UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE - FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Brian Friel's Conception of Forming History and Its Implications

Brian Friel: Pojetí utváření historie

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Anglistika a amerikanistika

Praha, September 2011

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I owe thanks to my supervisor doc. Ondřej Pilný, PhD for his most valuable advice, patience and kind support during my work on the thesis. I would also like to thank M. Kuthanova and M. Kotalikova for their moral support and for upholding my work ethic.

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.

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat téma historie v tvorbě současného irského dramatika Briana Friela a poskytnout tak celistvý přehled o jeho postoji jak k minulosti samotné, tak k psaní prózy zasazené do určitého reálného prostředí v minulosti. Pro tento účel jsem zvolila tři hry – Translations, The Communication Cord a Making History - které budou v jednotlivých kapitolách rozebrány z hlediska různých vlivů, které přímo nebo nepřímo ovlivnily Frielovo chápání problematiky historie, její dopad na současnost, a také jak by k ní měl umělec přistupovat ve své tvorbě.

První kapitola obsahuje teoretický základ této práce. Hlavní část vychází z práce Haydena Whitea Metahistory, která se zabývá pojetím historiografií v čase a nahlíží na ně spíše jako na příběhy než vědecké studie. Dále je tu nastíněn stručný přehled vývoje filozofie historie a jejího chápání od devatenáctého století až do počátku dvacátého století. Teorie Friedricha Nietzscheho hrají v této části velkou roli, jelikož jeho postava je všeobecně vnímána jako předchůdce modernismu a postmodernismu, a tudíž jeho názory, byť možná nepřímo, také ovlivnily Frielovu tvorbu. Druhá část teoretické kapitoly je věnována divadelní společnosti Field Day jejímž členem byl i Friel, a která také značně ovlivnila Frielův postoj k irské historii.

Další kapitoly se již týkají výše uvedených her a jejich detailní analýze. V Translations se Friel zabýval velmi citlivým historickým tématem – pádem staré gaelské civilizace v devatenáctém století. V této hře Friel dává vinu Anglii, která je znázorněna jako tyranská mocnost, která nemilosrdně zničila idealizovanou venkovskou irskou společnost.
V návaznosti na toto centrální téma se kapitola zabývá historickými nepřesnostmi a jejich důvody, kritikou hry, spojitostí mezi Field Day a tímto konkrétním vylíčením irské komunity, a dalšími aspekty.The Communication Cord je rozebrán z hlediska jeho doplňkové hry Translations. Irská idealizovaná historie a moderní přístup k vlastnímu kulturnímu dědictví a

historii představují hlavní témata hry, a jsou důkladně rozebrána zejména v porovnání s Translations. Poslední rozebírané dílo, Making History, již svým názvem napovídá, že bude hrát hlavní roli v této práci. Shrnuje totiž Frielovy teorie o historii jako takové, vytváření historických prací, úloze historika, a také pojednává o externích vlivech, které rovněž určují obsah historiografií.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Everything, including our politics and our literature, has to be rewritten – i.e. re-read. That will enable new writing, new politics, unblemished by Irishness, but securely Irish."[1] Such is the main objective of the Field Day Theatre Company formulated by Seamus Deane in the "General Introduction" to *The Field Day Anthology to Irish Writing*, and such is also the key to an understanding of Brian Friel's attitude to history and its recreation in his fictional works. In my BA thesis I am going to explore three of Brian Friel's "history plays" dealing with the Irish past, namely *Translations*, *The Communication Cord*, and *Making History*. In order to provide an overview of his approach to "making history" in literature, the plays are examined in accordance to Friel's main influences – the immediate impact of his artistic kinship to Field Day, his explicitly stated sources, and the postmodern view of history asserting itself in the second half of the twentieth century.

Firstly, I am going to provide a brief summary of the philosophy of history, focusing on the nineteenth-century thinkers whose arguments initiated a debate about the degree of objectivity in historical writing. These would include the theories of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and also Friedrich Nietzsche and his notions of history, truth, objectivity, and art. Nietzsche's thoughts occupy the centre of my theoretical part as he is widely considered the forerunner of postmodernism, mainly because of his constant questioning of the concept of truth and by emphasizing its relativity, and as such his philosophy at least indirectly affected Friel's work. Elrud Ibsch, a Dutch literary critic focusing on modern and postmodern tendencies in literature, acknowledged Nietzsche's theoretical contribution to the latter movement in her essay "The Refutations of Truth Claims":

[1] Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles," *Ireland's Field Day* (London: Field Day Theatre Company Limited, 1985) 58.

> Postmodernist writers and philosophers who wish to explain their epistemological position and wish to reflect on 'fact', 'interpretation', 'fiction', 'representation,' frequently use Nietzsche's writings as their pre-texts. This happens with such an intensity that one could claim Nietzsche as the main source of inspiration of postmodernism.[2]

This section of my thesis follows Hayden White's *Metahistory* as he treats historiographies as verbal structures consisting of a narrative, and his approach to individual philosophers is based upon this assumption. The introductory part is concluded with an outline of Field Day's concept of art, its function, and its theoretical origins.

The analysis of the plays is divided into three main chapters that are arranged chronologically according to the publication of the plays being discussed. The purpose of Friel's historical plays is an attempt to revise Irish history, and thus to achieve a redefinition of Irish national identity, which would eventually assist in resolving the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Consequently, the plays are supposed to identify traditional myths permeating through the Irish past, dissolve them and propose an alternative to the present situation and show new possibilities for the future. However, demythologizing might paradoxically lead to the creation of new myths, which is often pointed out by Friel's and Field Day's critics.

Translations is Friel's first historical play and faces the danger of creating a myth out of itself, despite the fact that Friel constantly undermines possible mythologizing passages and applies a great deal of sarcasm to avoid it. Nevertheless, the play has been often criticized for its factual inaccuracies and accused of promoting nationalism rather than refusing it. Due to its serious criticisms, Friel produced its counterpart, *The Communication Cord*, where the historical theme is explored in the form of a farce. The play is set in a restored thatched cottage in the contemporary era, which provides Friel with both present and historical focus

[2] Elrud Ibsch, "The Refutations of Truth Claims," *International Postmodernism*, eds. Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997) 265.

and enables him to treat the same issues that appeared in the previous play with humour. *Making History* is the last play discussed but also the most important from the perspective of historical writing. Similarly as *The Communication Cord*, it destroys the pieties and elegiac tone characterizing *Translations*, and instead, presents a thorough examination of the purpose of history, its fictional reproduction, the role of a historian, and the position of myths in difficult periods.

