Irish, the public vs. the private and so on, but the fact that he chooses to dramatize these tensions as opposed to resolving them, leaves the stage, and political/cultural dialogue, open to further debate. Translations, in essence, is a play which exposes more problems than it solves in order to create new space for discussion and for change.

CHAPTER TWO

The Communication Cord: Chaos and Construction

The repetition of historical and literary paradigms is not necessarily farcical but there is an unavoidable tendency toward farce in a situation in which an acknowledged tragic conflict is also read as an anachronistic -- aberrant -- picturesque one. (Deane, "Heroic Styles" 55)

In 1982, the Field Day Theatre Company staged The Communication Cord, a play which accomplishes exactly that which Seamus Deane writes of in his Field Day pamphlet "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea". Brian Friel takes the tragic paradigm of the then critically acclaimed Translations -- the dislocation of the Irish psyche and exploitation of the Irish language by British colonialism -- and rewrites it within the genre of farce. In his own words, Friel felt that the Irish "situation has become so absurd and so ... crass that it seems to me it might be a valid way to talk and write about it" (qtd in Dantanus 203). Keeping in line with the Field Day, post-colonial, revisionist mandate, Friel takes the pious version of the Irish cultural and linguistic past portrayed in Translations and inverts/subverts it in a superbly and tightly written

farce which depicts the necessity for continual rewriting and reassessment.

In the original Field Day programme for The Communication Cord, Seamus Deane outlines an adequate definition for farce within the Frielian theatrical world. Deane describes the stage as a machine, with the actors and actresses as its moving parts, a machine in which everything has a function and nothing has a destiny. The machinations of farce reduce, expose, humiliate and rescue, via laughter, the heroics of tragic failure. In this instance, it is the dangerous nostalgia for a lost native culture -- so potent in Translations -- which is denounced as "ludicrous and a sham" (Deane, "In Search of a Story"). The danger with working in the farcical mode is that the mechanisms of inversion can ultimately lead to a nihilistic conclusion; that is, if Friel is deconstructing the paradigms and structures rooted within the text of Translations, then is he not working against his previously ordered world of colonial dispossession and presenting a case for complete chaos and meaninglessness in language? Indeed, many critics echo Bernice Schrank's interpretation of The Communication Cord as the theatricalization of a world in which "disorder begets disorder" and in which speech is used to "reinforce a perception of the absence of alternatives [where there is] no implication of positive resolution" ("Politics and

Language" 71,73). However, when one takes particular notice of the physical stage -- that machine of Deane's definition -- and how it operates in both opposition to and union with the spoken text, a far more complex subtext is created which, essentially, advocates the same revisionistic attitudes of both Translations and the first set of Field Day pamphlets. This attitude may present itself in an aggressively destructive tone in The Communication Cord, with its portrayal of confusion and chaos; but, the attitude remains a progressive one in that any de(con)struction is a necessary prelude to reconstruction.

The physical stage, as described by Friel's set directions for The Communication Cord, depicts a world which is defined by artificiality, constriction and structured systems. We are told that the play will take place in a "restored thatched cottage close to the sea in the remote townland of Ballybeg, County Donegal" and that the time is the "present, early in October" -- an ominous season at best. The directions for Act I elaborate upon this restoration motif in that the cottage is labelled as "'traditional'" (11) and then described as "too pat, too 'authentic'. It is in fact a restored house, a reproduction, an artifact of today making obeisance to a home of yesterday." Friel's use of single quotation marks around the words "traditional" and "authentic" immediately brings the

veracity of such terms, and our ability to fix upon them any stable definition, into question. The set is a visual nod to the not so distant past of the barn/hedge school in Translations, but also a gesture toward the passing of traditional versions of Irish history. The characters in The Communication Cord are then confined within the small cottage, unlike those in Translations, who are allowed to move beyond the hedge school setting into the open field -- as in the love scene between Yolland and Maire. Not only that, but Friel makes certain that the perimeter of the cottage itself is constrained with a clutter of artifact so much so that the actors' movements are largely restricted to the centre of the stage which is the only area "free of furnishings". The restriction of the physical space on the stage is then starkly contrasted with the verbal pyrotechnics which make The Communication Cord both hilariously funny and biting satiric. In this play, the mode of farce works on three levels: one, the claustrophobic physical space of the stage-cottage; two, the chaotic confusion of the dialogue and all the games being played with roles and names; and three, the union of the two which create sub-text 'play'.

It is not surprising that the combination of the first two levels of the play may be interpreted as culminating in disorder and destruction as the final scene of The

Communication Cord results in the crumbling of the cottage itself, but in fact, it is far more complicated than the visual impact of structures imploding due to overuse and misuse. Friel offers a perfect metaphor for the critical approach to his farce in the door of the cottage. It is a half-door; that is, one which can be both open and closed at the same time, and the first dialogue between Jack and Tim offers commentary on exactly how to read both the door and the play:

TIM: It was open, Jack.

JACK: What?

TIM: The door -- it wasn't locked.

(Cut the sound of the engine.)

JACK: Can't hear you.

TIM: The door was open.

JACK: You're turning the key the wrong way.

(TIM looks at the key in his hand.)

TIM: Am I? (I, 12)

Their questions and confusion over whether or not the door is locked or unlocked are not only the result of a misunderstanding about the duplicitous nature of the door, but also of the way in which two conflicting views of the same thing can be held with equal conviction. What becomes

increasingly significant about the ability of the door to exist in two states at once -- open and closed -- is not only the parallel to the split nature of the post-colonial Irish mind, but also the inability of either Tim or Jack to recognize this sort of schizophrenia.

Let us move momentarily to the language issue in The Communication Cord. Richard Pine rightly suggests that the play is an example of the "viscosity of language" (162), and I am attracted to this image of unclarity and 'stickiness' because it describes both the situations which compose the farcical plot and their increasing confusion to both the audience and the characters involved; and because it also relates to the sticky situations in which the perpetrators of pretence perpetually place themselves. Trying to secure a tenured position with the university, young Tim Gallagher seeks to take advantage of his girlfriend's pretentious father, by pretending that the restored cottage, owned by Jack's father, is really his own. The cottage -- a pretence itself in its artificial construction -- is the playing area of this seemingly innocent game of 'let's pretend' gone haywire, as altogether too many other characters become involved and intertwined in Tim and Jack's attempt at deception.

The first scene wherein Tim comments "that perhaps we are both playing roles here, not only for one another but

for ourselves" (I, 19), points to another level of meaning regarding deception and representation. As the two boys plot out their shenanigans, the audience is made subtly aware of the metadramatic implications of their game. The assumption of roles, plots, sub-plots as the central activity of the primary text of The Communication Cord is, of course, a commentary on the very act of theatre. By subverting what the London Times described as a "national classic" as he turns the tragedy of Translations into a farce, Friel is also deconstructing, or perhaps placing into question, the power of the theatre. We cannot help but to see the bodies upon the stage as actors as well as characters, and characterized role-players, all to be eventually defeated by their acts of pretence and illusion. If I were to expand this parallel to include the role of the playwright, then Tim becomes a victim of another's plot -- Jack's -- even though he freely implicates himself in the drama. Friel's questioning of the role of the artist in the production of myths, pieties, unprogressive histories, is poignantly echoed in the disillusionment of the professor of language.

