

Thesis Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide a thorough overview of Brian Friel's attitude to historical writing based on an analysis of three of his plays that directly deal with the themes of Irish history and heritage – *Translations*, *The Communication Cord*, and *Making History*. The plays are analyzed from different perspectives, applying various sources and influences shaping Friel's understanding of the concept of history as such and its fictional representation in art. Upon this careful examination, major tendencies in Friel's historical writing are revealed offering a concise characterization of not only the plays in question but also of the Irish historical consciousness in general.

The thesis is divided into four major chapters – one providing a theoretical background which would be later applied to the other three parts that deal directly with Friel's works. The theoretical part is further divided into a brief summary of the philosophy of history and a short introduction of the Field Day Theatrical Company. The former segment is based on Hayden White's *Metahistory* for he treats historical writing as a narrative rather than a scientific objective report. This part follows the development of the concept of history, truth, and art, and is mainly focused on Friedrich Nietzsche as an ideological precursor of modernism and postmodernism. Field Day is characterized in reference to their goal of re-presenting/rereading Irish past in order to change the comprehension of the present situation and hopefully resolving the Northern Troubles.

These concepts would appear in all three chapters discussing individual plays, together with Friel's explicitly acknowledged sources not included in the first part. *Translations* is explored as Friel's first attempt at a play set deep in Irish history with the focus on a very sensitive issue from the past – the decay of the ancient Gaelic civilization. Friel's proposed

causes of the fall are analyzed together with historical inaccuracies and voiced criticisms, Field Day ideas and objectives are applied, and the myth-making potential of the play is discussed.

The Communication Cord is viewed as a supplementary work to *Translations* and as such it is also approached in its analysis. The notion of Irish history and the modern approach to it is explored, especially in comparison to *Translations*. Finally an interpretation combining both works is deduced, providing a complete picture of Friel's judgment on possible attitudes to the Irish past.

The final work included in the thesis, *Making History*, presents a complete picture of Friel's understanding of history itself, "making history," the role of a historian, external influences on the work's content such as the needs of the present situation, poststructuralist view of historiographies, and other issues. These topics are examined in a complex structure involving two biographies, where Friel uses Lombard as a mirror for his own creative process.