In the plays in question, Friel points out different aspects of historical understanding and history itself. *Translations* reconstructs the crucial moments of the destruction of the old Gaelic society, and describes the attitudes of the locals to this profound change using a combination of grief and sarcasm. *The Communication Cord* criticizes the hypocritical stand of contemporary Irish people to their Gaelic heritage, and denounces both a pretended glorification and an explicit repugnance as dangerous approaches to the Irish past. *Making History* investigates the process of myth-making and introduces some of the poststructuralist theories mostly questioning the existence of one specific interpretation of the past and the social expectations of a historian. Nevertheless, despite the stated differences, all plays propose a similar solution to the conflicts in the present Ireland, which is, according to Friel, the inevitable acceptance of a hybrid Anglo-Irish society and the resulting abandonment of the oppressive traditional nationalism.

1. HISTORICAL WRITING IN THEORY

1.1. Brief Development of the Philosophy of History

Until the early 19th century there had been no doubt of the necessary role of historical writing being perceived as an accurate and completely objective account of what truly happened in the past. No modifications of known fact were allowed and historians were considered merely as transcribers of certain past events rather than representatives of creative abstract literature. Hayden White describes this period's historiography as "pre-Newtonian and pre-Hegelian, more specifically Aristotelian, […] its science was 'empirical' and 'inductive,' its philosophy was 'realistic,' and its art was 'mimetic,' or imitative, rather than expressive and projective."[3] One of the first philosophers who outspokenly disagreed with this deep-rooted concept was Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel whose ideas formed a basis for latter thinkers also concerned with the question of history and truth, including Friedrich Nietzsche or Karl Marx. Hegel points out that it is unavoidable that historical writing produces conflicting records of the past, which is a thought closely associated with Nietzsche's future idea of multiplicity of personal understandings of truth, history, reality and fact in general. In addition, Hegel believed that a genuine historical account must not be based only on factual reality, but instead, it should also contain artistic non-realistic features as most other literary genres.

Friedrich Nietzsche extended but also criticized Hegel's work. He became a great critic of the academic style of historiography; he focused on its semantic aspect and desired it to be recognized as an artistic discipline. The main purpose of his work, according to Hayden White, was to "destroy the belief in a historical past from which men might learn any single,

[3] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1973) 268.

substantial truth."[4] The reason for such a radical attitude was his conviction that the general understanding of truth representing an unquestionable singular and only feature of reality that is based merely on sincere facts is a lie which all people blindly share. He criticized both this common view of truth but also its placement on a pedestal and serving as a lost and ultimately desired ideal in human lives. As truth was disregarded as a supreme entity, Nietzsche suggested a new perspective from which it could be perceived correctly. From this point of view truth is a very individual substance that is thoroughly created by one's personal impressions and beliefs. According to White, for Nietzsche there is no general truth, instead, there are millions of different versions of truth depending on a specific person, and therefore, similarly, there are as many views of past events as there are individual understandings of them.[5]

A very similar concept of history, historical writing and its inevitable perception is expressed by George Steiner in *After Babel*: "Any thorough reading of a text from history is a manifold act of interpretation."[6] This relativity of reality also brings a new perspective of a person's view of his or her own self, past, and life. Provided that history, in fact, is a product of human mind and therefore changeable, a simple recalling one's memories or researching a historical work should not be concluded only by examining events that supposedly happened. Instead, as there is no "substantial truth" that one might learn from such a research, history should serve a further aim in which an individual's past personal experience would help in recognizing his or her present self and provide assistance with future decisions and actions.

[4] White 332.
[5] White 332.
[6] George Steiner, *After Babel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977) 17.

This notion of history directly applies to Nietzsche's attitude to art. His famous statement "we have art in order not to die of the truth"[7] implies that art functions as a reaction against a world lacking any stable and reliable verity. White explains that for Nietzsche art and science represent "a product of a human need to flee from reality into a dream, to impose order on experience in the absence of any substantive meaning and context." However, people do not remain at this state of short pretence as "they take the dream for the formless reality and try to freeze life in the form provided by the dream."[8] This aspect of art seems to symbolize a life-sustaining dynamic as it enables one's conscience move repeatedly between constantly changing reality and this frozen artificial illusion that has not yet hardened into an impotent force. Nietzsche's positive response to this phenomenon and his wish to classify historiography as art suggests his belief that a person's conscious interaction with his own past should have a similar enriching effect as that provided by art. According to Deleuze, Nietzsche also perceives art to be the ultimate representation of falsehood which openly praises lies and deception. In other words, "it is art that invents the lies that raise falsehood to this highest affirmative power that turns the will to deceive into something which is affirmed in the power of falsehood."[9] In this manner the supposed truth contained in works of art is merely an appearance and artists who search for truth in their works are in fact finding an alternative existence to true reality.

According to White, Nietzsche shared Grillparzer's opinion that

> history is nothing but the manner in which the spirit of man apprehends facts that are obscure to him, links things together whose connection only heavens know, replaces the unintelligible by something intelligible, puts his own ideas of causation into the external world, which can perhaps

[7] Quoted in White 339.
[8] White 332.
[9] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London and New York: Continuum, 2006) 96.

> be explained only from within; and assumes the existence of chance where thousands of small causes may be really at work.[10]

Simultaneously, the method of constructing a historical work does not have to be based on factual accuracy. In fact, as Nietzsche proclaimed, "there could be a kind of historical writing that has no drop of common fact in it and yet could claim to be called in the highest degree objective."[11] Apart from the historians' duty to interpret the past from their individual perspectives and not necessarily follow the publicly acknowledged facts, they should also bear in mind the firm relation between the past and the present. As Nietzsche puts it, "you can explain the past only by what is most powerful in the present."[12] In order to make this statement work, the present and history in general must be understood as a continual act, providing that the present and future are determined by our interpretation of the past; and in case our view of history changes, the present and the future change accordingly as well. Consequently, a personal view of the past cannot depend on a solid unalterable period in history susceptible to only one specific way of retelling. In fact, history is subjected to constant re-examinations and various interpretations conditioned by the particular needs of the present and hopes for the future.

1.2. Field Day and Irish History

Nietzsche's theories concerning history, truth and art could be easily applied to the artistic aims of playwrights whose work was staged by the Field Day Theatre Company. It was established by Brian Friel together with Stephen Rea in 1980 and shortly after its foundation

[10] Quoted in White 352.
[11] Quoted in White 353.
[12] Quoted in White 353.