We learn early on that Tim, like our Manus of a previous era, is a junior lecturer in linguistics and the title of his proposed PhD thesis -- "Discourse Analysis with Particular Reference to Response Cries" -- reverberates back to Hugh O'Donnell's failed book -- "the Pentaglot Preceptor

or Elementary Institute of the English, Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Irish Languages" -- and my first chapter: it is talk about talk. As the play progresses, it becomes obvious that not only does Tim fail in keeping up the pretences which initiate the play, but he also fails in what becomes a mini-defense of his thesis on

Words. Language. An agreed code. I encode my message; I transmit it to you; you receive the message and decode it ... All social behaviour, the entire social order, depends on our communicational structures, on words mutually agreed on and mutually understood ... without the shared code, you have chaos. (I, 18-19)

Tim's comment becomes an opaque mirror from which the meaning of Translations, in terms of the colonial efforts of the British breaking the code and throwing a wrench into the workings of Irish language, is reflected. Of course, what is being expressed in The Communication Cord is that because of a series of role-playing exercises gone wrong -- a self-critical reference to Translations, perhaps? -- and a string of misunderstandings and mistaken identities, the already dispossessed 'code' completely breaks down.

Why does everything, including the set, fall upon itself in the conclusion of the play? I think it is obvious

that because the foundations upon which all the games are being built, including the theatrical heritage of Translations, are shaky to begin with, everything falls apart. The restored cottage and the language being examined may be working in opposition in that one is 'perfectly' constructed and one seems to reel in anarchy, but they are also very similar in that both are a matter of pastiche rather than a matter of authenticity. Jack lists off the contents of the cottage -- "Table. Lamp. Window. Curtains -- lace. Clock -- stopped. Dresser. Again the usual accoutrements." (I, 17) -- as automatically as he recites the semi-mythological pieties which the cottage embodies -- "This is where we all come from. This is our first cathedral. This shaped all our souls. This determined our first pieties. Yes. Have reverence for this place." (I, 15). In the words of Declan Kiberd's Field Day pamphlet "Myth and Motherland", such "sentimental stage-Irish claptrap about the charms of rural Ireland ... sweeping generalizations about the Celtic race constitute the most insidiously aggressive ploy of all the tactics used by imperialistic Englishmen." (88-89).

It should be noted that many reviewer/critics blithely interpreted Translations as an elegy for just such charming rusticity in rural Ireland. Friel, in a vicious attack on such sentimentality, some of it due to his own words, has

suddenly taken such claptrap out of the mouths of the romanticizing Brits such as Yolland and placed it into the mouths and minds of the Irish themselves. It is very telling that Jack's hogwash about "our first cathedral" are words which echo again and again in lines from Tim, Senator Donovan and Nora Dan -- all 'Irishmen' -- as the play progresses. Friel engages in a self-reflexive dialogue to say that, indeed, the British are largely responsible for a dislocated Irish psyche, but so too are the unthinking responses of characters such as Tim and Senator Donovan. In fact, Friel makes an even more stinging attack on the contemporary Irishperson as both the Senator and Nora Dan sit back and glorify the virtues of the sham cottage, and in the same breath offer it up for sale based upon their insincere descriptions of its pietas value.

The play continues as more than one smooth-talking shyster 'gets his own': Jack and Senator Donovan are both in professions which depend upon the ability to talk -- law and politics, and, metadramatically, theatre -- and both are shown to be men of great charisma and charm with their thinly disguised pub-style pick-up lines to women:

JACK: Many, many years ago, Susan, you and I were
fortunate enough to experience and share an

affection that is still one of my most
sustaining memories. (II, 67)

DONOVAN: Not that language matters when you're as young
and as beautiful as you are. (II, 73)

We do not believe these lines any more than we believe the Senator when he proclaims that the cottage is "the touchstone" or the "apotheosis" of Irish heritage (I, 31). And when all hell breaks loose, and the game is up, we should remain sceptical of the Senator when he suspiciously states that "words are superfluous, aren't they?" (I, 34). Because the play ends in the cottage tumbling down, and Tim feeling that perhaps "silence is the perfect discourse" (II, 86), does not imply that Friel is making a case for the meaninglessness of language. We must look at Tim's entire line in this instance: "Maybe silence is the perfect discourse" [my emphasis]. "Maybe" indicates that he is hesitating, oscillating, questioning his very thesis -- he is considering the rewriting, the reconstruction of much of it. This, then, is the critical stance which Friel and Field Day overwhelmingly advocate: that the best discourse is one which constantly re-examines itself and its own validity. As Richard Pine states: "The Communication Cord suggests Friel's self-reflexive cautiousness about his own work in

particular and about the Field Day enterprise in general" (543-544). I would argue that Friel is also warning against the easy establishment of equally unmeaningful new pieties or the reduction of plays such as Translations into easy categorization as tragedy or elegy. The cottage crumbles not because it is found to be structurally unstable, but because it is sustained by unthinking and unquestioning values. Tim's "maybe" is an anti-essentialist statement which reaffirms the state of the Irish mind examined in my first chapter which Pine described as "schizophrenic alternity [sic]" (28).

Friel masterfully works this state of the Irish mind into The Communication Cord in terms of, once again, names and the power either within, or lacking within, the naming process. Resisting the impulse to deconstruct my own theories of nomenclature in the Frielian dramatic context, it is once again in the names that the Irish psychological predicament is illuminated. Farce depends largely upon devices such as mistaken identities and role-playing, and often results in chaotic name-calling. The Communication Cord is no exception. Jack and Tim's deceptively simple game of 'let's pretend' is quickly complicated once characters turn up at inopportune times, naturally, and must be incorporated into the game; but not as themselves. Claire becomes 'Evette', Jack becomes 'Barney' and later, 'Jack the

Cod', Nora Dan is transformed into 'Nora the Scrambler' and the Senator is derogatively renamed 'Dr. Bollocks'. The confusion of these arbitrary alter-egos and personal slurs (which constitute, in part, the mechanics of what Pine defines as alternity) is compounded by the use of nicknames such as Miss Tiny, Patsy the Post, and Barney the Banks, which are, assumedly, employed to avoid confusion over who is who. The result is a wonderfully orchestrated implosion of the false Eden-scene in Translations when Owen and Yolland, deluded by Lying Anna's poteen, believe that to name a thing is to bring it into existence; that the name equals the identity. This multitextual irony is demonstrated when Senator Donovan comments:

Jack the Cod! I love that. Call a man Jack the Cod and you tell me his name and his profession and that he's not very good at his profession. Concise, accurate and nicely malicious. Beautiful! (I, 42-43)

'Jack the Cod' is indeed Jack McNellis but he is neither a fisherman nor a failure in his profession, despite some commonly held views on lawyers. Thus, the sentiment is both right and wrong at the same time as Friel's play is the nicely malicious attack on naming strategies which assume an all-powerful, all-telling omnipotence.

There is, of course, a very serious side to the game of names being played by Friel as The Communication Cord takes the split personality of Owen and spirals his predicament into anarchy. In several instances, characters do not know who they are, who they are supposed to be playing and even why the game is going on. What occurs is that misunderstandings about names, for example, become incorporated into an artificial linguistic code because of the lack of an accepted, stable one with which to begin -- the formula for chaos according to Tim's thesis. Barney the German remarks that Tim seems to be "just a little bit gallagher" (I, 51), mistaking Tim's family name for an expression of his state of mind. Later on, the Senator appropriates the term, and parrots Barney, in remarking that Nora Dan is "a little bit gallagher", showing how quickly, easily and mistakenly a code is decoded into chaos and then recoded (I, 74). The fact that Tim's name is translated to indicate madness is more than a deconstructive illustration of his thesis, and more than a microcosmic example of what Friel is doing in translating Translations into farce for, indeed, the game of 'let's pretend' in all its artificiality, does drive Tim slightly batty:

TIM: And now, I suppose, we're going to have your special Donegal midsummer orgy! Terrific, my

friend! You have a wonderful sense of humour!
(Totally defeated he slumps into a chair.) O my
God, it's out of hand, Jack! I can't go on! It's
all in pieces.

BARNEY: (Stiffly) I come here just to talk to you
business, Herr McNellis, and not to --

TIM: (Suddenly impassioned again; shouts) You're
McNellis! (Softly) You're McNellis. I'm Gallagher
-- Gallagher -- Gallagher! (I, 49-50)

Tim's increasing hysteria quickly infects the entire world of play as Senator Donovan chains himself to a post while reciting a nostalgic "little scene that's somehow central to my psyche" (I, 55). This event results in complete mayhem with everyone trying to free the Senator from bondage, all unsuccessfully, and Act I fittingly ends in a blackout with screams of frustration, fright and the 'cast' of deceivers in chaos. The belief that a name somehow contains a fixed, objective meaning has been refuted by the end of the first act, and Friel's attempt to dramatize the lack of anything "central" in language, culture, or the psyche is amplified in Act II.

Having the Senator imprisoned by one of the cottage's artifacts may be a rather shallow/obvious representation of the modern Irishperson becoming trapped within the context

of a shallow history, a flimsy nostalgia and the glorification of a dubious past; however, the repetition of the gesture at the end of Act II -- this time with Jack chaining himself to the same post before the final blackout -- drives the point home in an unrelenting manner. Friel is dramatizing the ridiculousness of both the Senator's notions of the stoic Irish peasantry and the crass misuse of that image by Jack.

In The Communication Cord, the cottage -- the stage machine -- is perhaps the central character. We are told that it has been constructed to appear 'authentic', the primary contradiction and deception, and then Jack, Tim, Senator Donovan and Nora Dan proceed to prostitute that authentic artificiality. Jack uses the cottage for sexual rendez-vous, Tim uses it for professional advancement, the Senator for restorative reasons and Nora Dan for economic gain based on the marketability of all of the above. If the cottage is to represent how the contemporary Irishperson views his or her national and cultural heritage, then the Senator's comments upon being released -- "this is the greatest dump in all" (II, 70) -- is an angry, even bitter, reaction similar in tone to Friel's comments about the unthinking, almost automatic romanticization of Ireland's history. Indeed, one wonders what is so magical and economically marketable about poverty, dispossession,

violence and oppression? Albeit a rhetorical question, the cottage/character certainly provides a decisive answer.

Initially, the cottage sends out smoke-signals in the form of blinding blow downs in Tim's face, to warn against the stacking of deceptions upon deceptions until 'reality' is completely lost. Not heeding such signs, not comprehending the code of the cottage that is, Tim plunges into the plot he and Jack dreamed up until control is evaporated and all structures -- even artificial ones -- completely collapse. To me, this is a very clear statement that some kind of apocalyptic change must occur in how the Irish perceive of their past, in order to re-evaluate the present. I use the term apocalyptic intentionally because it certainly signifies destruction, but it also contains the belief/necessity for reconstruction. With The Communication Cord, Brian Friel provides an anecdote to his critically acclaimed masterpiece in a defensive measure against the possibility of sentimental idolization of its predecessor. The Communication Cord is an extreme but effective answer to the problem of pious romanticization: through the annihilation of the hedge/school - cottage artifice, it becomes a play which literally, physically and symbolically clears out a space and a stage, allowing for something new to be written.

them, as well as establishing the fictional nature of theatrical discourse. In the second place, Friel's prefacing comments situate both him and the play within a wider dialogue about 'history as fiction' informed by analyses such as Hayden White's "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" and Paul Ricoeur's History and Truth. This is not to say that Friel's previous plays have no correlation to critical theories -- or, that his work does not allow for theory-related readings -- but Making History certainly invites a theoretical approach. As his programme note states, Friel believes that history, and the play, are fictional narratives and should be read as such. Because of its overwhelming rhetorical content, Making History reads more like a Field Day pamphlet than a performance text: Gerald FitzGibbon calls it a "dramatic essay" (50) and, in the words of Seamus Heaney, "it's a thesis on the stage" (personal interview). While chronicling the defeat and exile of Hugh O'Neill, Friel also dramatizes a debate over who makes history -- individuals involved in events which affect a nation, or 'historians' who record and organize those events into a textual artifact? Although the "thesis" which Friel is defending in this play is provocative in terms of the practice of writing histories and the crisis of the individual within often dogmatic historical frameworks, the dramaturgy of Making History is weak at best. I simply

cannot see this play coming alive on the stage as Translations and The Communication Cord did in terms of, primarily, the set and certain props working with, or against, the language of the play to create that critical third level of dramatic interpretation I emphasize so heavily in my previous chapter. As a rhetorical exercise, Making History is certainly interesting, but as for the prospects of performance, the physical text of the stage is overshadowed, or simply ignored, in the light of the verbal discourse.

During the six years between the creation of The Communication Cord and the production of Making History in 1988, the Field Day presses published six new pamphlets which deviated from the original six with a new emphasis on legal terminology and constitutional rhetoric. The authors of pamphlet Nos. 7 through 12 are also strikingly different from the original contributors in that they are not closely tied to the Field Day enterprise as were Paulin, Deane and Heaney (all directors) and they are not renowned for work in the literary or artistic communities. The rupturing open of the pamphlets' canon of contributors to include writers not directly linked to early Field Day is a laudable move in light of the company's dedication to difference. While these pamphlets are ostensibly more political in focus, they

continue to pursue the theatre company's goal of breaking down pre-conceived notions and beliefs.