Friel claimed in an interview with Ciaran Carty that "[they]'re the most reluctant producers" as they created Field Day only to force the Northern Ireland Arts Council to give them money for the production of *Translations*. "They only fund existing establishments so we had to become an establishment,"[13] Friel explained. Despite this original lack of ambition, Field Day soon acknowledged a much more fundamental purpose. The company was soon joined by Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, David Hammond, and Seamus Deane who defined the group's main objectives, beliefs and attitudes that profoundly shaped their work. Similarly as Nietzsche and as various postmodern philosophers such as Jean Lyotard, they strongly believed in the multiplicity of historical perspectives and views of reality considered to be truthful. In addition, they also perceived exploring history as not an end in itself, but rather as means for re-establishing one's present identity and even providing new possibilities for the future.

Field Day artistic endeavours and their proposed social purpose are inspired by a postmodernist view of truth in modern history expressed by Jean-François Lyotard in his critical study *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. He states that the contemporary era is characterized by "an incredulity towards metanarratives,"[14] in other words, by a distrust toward any traditionally established general truths according to which every individual has to adjust their personal identities, beliefs and attitudes. In "General Introduction" to *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing,* Deane applied Lyotard's specific terminology while explaining the company's point of departure: "There *is* a story here, a meta-narrative, which is, we believe, hospitable to all the micro-narratives that, from time to

[13] Brian Friel, "In Interview with Ciaran Carty," *Brian Friel in Conversation*, ed. Paul Delaney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000) 81.
[14] Jean-François Lyotard, *Post-Modern Condition : A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) xxiv.

time, have achieved prominence as the official version of the true history, political and literary, of the island's past and present."[15]

Lyotard more or less substituted Nietzsche's general non-existing truth for his notion of metanarratives. In Pilný's words, Lyotard believed that human world is "a complex network of often conflicting micro-narratives" and that "some of these narratives have been backed up by the authority of larger stories, metanarratives, that provide coherent general explanations and definitions of both history and the current situation."[16] These widespread metanarratives are viewed as one of the ground sources of conflicts in human lives as they constantly clash with other metanarratives and individual micro-narratives. In Lyotard's view, a possible solution would be a complete repudiation of collective narratives and their eventual surrender to countless personal perspectives.

Lyotard's theories significantly influenced Field Day's attitude to the contemporary Irish situation. They believed that these metanarratives, as produced by the followers of Irish nationalism or unionism, are the major cause of the Troubles and that by their re-examination and eventual reassessment presented in art the problems should be dissolved. Through this gradual reorganization of Irish national identity Brian Friel and his co-workers hoped in a subsequent foundation of a new tolerant living environment in which individual conflicting views would coexist in peace and harmony. Deane explains the origins of the present troubled situation in Ireland:

> In a country like Ireland, where nationalism had to be politically opposed to the prevailing power-systems, there was a serious attempt to create a counter-culture and to define it as authentic to the

[15] Seamus Deane, "General Introduction," *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volumes I-II* (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991) xix.
[16] Ondřej Pilný, *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006) 106-107.

> nation. In doing so, it used historical and archaeological scholarship in a polemic fashion. For this, it was rebuked. It distorted the facts of history and reduced literature to propaganda.[17]

This particular idea had a central position in all Field Day writings and although the company did not produce any specific declaration of their purpose, it was implied in the Preface to *Ireland's Field Day*, a collection of Field Day pamphlets on Anglo-Irish literature, history and politics: "[all the directors] believed that Field Day could and should contribute to the solution of the present crisis by producing analyses of the established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation."[18] This attitude was demonstrated in *Field Day Anthology* by juxtaposing literary artefacts by authors born in Ireland across the period of 1500 years, but also in plays exploring a specific time in Irish history.

Apart from the basic understanding of metanarratives and micronarratives, it is also important to mention Field Day's concept of the fifth province, representing the ultimate aim of the company's endeavours. All six members of Field Day were born and raised in Northern Ireland; and therefore, all their life they were in close contact with the conflict between Irish Protestants and Catholics, North and South. Most of them, including Friel, grew up in a nationalist family surrounded by unionist living environment, which forced them to share a strong sense of homelessness and a lack of regional identity. As a consequence, a need for unity and personal freedom lies at the centre of all their work. Mark Patrick Hederman, the co-editor of the cultural journal *The Crane Bag* which was sympathetic to Field Day, described the term "fifth province" as "a no man's land, a neutral ground, where things can detach themselves from all partisan and prejudiced connection" or "a secret centre [where] all

[17] Seamus Deane, "General Introduction," *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volumes I-II* xxii.
[18] Quoted in Shaun Richards, "Field Day's Fifth Province," *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland*, ed. Eamon Hughes (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991) 140.

oppositions were resolved."[19] In reference to the Field Day enterprise, this particular conception of the fifth province creates an idea of a united Ireland based on mutual understanding among its citizens who willingly abandoned traditional myths and prejudices and, instead, embraced a modern world based on a plurality of perspectives.

This liberating plurality of micronarratives should emerge from art, being the main catalyst of change and addressing the whole Irish nation. In Tom Paulin's words, "there are all sorts of things that need change there, but we feel it'll only be changed when the imaginative force of Northern culture is reattached to Southern culture."[20] *Translations* and other Field Day plays were often accused of being too political and a nationalist propaganda, but when Fintan O'Toole asked Friel whether Field Day depended on political nationalism and on the achievement of a united Ireland, Friel answered: "I think it should lead to a cultural state, not a political state. And I think out of that cultural state, a possibility of a political state follows."[21]

[19] Mark Patrick Hederman, "Poetry and the Fifth Province," *The Crane Bag*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1985: 110.
[20] Tom Paulin, "Brian Friel and Field Day," Radio Telefís Éireann, Transcribed interview, *Brian Friel in Conversation*, ed. Paul Delaney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000) 188.
[21] Fintan O'Toole, "The Man from God Knows Where," *Brian Friel in Conversation*, ed. Paul Delaney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000) 175.

2. *TRANSLATIONS*

Brian Friel had been recognized as a prominent Irish playwright since his early plays in the 1960s; however, it was the production of *Translations* in 1980 that caused his today's acclaim among both general readership and critics. Although for Friel, "the play has to do with language and language only,"[22] most responses from the audience and critics were focused on the subject of Irish history and politics. Ulf Dantanus pointed out that "the play's great strength is that it approaches politics through history, anthropology and linguistics. It establishes various links within a racial, cultural, and linguistic consciousness in order to explain events of history."[23] *Translations* is Friel's first play set in the past and concerned with the identity and memory of the whole Irish nation. In accordance with Field Day philosophy, the play stages some of the popular myths from Irish history, and proposes a solution to the Anglo-Irish conflict applicable also to the troubles in Northern Ireland taking place in Friel's own period.