Pamphlets 7-9 examine both the arbitrary nature of terms such as 'Protestant' and 'liberty', as well as how the public's belief in these concepts have become dangerously entrenched. McCartney's Liberty and Authority in Ireland effectively destroys the myth that the Republic of Ireland is a kind of libertarian paradise in comparison to Northern Ireland, and argues that the Catholic-dominated governments in the South have instituted equally "fascist policies" as have groups in the North (9). His pamphlet, and Marianne Elliott's Watchmen in Sion: the Protestant idea of liberty, deconstruct the terms liberty, nationalism and republicanism to a state of relativistic rhetoric at use in games of political power and propaganda. In all the pamphlets there exists an underlying concern about the continuing violence in Ireland, and despite differences in context, each contributor makes some pro-active statement regarding the possibility of peace:

The circumstances of a tragic contemporary Ireland impose the necessity for creating a social environment by law in which people of differing religious faiths and of conflicting moral values may live together in peace. The establishment of mutual values and pluralist

societies both in Northern Ireland and the Republic is a necessary pre-condition to peace let alone unity.

(McCartney 25)

Pamphlets 10-12, subtitled the Emergency Legislation Series concentrate on issues such as constitutional rights and the violation of personal liberties under acts of coercion and repression over the last sixty years in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. McGrory presents the law in much the same way as Friel presents language in Translations and The Communication Cord, as an instrument of both oppression and freedom. Mulloy, Farrell and McGrory unanimously condemn the adoption of Coercion Acts by the Irish Free State and the Republic of Ireland because such Acts were merely translated from the British colonial administrations to Irish governments which supposedly had fought against England in the name of democratic freedom. Posing the question: "freedom of speech, freedom to organize politically, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention are all carefully protected -- Or are they?" (Farrell 5), the Emergency Legislation Series of pamphlets answer a resounding NO:

Adoption requires less effort than thinking afresh.
Thus do legislative models, descended to us from the
dynasties of coercion, endure to this day. (Mulloy 23)

Despite the fact that these pamphlets, laden with legal rhetoric and jargon, seem a far cry from the artistic genre of a dramatist such as Brian Friel, an overwhelming connection exists -- especially with Making History -- in the mutual desire to expose philosophical ideas such as liberty, political beliefs such as nationalism, and discursive methods such as history, not as objective and inalienable truths, but as arbitrary terms and texts which, once scrutinized, are rendered subjective and mutable.

As mentioned earlier, historical revisionism is not a new concept. Hayden White's 1974 essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" attempts to re-establish the origins of history within the literary imagination and as a discursive process. White argues that history is a form of narrative, of story-telling, of inquiry, and is therefore provisional and incomplete. Histories do not reproduce events but rather, through a process of "suppressing" and "highlighting" of certain aspects, indicate a direction in which to think about those events (White 400). The writers of histories thusly transform past situation through their

own biases and their individual choices of what to include and what to exclude.

The rhetorical structure of Friel's dramatic pamphlet on the making of histories actually begins with the theatre programme. Accompanying the Field Day production of Making History, the programme contains reprints of certain 'historical' sources about Hugh O'Neill dating from 1599 to Sean O'Faolin's contemporary study, The Great O'Neill, along with critical essays such as Declan Kiberd's "The Search for a Usable Past". The playgoer will, assumedly, read such accounts of the life of O'Neill, Mabel and the Kinsale uprising with only one 'authentic' document from Hugh himself. This is a reproduction of a letter to Philip III of Spain which is cut-off, printed at an angle, and wholly illegible to the modern reader. Armed with virtually no primary sources which could provide clues to the psychological dilemma of the Great O'Neill, audiences are then presented with Friel's history of a man caught between two cultures, two politically adversarial nations and yet, a man who must choose a course of action. The programme itself reads like a history of different versions of the same historical period; each one being incomplete, subjective and inherently biased. The play, then, is set within a context of contingent meanings and presented as Friel's version of 'history'.

The description of both Hugh O'Neill's Dungannon home in Act I and Peter Lombard's apartment in Rome for Act II state that the rooms are "scantily furnished" and no attempt is made at decoration (I, i, 1). It is not the lack of stage properties, however, which create a 'dead' play because Friel is careful to point out that at least the character of Hugh O'Neill "moves about this comfortless room quickly and energetically" taking possession of what I can only imagine as a great deal of empty space (1). Whereas the brilliant marriage of physical stage and verbal text makes The Communication Cord a vibrantly successful play, its absence contributes to an overbearing rhetorical quality in Making History.

Friel introduces potentially meaningful images and properties, but he neither carries their meaning throughout the play, nor allows any subtlety to their existence. For example, the most visually striking objects in the first scene of Act I are the flowers O'Neill is arranging and the coat he is wearing. We are told that the flowers are called Spanish Broom, or to use the Latin name -- genista -- and the coat was tailored in London. Both are extravagant and magnificent in colour and appearance. The flowers can easily be linked to the political presence of Spain in the play. From Peter Lombard's existence to "that consignment of Spanish saddles" (I, i, 4), Spain is an undeniable influence

in Friel's narrative. Flowers are never mentioned beyond the first scene, however, except for a dispute between Mabel and Harry over how to care for them. Harry states that they need a lot of water and Mabel later disagrees. This prop could easily be read as a metaphor for how Hugh ought to handle the Spanish presence, either nurture their political potential or disregard them -- but a problem arises in that this interpretation is obvious and simple. The metaphor is never dramatically developed with any style or subtlety and therefore falls flat.

Hugh's extravagantly tailored coat from London is just as easily read as a representation of Hugh's period of British breeding -- he spent nine years in England with a foster family. It indicates his material attraction to the benefits which English society can provide and is reinforced by the British accent he adopts when it suits him best. Friel is painting a picture of a man patched together by varying influences. But again, the image of his luxurious coat is never worked into the rest of the text beyond that initial, obvious instance. The most frustrating example, for a critic, of this weak dramaturgy is the scene in which Mabel's sister, Mary, brings her seeds for her garden:

MARY: I've brought you some seeds. (She produces envelopes from her bag.) I've labelled them

for you. (Reads:) Fennel. Lovage. Tarragon. Dill. Coriander. Borage. I had tansy, too, but I'm afraid it died on me. Do you remember every Easter we used to make tansy pudding and leave it -- Sorry. Don't plant the fennel near the dill or the two will cross-fertilize.

MABEL: Is that bad?

MARY: You'll end up with a seed that's neither one thing or the other.

(I, ii, 21-22)

As critic Christopher Murray notes, "Friel is exploring the possibility of transplantation between two cultures" (71), but I would argue that such exploration never culminates dramatically and is essentially abandoned. There is a short exchange between Hugh and Mabel wherein Hugh compares the personalities of his associates to the various seed groups, but once again, the substance of that comparison, the reason behind it, is never developed or even pursued to any significant end. Instead, the image of the seeds, like the flowers and Hugh's coat, remains in dramatic limbo.

Critics such as Richard Pine make an interesting point that Making History is a play which exists within, and articulates what he terms "the Gap". That is, a nihilistic

space -- a limbo of sorts -- of both psychology and performance. Pine states that the play "lacks dramatic impact ... not only in form but, ostensibly, in content and matter" (210). He goes on to argue that the play is the embodiment of the death of Gaelic Ireland and there is both "a literal and intellectual nihilism in Making History" as Friel avoids any problems of closure by not opening up any questions (211). "The gap is between the private and public worlds, between past and future, between illusions and reality" (214). While I agree with Pine that the play is severely lacking in dramatic impact, there is, however, a great deal of intellectual matter which demands consideration. As I stated in my preface, this is the last play Friel wrote for the Field Day Theatre Company and it is the play most closely related to the pamphlet series in both form and content.

In the Gap, a space made possible largely through the apocalyptic destruction in The Communication Cord, Friel constructs a rhetorical debate on the nature of history and history-making which extends into the realm of reader response and reception. Throughout the pamphlet series, there is a continuing reference to the transitory nature of history and its relation to literature. In "Heroic Styles", Seamus Deane states that "both literature and history are discourses which are widely recognized to be closely related

... Literature can be written as History, History as Literature." (45). Declan Kiberd takes this thought and brings it into the post-colonial context with his comment "like all colonized people ... history is a form of science fiction ... the word 'history', like the word 'Gaelic', means whatever you want it to mean, and therefore means nothing." ("Myth and Motherland" 95). And Denis Donoghue in the Afterword to Ireland's Field Day notes that "history is not solid ground. No word in contemporary thought has been more effectively undermined than history: it is hard to use the word at all without seeing it dissolve into fiction and fancy" (116). From Friel's programme note alone, it is obvious that he is very much in tune with this Whitean concept of history being related to fictional forms of discourse as well as being a shifting narrative, one which changes with the both the historian's and the reader's vision. I believe Pine to be in error, however, by stating that Friel never "opens up" the discourse for debate or questioning. Indeed, the discussions between Hugh O'Neill and Peter Lombard on the nature of history and truth come out in a resounding statement about the revisionist nature of historical documentation and the overwhelming openness of historical figures and events to individual interpretations.

In Act I, scene i, the debate begins with Lombard explaining the nature of his thesis on the Irish situation

-- the "De Regno Hiberniae Sanctorum Insula Commentarius", a title sounding suspiciously like Hugh O'Donnell's book in Translations and Tim Gallagher's thesis in The Communication Cord, two other treatises of the Friel/Field Day canon which come under examination and trial. The real rhetorical debate begins when Hugh questions Lombard on another document, closely related to the first, the life history of the O'Neills:

O'NEILL: Have you begun?

LOMBARD: No, no; only checking some events and dates.

O'NEILL: And when your checking is done?

LOMBARD: Then I suppose I'll try to arrange the material into a shape -- eventually.

O'NEILL: And interpret what you've gathered?

LOMBARD: Not interpret, Hugh. Just describe.

O'NEILL: Without comment?

LOMBARD: I'll just try to tell the story of what I saw and took part in as accurately as I can.

O'NEILL: But you'll tell the truth?

LOMBARD: I'm no historian, Hugh. I'm not even sure I know what the historian's function is -- not to talk of his method.

O'NEILL: But you'll tell the truth?

LOMBARD: If you're asking me will my story be as accurate as possible -- of course it will. But are truth and falsity the proper criteria? I don't know. Maybe when the time comes my first responsibility will be to tell the best possible narrative. Isn't that what history is, a kind of story-telling? (I, i, 8)

Christopher Murray convincingly argues that Lombard's comments enter upon "the territory traversed by Paul Ricoeur in History and Truth" (64). As a historian of Ricoeur's definition, Lombard will attempt to build a system which does not create truth as such, but will develop a discourse on the human subject as the object of history (Murray 65). As a naive Socrates, Hugh's questions pressure Lombard into considering the ramifications of his texts, but they also illuminate exactly the notions of history expressed by the Field Day pamphlets and Friel himself, that history is a narrative, a story. When it comes to the matter of truth, it appears that Friel, like Kiberd and Lombard -- all historians or writers of historical narratives, believes that the term has no affective meaning or importance:

LOMBARD: I'm not sure that 'truth' is a primary ingredient -- is that a shocking thing to

say? Maybe when the time comes, imagination will be as important as information. But one thing I will promise you: nothing will be put down on paper for years and years. History has to be made -- before it's remade.

(I, i, 8-9)

This 'shocking' statement is effectively reiterated in Friel's own preface to the play when he states that Making History is a combination of actual events and imagination. Lombard's admission that truth is not supremely important is startling only to those who believe that truth is objective and absolute, but, if one accepts the Field Day philosophy that history and revisionism are identical practices, then an admission such as Lombard's is perfectly tenable. What is truly fascinating about this passage from Lombard in the first few moments on the stage is that the history to be made, before it is remade, is in fact Friel's own version of events; a version he has already acknowledged as unchronological and largely imaginary, but still titled as a history.

O'Neill and Lombard's debate is not resurrected until the final scene when, appropriately, the history in question has indeed been made -- Hugh has rebelled against the English crown, he has failed, and he has fled to Spain to

spend the remainder of his days in exile -- and the argument shifts from being purely academic to being based on personal experience. Friel sets up the final scene as a mock-heroic battle for Hugh O'Neill, not of the sword but of the pen, as the drunken, exiled hero once again engages Lombard about his history-in-the-making and what Hugh personally feels to be the pertinent details. Naturally, Hugh loses his fight to impose the character of Mabel as a key figure because she simply does not fit in with the particular narrative Lombard has chosen to give historical prominence:

LOMBARD: People think they just want to know the 'facts'; they think they believe in some sort of empirical truth, but what they really want is a story. And that's what this will be: the events of your life categorized and classified and then structured as you would structure any story ... I'm simply talking about making a pattern ... offering a cohesion to that random catalogue of deliberate achievement and sheer accident that constitutes your life. And that cohesion will be a narrative that people will read and be satisfied by. (I, i, 66-67)

True to form, Lombard's speech is a dramatic version of Ricoeur's ideas about historical system-building, but this speech also echoes Terence Brown's sentiment that:

to write history was not to offer a neutral account of sequential events -- rather, the historian was custodian of a sacred, tribal narrative, and this form of historiography became dominant in Ireland. (6)

The evidence of this play indicates that 'tribal narratives' are dominant not only in Ireland of the early 18th century, but even in contemporary histories and dramas.

Anyone familiar with stories about Hugh O'Neill will realize that Lombard won this imaginary/historical fight. For centuries the Great O'Neill has been regarded as the embodiment of the allegiance to Gaelic traditions in the face of England's colonizing powers. Even Pine's statement that the play is about the death of Gaelic Ireland is loyal to this mythology of Hugh O'Neill. Friel dramatizes Hugh as losing this battle with Lombard in a Hamlet-like rhetorical debate within the personal mind of Friel's creation -- Hugh O'Neill.

Having established that visually and textually, Hugh O'Neill -- and the play -- exists in a state of limbo, a moment of indecision, the secondary conflict in Making

History becomes a personal choice expressed in what I term as the rhetoric of the Gap -- 'this ... or, that'.