2.1. *After Babel* and Field Day: The Necessity of Translating the Past

Friel's attitude to a creative history-making displayed in *Translations* and other works was highly influenced by George Steiner and his theoretical work *After Babel* which also served as one of the most important inspirations for the play. Steiner's work is centred on the thought that history is "a speech act, a selective use of the past tense;" and therefore, an understanding of a historical text requires a conscious translating or, if stated differently, an interpretation.

[22] Quoted in McGrath 181-182.
[23] Ulf Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) 199.

This idea logically results in the conclusion that "there is no total history"[24] for in every historiography its author must omit some information, choosing only what he or she considers important, and thus applying their subjective opinions to their seemingly objective texts. As to one's perception of historical accounts, Steiner suggests that "we remember culturally, as we do individually, by conventions of emphasis, foreshortening, and omission."[25] Therefore, no historical text is an entirely objective account of past events, and similarly, no reading of a historical text can be considered impartial as each individual uses his or her personal means of interpretation, depending on various matters dominating the moment of reading. In addition, Steiner proclaims that "language is in perpetual change"[26] and "no semantic form is timeless."[27] Considering the previously stated idea that history is a form of language, its meaning must change evenly with the language change. Consequently, in order to understand past events which are firmly linked with our present, it is necessary to "translate," or "interpret," them.

This notion is very similar to Field Day's concept of rereading, or reinterpreting the mythologized segments of Irish history with the purpose of a better comprehension and a final dissolution of contemporary problems. While discussing the value of *Translations*, Ulf Dantanus explains:

> any contemporary condition or situation has in itself a history of political events; it does not exist in a vacuum. An understanding of the history may help in defining the nature of today's troubled circumstances. Furthermore, in approaching a problem with the help of a historical dimension, it may be possible to circumvent petrified attitudes and fixed ideas. In that sense, *Translations* can be seen as a great education.[28]

[24] Steiner 30.
[25] Steiner 30.
[26] Steiner 18.
[27] Steiner 24.
[28] Dantanus 194.

As the play was supposed to provide a better comprehension of the problematic situation in contemporary Ireland, Friel had to go back in time to the actual origins of the Anglo-Irish conflict. As a result, the troubled present of the twentieth century is included in the text of the play in the form of various bad omens displayed in the plot. For instance, the implied rebellion of the Donnelly twins represents the very beginning of violent actions in the late 1960s, and the sinister sweet smell of potato blight together with a growing instability and confusion in the community foreshadow the restless future of the country in general. Before Friel commenced writing his play, he spent a considerable amount of time researching the 1830s period and reading available materials and primary sources describing the factual social and political situation in Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century. In *A Sporadic Diary* he admitted to be constantly reading and returning to specific texts, particularly Colonel Colby's *A Memoir of the City and North Western Liberties of Londonderry, A Paper Landscape* by John Andrews, *The Hedge-Schools of Ireland* by Dowling, Steiner's *After Babel*, and also the letters of John O'Donovan, an Irish scholar in charge of a proper and precise standardization of the place names.[29] These materials provided Friel with a necessary insight into the actual condition of the country during these transitory decades, and it served as a basic background for his fictional story, aiming at the already mentioned reassessment of historical myths and thus dissolving the present problematic metanarratives of modern Irish people.

On the other hand, if people fail in rereading, or translating history and, instead, accept past linguistic and semantic forms which are no longer valid, they would necessarily cease moving forward and get caught in the dead past. This theory is discussed in *Translations* at

[29] Brian Friel, "Extracts from a Sporadic Diary: *Translations*," ed. Christopher Murray, *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews, 1964-1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 74.

the end of Act III, in a scene where the fall of the Gaelic civilization is quite certain. Hugh, in a quite dishevelled condition, has a one-sided conversation with Owen. He expresses an opinion that "it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. [...] We must never seize renewing these images; because once we do, we fossilise."[30] Hugh's "fossilisation" could be compared to the consequence of a refusal to translate history according to one's present condition, an implication from Steiner's *After Babel*. Moreover, Hugh openly states that "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." (88) In this passage he realizes that an acceptance of a hybrid Anglo-Irish society is inevitable in order to move forward in one's life, and to avoid both personal and cultural stagnation by clinging to the lost Gaelic past. This message, encouraging the abandonment of traditional nationalism and an embracement of a new culture, is typical for the Field Day enterprise, and as such it lies at the centre of Friel's next play set in the past, *Making History*.

2.2. (De)mythologization of Irish history

Field Day's artistic aim of the dissolution of myths, however, proves to be rather intricate as it inevitably produces a danger of forming new myths replacing the old ones. As Pilný explains, "these [new] myths, while not necessarily epitomizing a consistent metanarrative yet, could potentially provide the basis for one. Friel seems to be quite aware of this danger, as he often attempts to carefully balance what could be viewed as mythologizations with suitable qualifications."[31] A good example could be Friel's depiction of the local hedge school in

[30] Brian Friel, *Translations* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000) 88.
[31] Pilný 114.

Baile Beag. It is not entirely based on his imagination, as in rare cases these local schools in rural Ireland did not teach exclusively mathematics, reading, writing, history and geography, but sometimes also Latin and even Greek, although such education was provided only for male students preparing for priesthood.[32] Pupils were instructed in Gaelic, and thus hedge schools were in charge of preserving the Irish language and culture until they were replaced by National Schools where every subject was taught in English. However, although the portrayal of Baile Beag hedge school is partly based on true accounts and partly fictionalized, it is still more or less perceived as a realistic perspective of an institution. Nevertheless, if this mimetic interpretation be ignored, Friel's hedge school would be understood mainly according to their role as the destroyed preserver of the native language, and as such also as an allegory of noble Gaelic civilization in decay enforced by the English government.