O'NEILL: Do I keep faith with my oldest friend and ally, Maguire, and indeed with the Gaelic civilization that he personifies? Or (my emphasis) do I march alongside the forces of Her Majesty? And I've marched with them before, Mary. You didn't know that? Oh, yes, I've trotted behind the Tudors on several expeditions against the native rebels ... Oh yes, that's a detail our annalists in their wisdom choose to overlook, perhaps because they believe, like Peter Lombard, that art has precedence over accuracy. I'm beginning to wonder should we trust historians at all! Anyhow back to Maguire -- and my dilemma. It really is a nicely balanced equation. The old dispensation -- the new dispensation ... Impulse, instinct, capricious genius, brilliant improvisation -- or (my emphasis) calculation, good order, common sense, the cold pragmatism of the Renaissance mind ... Do I grasp the Queen Marshal's hand ... or (my emphasis) do I grip the hand of the Fermanagh rebel and thereby bear public and imprudent witness to a way of life that my blood comprehends

and indeed loves and that is as old as the Book of Ruth? My dilemma. (I, ii, 27-28)

Just as O'Neill struggles with Lombard not to become embalmed "in pieties" (I, ii, 63), Hugh places his dilemma within the context of being "trapped in the old Gaelic paradigms of thought. It's so familiar -- and so tedious" (I, ii, 27). Hugh's fear or anxiety at being imprisoned in someone else's narrative is exactly the belief which the Field Day pamphlets of this period are attempting to articulate within the specifics of Irish political history. The 'powers that be' construct discourses, laws, or religious doctrines, in order to maintain the power base from which they arose. Hugh's fears in Act II of Making History are brought into focus by this contextualization of power and how it is imbedded within any discursive practice. As frustrated with being slotted into a "type" as Friel is with traditional paradigms, Hugh asks himself the very real question of "how am I to conduct myself" at a crucial moment in history? One might argue that Friel is backtracking from his 'both/and' philosophy of post-colonial revisionism in presenting this drama of Hugh O'Neill in terms of a choice between supporting either Gaelic allegiances or British ones. But I would counter that Making History is not so much about the private dilemma over public roles, as Richard Pine

would have it, but about exactly what the title says: making history.

Any play in performance is obviously a different play every night, and any text is a different text every time it is read. Murray points out that "there is only the invention, the making process, and this is something which Irish and English audiences, variously inheritors of the situation O'Neill brought about, are necessarily implicated in" (76). Theatre critic Brian Brennan re-emphasized the role of the audience in his review of Making History for the Sunday Independent:

By embracing the belief that an 'historical text is a kind of literary artifact,' Friel is repeating, indeed celebrating the very process which poor old Hugh O'Neill deplores within the play. And this lovely existential joke will be repeated with every performance of the play.

In the weeks ahead, Making History will go to 21 towns and cities. Each person who sees it will, because of the nature of theatre, observe a different Hugh O'Neill begging to be portrayed as he was. And so, each member of each audience will be a party to the re-inventions of Hugh O'Neill ... (15)

Words written upon the page, or spoken upon the stage, will often generate common conclusions, but there is validity in the belief that texts, particularly theatrical ones, are a contingency and continually change shape in and through time. If audiences were suspended in time and were allowed to, as Hugh O'Neill would like to do -- "just sit -- and wait" (27), then perhaps objective answers to Hugh's type of questions might be attainable. As it stands, Hugh O'Neill is relegated to being the reader of his own life history and makes no attempt to counter Lombard's version via the methodology Friel presents as powerful: writing. Hugh O'Neill

remains private ... he has no way of translating [his private desires] into his public language, his historiography. O'Neill is condemned to perpetual isolation. (Murray 75)

Significantly, the only text Hugh O'Neill writes himself is a letter of surrender to Queen Elizabeth I, and this authorial act of submission symbolizes the character of Hugh's defeat on both the physical and textual battlefields. If history is a text, then it is those who write histories who are best able to grapple with and communicate the problems of the Gap.

In the act of making Making History, which as text is continually remade, Friel successfully argues for the transitory nature not only of a life but also of the varying accounts of life. "This is one of the strengths of this play -- its refusal to thrust its chosen terms into a pretence of finality, or to insist unduly on contemporary parallels, or to jail its rich characters in any ultimate interpretation" (Kiberd, "The Search for a Usable Past"). Indeed, the play is a powerful argument for the narrative quality which defines historiography, a quality which allows readers, once they are aware of it, to view Hugh O'Neill as both a hero and a traitor, both man and myth, and perhaps more importantly, to realize that Friel in his role as both historian and dramatist continually resists entrapment in stereotypes and pieties.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dancing at Lughnasa: Ritual and Rupture

During the summer of 1992, I had the unique and pleasurable experience of seeing two productions of plays by Brian Friel within the same week. The Abbey Theatre Dublin production of Dancing at Lughnasa, having already won London's Olivier Theatre Award for 1990 was enjoying an eight month run at The Garrick Theatre, and literally right around the corner, Windham's Theatre was producing an equally successful revival of Friel's 1964 "smash hit" -- Philadelphia, Here I Come!. In retrospect, this was an appropriate theatrical combination, for Dancing at Lughnasa has much more in common with Friel's earlier plays than with his Field Day productions. Richard Pine surmises that Dancing at Lughnasa is Brian Friel's most autobiographical work since Philadelphia, Here I Come! due to the overwhelming nostalgia in both plays. Pine uses the term nostalgia in the context of nostos (home) and algos (pain), that is, the painful homecoming associated with memory (224). One could argue, because of the coincidence of the plays' simultaneous productions, that the divided character of child/adult Michael can be read as a manifestation of the split persona of Public/Private Gar, coming home through his memories. Regardless of that type of speculation, there is

no doubt that Dancing at Lughnasa marks a new direction in Friel's dramaturgy, a break that is not explained merely by the fact that Field Day did not produce the play. It is a play which incorporates an examination of a new concern, for Friel at least, about the necessity of paganism in the civilized world.

The three plays examined so far have an overwhelming concern with translation in common: the literal and metaphorical translation of place names and cultural identity; the translation of the tragic genre to the farcical; and the translation of historical figures and events into historical discourse and then further into dramatic performance. In the introduction to Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature, Seamus Deane writes that:

in the theatre [of Field Day] the central preoccupation has been with a particular experience of what we may call translation ... the dramatic analysis centres on anxieties of naming, speaking, and voice and the relations of these to place, identity and self-realization. The plays and pamphlets are intimately related as parts of a single project although they of course employ entirely different cadences in their development of the central discourse. (14-15)

Dancing at Lughnasa, a play which signifies the end of that intimate relationship between Brian Friel as artist and the Field Day Theatre Company, is not so much concerned with translation in any political-cultural sense, but the very personal translation of the past into the present through image and memory.