A similar, although more questionable, mythologizing interpretation could be applied to the depiction of the Ordnance Survey and the suggested brutality of Captain Lancey. In contrast to Friel's distorted portrayal of hedge schools, he took significant liberties in the creation of his version of the Ordnance Survey which could be even described as a "hostile caricature."[33] Joep Leerssen explored the connections between Ireland in the nineteenth century with its literary representations, and published his findings in his critical work *Remembrance and Imagination* in which he also included the descriptions of the problematic events depicted in Friel's *Translations*. As to the Ordnance Survey, he states that it developed from a "straightforward map-making and gazetteering project into a huge synopsis of the Irish physical and cultural landscape, where each historical landmark was to be described in its physical appearance and antiquarian importance in major archeological descriptions accompanying each map."[34] He puts a great emphasis on the project's peaceful nature,

[32] Connolly 152.
[33] Connolly 152.
[34] Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996) 101-102.

claiming that the British soldiers undertook only some technical procedures of the process and that the crucial intellectual work was performed by scholars "with a good knowledge of, and sympathetic interest in, local antiquities and native lore."[35] He also stresses the profitability of the survey for the Irish people and suggests that, in fact, "the Ordnance Survey was a major contribution to the cultural nationalism of later decades, in that it equated the very land itself with a Gaelic past and a Gaelic-speaking peasantry, thus canonizing the Gaelic tradition as […] the cultural ground under the feet of modern Ireland."[36] However, Friel's version of the procedure significantly differs from this report. Leerssen himself sees a great danger in its portrayal in *Translations* where, he says, it is described as "a blunt colonial instrument in the hands of the imperial forces, inflicting cultural self-estrangement on native Ireland by means of billeting English soldiers in rural villages, and imposing uncomprehending and ugly anglicizations of native placenames under threat of eviction."[37] Therefore, if the Ordnance Survey of *Translations* is not to be understood as a realistic representation of the process but rather as an allegory of the fate of the Irish culture and language, a new myth might arise.

Friel's treatment and presentation of the Irish language also proves a great potential of creating a myth out of itself:

> A rich language. A rich literature. You'll find, sir, that certain cultures expend on their vocabularies and syntax acquisitive energies and ostentations entirely lacking in their material lives. […] Yes, it is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception – a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet with potatoes; our only method of replying to … inevitabilities. (50-51)

[35] Leerssen 102.
[36] Leerssen 102.
[37] Leerssen 102.

In these passages Hugh is conversing with Yolland and describes his mother tongue. Considering the mythologizing aspect of the play, this segment could be perceived as evidence that the play supports nationalist belief in the superiority of Irish to the English language. However, as noted by Dantanus, this interpretation should be discarded by the ironical fact that Hugh is conversing with Yolland in English.[38] Moreover, at this particular moment Hugh is not a completely objective spokesperson for the Gaelic culture, for he is disturbed by various matters including "the return of his anglicized son, the English presence of English in the village itself, his nursing of a severe hangover from the previous night and, last but not least, the fact that he is about to purposely abandon his thirty years of teaching through Irish and accept a position in an English-language National school."[39]

The tragic fall of the ancient Gaelic civilization triggered by the evil English force could be perceived as another potentially newly created myth. Its intensity is strengthened by various motifs, such as the nobleness and innocence of some of the Gaelic characters, ignorance and cruelty of Captain Lancey, forced Anglicization of all Irish place names and, of course, the abolition of local hedge schools and their replacement with English National schools. The play is concluded by the much-debated image of Hugh reciting a passage from *The Aeneid* about the surrender of Carthage to the powerful Roman Empire. The devastation of Carthage is a metaphor for the fall of the ancient Gaelic culture, leaving the Roman Empire to be interpreted as a metaphor for the English. This interpretation might cause a formation of another myth, another proof of the myth-making potential of the play. However, as Pilný has pointed out, "Friel attempted once again to complicate the possibility of unambiguous reading of a powerful image, eliminating any potential pomposity."[40] In this particular case Hugh is

[38] Dantanus 194.
[39] Pilný 213.
[40] Alan Peacock, "Translating the Past: Friel, Greece and Rome," ed. Alan Peacock, *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993) 118.

once more strongly intoxicated and cannot properly remember the words of the epic although normally he knows it "backwards."(91) Nevertheless, despite the character's proposed incompetence to represent a member of the dying Gaelic Ireland commenting poignantly on its tragic fate, the inner power of the final image overcomes his unsuitability for this role and presents Hugh as a serious prophet of the last days of his civilization. The gravity of this scene brings about a strong sense of nostalgia, causing one of the main objectives that critics expressed about the play and thus also affecting the nature of Friel's next play, *The Communication Cord*.

2.3. Historical Inaccuracies and Criticisms

Although *Translations* is a play set in a clearly defined historical era, it still belongs to the category of fiction, which necessarily implies some creative distortions of historical facts known about the periods Friel attempts to describe. As he famously stated, "drama is first a fiction, with the authority of fiction. You don't go to *Macbeth* for history."[41] Friel also openly expressed his attitude on historical writing, trying to justify his own method:

> Writing an historical play may bestow certain advantages but it also imposes particular responsibilities. The apparent advantages are the established historical facts or at least the received historical ideas in which the work is rooted and which give it its apparent familiarity and accessibility. The concomitant responsibility is to acknowledge those facts or ideas but not to defer to them.[42]

[41] Brian Friel, "Making a Reply to the Criticisms of Translations by J.H. Andrews," ed. Christopher Murray, *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews, 1964-1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 119.
[42] Brian Friel, "Making a Reply to the Criticisms of Translations by J.H. Andrews" 119.

As Field Day was composed of artists with similar attitudes toward art, Seamus Deane approved of Friel's technique of writing historical prose and attempted to define and defend it in his articles, namely "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea." Deane explores the terms "literature" and "history" and tries to accommodate their stands in works of art dealing with Irish heritage. Specifically, he claims that it is possible to find a literary work of a purely fictional or purely historical character, but also that these two approaches might merge into one another as easily as they might exist separately."[43]

He also discusses the notion of tradition, proposing "it is an invention, a narrative which ingeniously finds a way of connecting a selected series of historical figures or themes in such a way that the pattern or plot revealed to us becomes a conditioning factor in our reading of literary works."[44] From this perspective, tradition could be perceived as a kind of metanarrative as both these concepts determine public attitudes and impressions of the world and also of its artistic representations. In the case of *Translations*, the general atmosphere in Irish society was predominantly influenced by the Troubles, so it is quite understandable that most people perceived the play as profoundly political. Nevertheless, in an interview with Paddy Agnew in 1980 Friel denounced any sadness for the loss of Celtic Ireland that could possibly influence the resulting tone of *Translations*:

> I have no nostalgia for that time. I think one should look back on the process of history with some kind of coolness. The only merit in looking back is to understand how you are and where you are at this moment. Several people commented that the opening scenes of the play were a portrait of some sort of idyllic, Forest of Arden life. But this is a complete illusion, since you have on stage the

[43] Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles," *Ireland's Field Day* 45.
[44] Deane, "Heroic Styles" 9.