If Friel can be seen as moving back toward private concerns such as memories and 'homecomings', then the opposite is true of the last set of pamphlets published by Field Day. Collected in 1990 under the title Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature, the three essays by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said signal a concerted effort to place the Irish post-colonial condition into a global perspective. The fact that none of these contributors are Irish, even though Eagleton often lays claim to a Gaelic heritage, is significant in the context of Field Day's desire to continually break open discussions to include new approaches. What Eagleton, Jameson and Said have in common is not their nationality, or their direct participation in Irish political culture, but their shared position as prominent literary theorists of international renown and as Marxist, or post-Marxist, ideologues. Their pamphlets, therefore, read very much like their texts on critical theory: rather lengthy, dense discussions of philosophical matters informed by a particular ideological framework. For

example, Jameson's pamphlet Modernism and Imperialism is an extension of his previous work on the post-modern condition and reveals the same disillusionment he expressed over contemporary American culture in his reflections on the status of an Irish national literature:

[culture] can now no longer be grasped immanently; it no longer has its meaning, its deeper reason for being, within itself. As artistic content, it will now henceforth always have something missing about it. (51)

Jameson is lamenting the loss of any central point of reference in modern cultural pursuits. The problem with such statements, and these three pamphlets in general, is the question of their validity and applicability in and to the contemporary Irish situation as Field Day views it.

Jameson's comment that a national literature no longer has a meaning within itself is a contradiction of Seamus Deane's contention in the introduction to this same volume of pamphlets that, indeed, Field Day is striving to develop a "central discourse" which will revitalize and initiate new meanings for Ireland's national literature and culture. One must ask if these essays are simply a token nod to the international ideological arena and if they do not in fact

contradict what has heretofore been established as Field Day's agenda.

Another example of this sort of self-defeatism in Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature is Terry Eagleton's statement that "nationalism, Irish or otherwise, has never been particularly notable for its self-irony" (27). Professor Eagleton overlooks the presence of self-irony in works by Sean O'Casey, Brendan Behan and Frank McGuinness -- not to mention Brian Friel -- by claiming that Irish nationalist playwrights are incapable of portraying their nation's problems and struggles in an ironic, metadramatic mode. This most recent publication from the Field Day presses has neither the specific referentiality of for example, the Emergency Legislation Series, nor the broader applicability to questions of Irish language, history and political heritage which defined Ireland's Field Day.

Whether or not these three essays were the catalyst for Brian Friel to separate his dramatic efforts from the Field Day Theatre Company, the mutually informing dialogue which previously existed between Friel's plays and the pamphlet series no longer applies to Dancing at Lughnasa. Friel's statement in 1972 that "it is no help to the Irish dramatist to look outside Ireland, because his situation is substantially different from the French or English or American" is particularly telling because it reflects a

desire to focus on Irish concerns, and a rejection of any effort, such as Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature, to seek parallels with other nationalities and ideologies ("Plays Peasant and Unpeasant" 306). I am, therefore, extrapolating to read Dancing at Lughnasa as such a rejection of the direction in which Field Day appears to be moving and such a desire to re-focus on particularly Irish concerns.

In an 1991 interview with Vanity Fair magazine, Friel stated that "language has become depleted for me in some way; words have lost their accuracy and precision. So I use dance in the play as a surrogate for language" (130). This disillusionment hints at a possible reason why Friel chose not to have Dancing at Lughnasa produced by the Field Day Theatre Company. All the plays and pamphlets from 1980-1990 work toward infusing a new accuracy or precision into language, or at least highlighting the problems of such an endeavour; but, with this latest play, Friel relinquishes that quest in attempting to find an alternative form of communication. Despite box office successes in Dublin, London and New York, Dancing at Lughnasa fails to establish dance as an adequate signifying system for the thematic concerns of the play. The dance sequences in the production I saw were certainly energetic and moving, but their significance was consistently reiterated in the dialogue,

implying that dance alone was incapable of fully communicating meaning.

Having read the play before seeing its production on the stage, I was anxious to see how the director would incorporate the dance metaphor within the performance. I counted nine, with the possibility of more, scenes in which dance was written into the text either as the dominant action on the stage, or as a background motion to the dialogue. As Friel weaves scenes of wild Dionysian-like celebrations and cinematic routines reminiscent of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire into a discourse on the desperate need for non-linguistic expressions, I kept anticipating a surreal production where movement, music, and lighting would be the dominant tools with which the company would play out the drama.

Whether or not director Patrick Mason chose to avoid such an approach, or he found that the text, in all practicality, resisted a surrealistic interpretation, his production of Dancing at Lughnasa was dominantly realistic: it looked, felt, and sounded like a standard Irish play set in the countryside, about a family. The visual and textual importance of paganism was overshadowed in a production which chose, instead, to highlight Michael's act of remembering. I disagree with critic Richard Tillinghast, who saw the same production as I, in his assessment that

"Friel's cultural explorations . . . are both broader and more dramatic than anything he has attempted before" (40). I feel that Dancing at Lughnasa is, rather, a concentrated examination of the tension between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses during a time and in a place wherein "the necessity for paganism" is crucial (Friel, Vanity Fair 134).

The introduction of paganism, and the resistance to it, comes with the very first lines of the play as the adult Michael recalls the summer of 1936:

We got our first wireless set that summer -- well, a sort of a set; and it obsessed us. And because it arrived as August was about to begin, my Aunt Maggie -- she was the joker of the family -- she suggested we give it a name. She wanted to call it Lugh after the old Celtic God of the Harvest. Because in the old days August the First was La Lughnasa, the feast day of the pagan god, Lugh; and the days and weeks of harvesting that followed were called the Festival of Lughnasa. But Aunt Kate -- she was a national schoolteacher and a very proper woman -- she said it would be sinful to christen an inanimate object with any kind of name, not to talk of a pagan god. (I, 1)

The conflict between Christian and Pagan, control and abandonment, and the family as the major source of frustration and constriction of freeing, spectacular action is all established within these first few lines. The remainder of the play text is a working through of such moments of surrender to more pagan instincts, and the eventual repression of them, through the memories of Michael.

The best and most celebrated example of this struggle is in Act I when the Mundy sisters, inspired by music from their "voodoo" radio, break into spontaneous dance in the purest expression of defiance and transcendence of the restriction of daily routines. True to Friel's desire to surmount the requirements of language, the scene is written in stage directions alone; choreographical instructions to participants in dances. I use the plural here because what seems to be of utmost importance is that each of the five women find their own rhythms and movements while at the same time portraying a unified effort to subvert the mundane order of their lives:

Then ROSE's face lights up. Suddenly she flings away her knitting, leaps to her feet, shouts, grabs MAGGIE's hand. They dance and sing -- shout together; ROSE's wellingtons pounding out their own erratic rhythm.

Friel's note that "the movements seem caricatured; and the sound is too loud; and the beat is too fast; and the almost recognizable dance is made grotesque" (21) is something that must come through in the performance as an indication that these women do not feel completely safe, or assured, in such expressions of wildness and assertions of personal freedom. And, to give the actors in Mason's production credit, this conflict was certainly present in their performance of the scene. However, the energy of these dances was not maintained throughout the remainder of the play wherein the conflict becomes increasingly important.

The character of Father Jack, played by Alan Dobie, is the catalyst for the theatrical realization of his confrontation between 'civilized' and 'pagan' values. A missionary who has spent the last twenty-five years working in a Ugandan leper colony, Jack returns -- or is sent home -- to Ireland to die. As Michael says, the two memories "of our first wireless and of Father Jack's return -- are always linked" because both force the matriarchical household to confront the existence of pagan, or simply unrestricted, ideas and emotions. Despite Friel's experimentation with a new dramaturgical device, he cannot seem to escape the problem of linguistic translation as Jack -- and Alan Dobie was able to beautifully communicate this -- has continual difficulties in speaking his 'native' tongue after so many

years in Africa. To be fair to Friel's main concern, Jack also has difficulties in re-adjusting to the rituals of his Irish homeland after completely immersing himself in those of Uganda. He speaks nostalgically not of Ireland, but of the many ceremonies he witnessed and participated in with his Ugandan family, and the five sisters -- Maggie, in particular -- are intrigued and worried at the same time. The scene in which Jack and Maggie discuss the not-so-likely possibility of all of them returning to Uganda reveals the women's simultaneous fascination and disapproval:

MAGGIE: Could you guarantee a man for each of us?

JACK: I couldn't promise four men but I should be able to get one husband for all of you.

MAGGIE: Would we settle for that?

CHRIS: One between the four of us?

JACK: That's our system and it works very well. One of you would be his principle wife and live with him in his largest hut --

MAGGIE: That'd be you, Kate.

KATE: Stop that, Maggie!

JACK: And the other three of you he'd keep in his enclosure. It would be like living on the same small farm.

MAGGIE: Snug enough, girls, isn't it? (To JACK) And
what would be -- what sort of duties would we
have?

JACK: Cooking, sewing, helping with the crops, washing
-- the usual housekeeping tasks.

MAGGIE: Sure that's what we do anyway.

JACK: And looking after his children.

MAGGIE: That he'd have by Kate.

KATE: Maggie! ... It may be efficient and you may be in
favour of it, Jack, but I don't think it's
what Pope Pius XI considers to be the holy
sacrament of matrimony. And it might be
better for you if you paid just a bit more
attention to our Holy Father and a bit less
to the Great Goddess ... Iggie.

(II, 62-63)

This scene is an unnecessary verbal clarification to the unabashed dance sequence of Act I, as the sisters become caught up in the possibility of freedom expressed in dance or polygamy, but withdraw, largely at Kate's urging, into their familiar 'system' with only a passing realization of the similarities which exist between the pagan African culture and their own 'civilized' world.

In the process of analyzing Dancing at Lughnasa by comparing the performance to the written text, I am beginning to perceive that the text does not truly allow for that surreal production which I originally anticipated. The way in which Friel consistently reiterates in dialogue what he sought to express in dance is, perhaps, an indication that he has not completely freed himself from the limits of language; and perhaps, he is incapable of doing so. There is no doubt that Dancing at Lughnasa is a great experiment on the part of a dramatist whose greatest achievements to date have been with plays consumed with verbal play and irony, but it is equally apparent that the experiment is in an embryonic stage and has not reached the maturity of his previous works.

This realization leads me to speculate on what now may be termed as "Friel's Field Day period" as a time in which the relationship between artist and politically active theatre company allowed Brian Friel to reach one level of maturity and excellence in playwrighting, but also allowed him to break free from the structures of that relationship once he realized that his art was taking a different direction. That decade long cultural, rhetorical and artistic union will no doubt be viewed as an epoch in the career of Brian Friel and the development of the Field Day Theatre Company. How these two prominent forces in the

history of Irish theatre will pursue their now separate paths, is a text yet to be written.

AFTERWORD

The development of Brian Friel's dramatic career from the 1964 success of Philadelphia, Here I Come! to the 1993 revival of Translations in London's West End has undergone several shifts in focus, in composition, in style and in purpose. One of the most significant of these transformations is when Friel, for the first time, aligned himself and his creative energies with one particular theatre company: Field Day. The parallels between Friel and Field Day in their early collaborative efforts are not simply the result of personal acquaintance, but a concerted effort on the part of both playwright and theatre company to express compatible, mutually nourishing views. In the period from 1980 to 1990, Ireland heard invigorating new voices speaking to contemporary political, social and cultural questions and concerns through the mediums of pamphlet publications and the theatre. The relationship between Brian Friel's plays and the Field Day pamphlets was in no way static; it moved from a synchronicity of ideas, through a period of individual exploration until it finally ended with the production of Dancing at Lughnasa by the Abbey, and the sad rumour that the Field Day Theatre Company is facing imminent dissolution.

The first set of Field Day pamphlets are largely concerned with the Irish state of being, its sense of linguistic, political and psychic homelessness. Correspondingly, Brian Friel's pair of masterpieces, Translations and The Communication Cord, focus on the difficulties of a language as it passes through phases of oppression, suppression and dispossession resulting in a state of chaos largely due to the idolization and romanticization of a system of assumptions, beliefs, and words which no longer "match the landscape of fact."

The second wave of pamphlets, and their dramatic partner Making History, work together in a slightly different way. The essays are much more focused on the examination and exposition of specific examples of how the linguistic discourse of power, i.e., laws, religious doctrines and political processes, operate in such a way as to indoctrinate the public and ensure the maintenance of the 'powers that be'. Although never explicitly stated by Field Day, the act of examining the discourse of power is also situated within a larger discursive community articulated by writers such as Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur and Edward Said. Making History is an example of many of these discourses of power in action as opposed to Translations and The Communication Cord, which are explications of the how their pamphlet counter-parts viewed the Irish mind and condition.

The correlation between Field Day and other, non-Irish, theorists is what the final set of pamphlets, Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature, attempts to make explicit. Brian Friel, on the other hand, initiated a new direction in his career which was no longer compatible with the publication of the Field Day Theatre Company. What is important, however, is that for nearly ten years there existed a relationship in which the participants were all cultural activists and visionary artists, and in which the paths of intellectual, artistic and political influence led two-ways.

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APPENDIX A

The following is a list of the Field Day pamphlets used in this thesis.

Collected under the title Ireland's Field Day (London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.) 1985:

Number 1 - A New Look At The Language Question by Tom Paulin

Number 2 - An Open Letter by Seamus Heaney (poem)

Number 3 - Civilians And Barbarians by Seamus Deane

Number 4 - Heroic Styles: the tradition of an idea by Seamus
Deane

Number 5 - Myth And Motherland by Richard Kearney

Number 6 - Anglo-Irish Attitudes by Declan Kiberd

Published in 1985 as individual pamphlets:

Number 7 - The Whole Protestant Community: the making of a
historical myth by Terence Brown

Number 8 - Watchmen In Sion: the Protestant idea of liberty
by Marianne Elliott

Number 9 - Liberty And Authority In Ireland by R.L.
McCartney QC, MPA

Published individually in 1986, but under the series title
Emergency Legislation:

Number 10 - Dynasties Of Coercion by Eanna Mulloy

Number 11 - The Apparatus Of Repression by Michael Farrell

Number 12 - Law And The Constitution: Present Discontents by
Patrick J. McGrory LL.B

Collected under the title Nationalism, Colonialism and
Literature (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P) 1990:

Number 13 - Nationalism: irony and commitment by Terry
Eagleton

Number 14 - Modernism And Imperialism by Fredric Jameson

Number 15 - Yeats And Colonialism by Edward Said