representatives of a certain community – one is dumb, one is lame and one is alcoholic, a physical maiming which is a public representation of their spiritual deprivation. [45]

In reference to the previously stated aims of Field Day and Friel's explicit denial of any proposed nostalgia in his play, *Translations* cannot be interpreted as a mere elegy for the dying Gaelic culture under the disastrous oppression of the British, and neither as a conscious support of the nationalist party. However, some critics accused Friel of the latter objective, criticizing the play's "comforting nationalist idea that the loss of the language and culture was all the fault of the English" and "the naive romanticism of presenting Gaelic culture as a lost Eden."[46] Lynda Henderson, one of the most vigorous critics of the play, accused Friel of misinterpreting both Irish and English objectives. She says: "Its seductiveness adroitly disguises its dishonesty. It is dishonest to both cultures it represents."[47] Another literary critic, the revisionist Edna Longley, accuses Friel of producing a sectarian piece of narrative. Although throughout the whole play there is no reference to Catholics or Protestants, she expressed an opinion that "Friel translates contemporary Northern Catholic feeling into historical terms."[48] A different kind of criticism was voiced by John Andrews, the author of *A Paper Landscape*, one of the most important sources for the production of the play. Interestingly enough, despite representing historians and not literary critics, Andrews was capable to acknowledge that the primary value of *Translations* is not validated by its historical accuracy, and although he mentioned significant anachronisms contained in the play, he refused to reject it altogether: "Every anachronism is thrown into relief by corresponding non-anachronism," which resulted in "an extremely subtle blend of historical

[45] Paddy Agnew, "'Talking to Ourselves': Brian Friel Talks to Paddy Agnew," *Brian Friel in Conversation*, ed. Paul Delaney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000) 148.
[46] Richards 144.
[47] Quoted in Christopher Murray, "Friel's 'Emblems of Adversity' and the Yeatsian Example," ed. Alan Peacock, *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993) 72.
[48] Quoted in Murray 72.

truth and – some other kind of truth."[49] Wolfgang Zach also attempted to defend the play's strategies and expressed an opinion that "*Translations* deliberately reflects twentieth-century fantasy rather than nineteenth-century reality. It offers 'nostalgic and elegiac images from an imagined past,' made into 'correlatives of present Irish issues.'"[50] From this point of view, the historical factual inaccuracies of the play serve as a reminder of the strong idealization of Irish history persisting in the twentieth century – the major theme of *The Communication Cord*.

Friel's most direct reaction to the critical voices was a production of an article entitled "Making a Reply to the Criticisms of Translations by J. H. Andrews" where he describes the entire process of writing the play, including his continuous alternations of ideas, all sources and materials he studied beforehand, and an acknowledgement of some historical inaccuracies in the play. He admits, "I feel very lucky that I have been corrected only for using a few misplaced bayonets and for suggesting that British soldiers might have been employed to evict peasants. I felt that I had merited more reprimands than that."[51] Clearly, this statement is a garbled interpretation of Andrews's criticism which certainly did not point merely at singular items being misplaced in the play or at the English soldiers' ill-treatment of the Gaelic peasants. His voiced objections were firmly linked with the play's suggestive representation of Ireland as a victim of the imperial English force – an image providing the base for most criticisms of the play. However, according to Connolly, Friel's irritation with his critics' constant comments on the historical improbabilities of the play is only one of the implications of his statement. In fact, despite Friel's open acknowledgement of his preferred fictionalization of Irish history rather than its preservation while working on a play, he did not free himself and his work from the reality of the past as much as he desired. In Connolly's words, this fact resulted in the paradoxical situation in which "a playwright, consciously

[49] Quoted in Murray 73.
[50] Quoted in Connolly 153.
[51] Brian Friel, "Making a Reply to the Criticisms of Translations by J.H. Andrews" 116.

asserting the autonomy of his fiction, has nevertheless remained the prisoner of a particular image of the Irish past, an inherited folk history, in ways that actually work against his artistic purposes."[52]

[52] Connolly 158.

3. *THE COMMUNICATION CORD*

3.1. Comparison to *Translations*

The Communication Cord was written as a reaction to the preceding play, *Translations*, which was, in Friel's view, taken too seriously. Field Day member Julie Barber said that "while Brian was pleased with the success of *Translations* he felt the critics treated it with much too reverence."[53] Friel's reply to these voices was a production of a play focused on issues that also appear in *Translations*, particularly the theme of history and heritage, myths comprised in Irish past, and the attitude of modern people toward these matters. However, while *Translations* is written in a serious tone, *The Communication Cord* presents the same issues from a satirical perspective and thus undermines their original piety. Therefore, as the latter play's farcical tone is dependent on the gravity of its predecessor, it is important to perceive these two plays simultaneously as complementary works.

In *Translations* Friel discusses history by establishing the play's setting in Gaelic Ireland in the 1830s. Although the pre-colonial period is involved in *The Communication Cord* as well, Friel did not set the play in the past but in contemporary Ireland. The whole action takes place in a restored traditional cottage, which provides the play with a constant sense of history despite the modernity of characters and time. As Dantanus noted, "the restored cottage allows Friel a focus that is both contemporary and historical."[54] While commenting on the relation between the two plays, Friel explained: "*Translations* was about how this country found a certain shape. This farce is another look at the shape this country is in now."[55] Apparently, according to Friel, the most suitable form for describing the shape of Ireland in the late

[53] Ray Comisky, "Rehearsing Friel's New Farce," *Brian Friel in Conversation*, ed. Paul Delaney (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000) 163.
[54] Dantanus 203.
[55] Comisky 165.

twentieth century was a farce, a parody on issues once taken seriously: "I think [satire] is a perfectly valid way of looking at people in Ireland today, that our 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."[56] As proposed in Friel's remark, the main target of his farce are the present-day middle-class Irish citizens and particularly their attitude toward Irish past and heritage.

3.2. Nostalgia vs. Hostility Toward Irish Heritage

The plot centres on the interactions among several characters and their reactions to the restored thatched cottage. Some of them belong to an older generation who, at first sight, seem to highly appreciate Irish past symbolized by the cottage. Other characters mostly belong to a younger generation who, in contrast to their elders, openly despise everything the house stands for. A good example is Jack, the son of the owner of the cottage, who does not hide his true feelings toward the house and admits being able to drive his motorbike "up that bloody lane, right up to the door."[57] His attitude greatly contrasts with his father's both physical and mental approach to the cottage. As Jack explains,

> when parents or sisters come for a weekend they have to leave the car down [...] and walk up. It's hell in winter – water, muck, slush, bloody cow-manure. [...] But father believes that the penance of that introduction is somehow part of the soul and authenticity of the place. (13)

However, Jack's father is not the main target of Friel's farce although he belongs to the class being satirized. The centre of the play is focused on Senator Donovan, an older self-confident and influential intellectual, who embodies several issues of contemporary Ireland

[56] Comisky 165.
[57] Brian Friel, *The Communication Cord* (Loughcrew: The Gallery Press, 1989) 13.

that Friel attempts to point out in his play. Firstly, he represents a typical urban middle-class attitude to Gaelic heritage by his superficial admiration of anything seemingly authentic. Secondly, Senator Donovan's beliefs and admiration for the past are affected by myths integrated into the perception of Irish history, and thus enhancing his initial emotional response to the restored cottage. Lastly, on a higher level, his stand is greatly influenced by traditional nationalism that idealizes Gaelic Ireland as a form of pure and innocent period in Irish history and uses this image in the political fight against unionism.

Both themes of traditional nationalism and mythologization of Irish past also appear in *Translations* and in both plays they are closely related. Their connection results from the fact that the nationalist view of the Irish past is based upon certain myths which are continually developing and getting accepted by the general public as true reality. In the case of *Translations,* this theme concerns Friel's portrayal of the Ordnance Survey and Baile Beag hedge school. As discussed in the previous chapter, the local rural hedge school is described accurately to some extent; and although Classical languages were not commonly taught in ordinary hedge schools, Friel's school in Baile Beag is not entirely based on his imagination. In *The Communication Cord,* however, the restored traditional thatched cottage is artificial notwithstanding the great accumulation of old Gaelic artefacts crammed up inside. A thorough description of the interior of the restored cottage is presented at the beginning of Act I. Although it includes every possible detail which could support its attempted accuracy, the section is concluded with a suggestion that "one quickly senses something false about the place. It is too pat, too 'authentic'. It is in fact a restored house, a reproduction, an artefact of today making obeisance to a home of yesterday." (11)

Jack possesses no reverence toward the myths embodied by the cottage and enjoys ridiculing people who do seem to admire them. To quote Dantanus's observation, "[Jack] has

developed an impressive vocabulary in order to be able to extol on demand the virtues of the simple hearth." (15) Upon Tim's description of the cottage as merely "nice," Jack, seemingly hurt, retorts: "'Nice!' The ancestral seat of the McNeilis dynasty, restored and refurbished with love and dedication, absolutely authentic in every last detail, and all you can say is 'nice'." He then continues in his sardonic description of the place: "(*In Parody*) This is where we all come from. This is our first cathedral. This shaped our souls. This determined our first pieties. Yes. Have reverence for this place. (*Laughs heartily*)" (15) His friend Tim also rejects any emotional piety toward Irish heritage that the cottage might represent to him, and for the purpose of presenting the place to Senator Donovan he merely repeats Jack's cynical description, only this time it is heartily accepted by its recipient. Later in the play Tim expresses his true emotions toward the house: "I feel no affinity at all with it [...]. In fact I think I hate it and all it represents." (43)

The character of Nora Dan might be considered a parallel to the restored cottage, sharing its pretentions and seeming authenticity. The stage directions, as in the case of the cottage, uncover her deceit by stating that she is "a country woman who likes to present herself as a peasant." (22) McGrath sees her as an anachronism from a Synge play as she talks in the rhythm of his peasants, and her frequent use of old Irish colloquialisms such as "yous," "gulder" or "stirk" only confirms her artificiality.[58] Jack uses the same mocking vocabulary for both the house and his neighbour, describing her as "the quintessential noble peasant - obsessed with curiosity and greed and envy," (21) and after a brief conversation with her he reveals his true opinion, depicting her as "a nosey, hypocritical, treacherous old bitch." (24) McGrath concludes with a suggestion that she, similarly as the cottage,

[58] McGrath 200.

> represents an er-satz, tourist-board nationalism that often passes for the real thing in Ireland. Both she and the cottage represent the Irish Ireland nostalgia that dominated nationalism from the days of the late nineteenth-century revival through the first several decades of independence.[59]

This kind of nostalgia is strongly sensed in *Translations*, particularly after Hugh's final recitation of Virgil's Aeneid that strengthens the often discussed elegiac tone of the whole play. In *The Communication Cord* nostalgia for Gaelic Ireland is also present but in a rather diminished and subverted form. It is inflamed by the cottage and its proposed "authenticity," and its main executor is Senator Donovan. McGrath points out that "the [place] has its psychological counterpart in the pietistic attitudes of the traditional nationalism the cottage represents."[60] In other words, the appearance of the place is firmly linked with its complete adoration performed by characters from the older generation. For Senator Donovan, who was born in a similar place, the cottage stands for "the touchstone, [...] the apotheosis, [...] the absolute verity, […] the true centre." (32) Initially he believes the myth provided by the "too pat" appearance of the cottage, but at the end his enthusiasm causes him to accidentally chain himself to a cow-post while re-enacting a scene from his childhood. As other characters attempt to release him, his illusions are destroyed and his admiration for the place disappears. In McGrath's words, Senator Donovan "chains himself literally to his memory"[61] and suddenly finds himself being mocked by his most cherished Irish past. This paradoxical situation, according to McGrath, clearly implies that "traditional nationalism is an anachronistic reproduction that chains the Irish unproductively to their past."[62]

Senator Donovan's final disillusionment contributes to the gradual dissolution of the myth of an idealized Gaelic Ireland. The issue of demythologization of Irish history is placed at the

[59] McGrath 200.
[60] McGrath 200.
[61] McGrath 199.
[62] McGrath 199.

centre of Field Day philosophy; therefore, in a specific form this theme appears both in *Translations* and *The Communication Cord*. *Translations*, however, inclines more toward mythologization rather than myth-dissolution, although in the play there are numerous components undermining the hypothetical newly created myths. On the other hand, in *The Communication Cord* there is only one myth, embodied by the restored traditional cottage, and throughout the play it is being demolished, abused, and finally entirely ruined by all characters involved. According to Maxwell,

> the past – heroic, its landscape seen by instinct as the abode of gods and men – can no longer perpetuate its myth-making powers. Its present heirs, in this view of them, can see it only in coarsened perceptions, whether pseudo-antiquarianism or commercialising indifference.[63]

The play's characters desire the cottage for various reasons; each of them attempts to exploit it in some way. Jack openly uses it as a love-nest; Senator Donovan and Nora Dan desire to make the cottage their property; and Tim is trying to gain his tenure and please his girlfriend Susan by presenting the place as an artefact of old times, faking an admiration for Irish heritage the cottage should represent. As this hypocritical approach to Irish history and heritage intensifies, the cottage increasingly becomes more and more disordered and hostile to its users. It forces its presence on the characters by a constant opening of doors, covering Tim with smoke from the fireplace, extinguishing the lamp light, and chaining Senator Donovan and later also Jack to the cattle post. The final response of the cottage to the characters' selfish interests is the collapse of the roof, burying the younger generation under its ruins. Friel's ending suggests that the old generation's blind reverence and the younger characters' antipathy are equally dangerous attitudes to Irish heritage. Those who try to ignore their heritage are nevertheless incapable to avoid its inevitable effects in the present. On the other

[63] D.E.S. Maxwell, *Modern Irish Drama: 1891-1980* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 211-212.

hand, the devotees of the first approach are necessarily chained to the past, as literally portrayed by Senator Donovan's situation, and are unable to develop in modern society. For Kearney, Friel in this sense "satirizes the contemporary attitude of certain sentimental nationalists who seek to revive the old culture, which is now irretrievably lost."[64]

3.3. Modern Attitudes to Irish history

However, *The Communication Cord* does not qualify merely as a farcical re-enactment of the sentimental themes in *Translations*. In McGrath's words,

> it also serves to position the critical nationalism espoused in *Translations* in relation to two of its alternatives – the traditional unrenovated nationalism represented by the thatched-cottage nostalgia of Senator Donovan on one hand, and on the other hand the antipathy toward nationalism represented by Tim and Jack and their generation.[65]

From this perspective it is effective to view the plays "in tandem" as Friel desired, as only by their combination the problematic nature of Irish past and heritage is wholly explored. *Translations*, through Hugh's last speech to Owen, promotes a necessity of a constant reassessment of the past, leading to a mental liberation from the circumstances of the present situation and allowing both personal and national growth and progress. This approach to one's heritage and national past is considered ideal and is generally promoted in Field Day plays. On the other hand, attitudes that should be avoided are presented in *The Communication Cord* in the form of satire, which should demonstrate their insufficiency and impracticality in modern society. One of them is identical with Hugh's "fossilization," the state of being

[64] Richard Kearney, "Friel and the Politics of Language Play," *Massachusetts Review: A Quarterly of Literature, the Arts and Public Affairs,* 1987, 28 no. 3: 510-515.
[65] McGrath 201.

unproductively stuck to the past, and is represented by Senator Donovan and his chaining to the cow-post. The other alternative approach is symbolized by Tim and his generation's aversion to the Gaelic Ireland, an attitude equally unsatisfactory.

In addition, McGrath suggests that the two plays, viewed together, "also recognize the postcolonial necessity for moving away from the traditional nationalism toward a new sense of nation that acknowledges its *inter*national hybridity."[66] He bases his argument on Bhabha's critical study of post-colonialism titled *The Location of Culture* in which Bhabha discusses the notion of international culture as:

> based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the "inter" – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the "people."[67] (Bhabha's emphasis)

From this point of view, nationalism and its idealized images of pre-colonial times are needed for a spiritual liberation of oppressed colonized people. However, upon achieving this aim, nationalism should cease to dominate the society, otherwise it might transform into a new oppressor of those who do not identify themselves with the nationalist ideas. McGrath suggests that such a post-colonial society should "seek not only equality for itself among other nations, but equality of everyone within the new nation" and that, in reference to Bhabha, "this is more likely to occur through a recognition of hybridity of all cultures than various attempts – such as nationalism, separatism, [...] – to recognize or acknowledge the putative purity of individual cultures."[68] Applied to Friel's plays, nationalism in the form of

[66] McGrath 201.
[67] Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 38-39.
[68] McGrath 202.

the idealized Gaelic past presented in *Translations* was useful in difficult times in Irish history when people struggled under the oppression of the English colonizers. In postcolonial contemporary Ireland, however, such nationalist images are no longer desirable as they cause an excessive attachment to the past and prevent social progress. The damage created by such misplaced nationalism is illustrated in *The Communication Cord.* The resolution of the present Irish troubled situation should be the rejection of traditional nationalism and the consequent acceptance of a hybrid Anglo-Irish society.

4. *MAKING HISTORY*

In Connolly's words, *Making History* "is not just a play set in the past, but a play about history itself."[69] It summarizes Friel's attitude to history and historical writing, themes also appearing in his preceding plays *Translations* and *The Communication Cord*. Apart from *Translations*, it is Friel's only play with a setting deep in Irish history; other works are usually set in the present. In addition, both works deal with a crucial transitional period in Irish history. The earlier play focuses on the time when the English language started to dominate the Gaelic community through official changes in the society, and the latter play is concerned with the late sixteenth-century final subjugation of Gaelic Ireland by the English. Both plays explore the theme of mythologization of Irish past, but whereas in *Translations* it has an inferior position to other topics such as language, in *Making History* it is the central subject of the play.

4.1. Imagination: The Source of One's Identity

Friel's approach to history applied in *Making History* is based on the assumption that reality is relative and that it is created out of one's subjective perceptions of the world. McGrath shares this theory and suggests that, in fact, "we are products of stories we tell about ourselves."[70] From this point of view, an individual understanding of one's personal identity is based on verbal constructs that we create in order to describe our lives. McGrath explains

[69] Connolly 149.
[70] McGrath 13.

this thought with reference to Heidegger: "As Heidegger points out, we do not speak language, it speaks us. Identity, then, is structured as a fiction, as a story or a number of stories, about who we are."[71] Most importantly, in relation to the play, these narratives do not necessarily have to belong only to individuals; instead, there can be a story depicting an identity of a whole collective of individuals, such as communities, nations or civilizations.

This hypothesis is directly connected to Lyotard's notion of metanarratives, and in *Making History* it appears in the form of mythologization of the Irish past. The theme of myth-making is positioned at the heart of the play and is explored from different angles in a complicated structure. First of all, Friel does not explore it exclusively within a singular narrative level. Apart from the actual plotline involving the biographer Archbishop Lombard, there is an additional plane belonging to Brian Friel, the biographer. Furthermore, there is a third version of O'Neill's life story presented by the author Sean O'Faolain in his work *The Great O'Neill* which also served as Friel's primary source of information in the production of the play. Overall, there are three separate narratives with different purposes and ideals, all focusing on the depiction of Hugh O'Neill's life and times and embodying specific attitudes to historical writing.

4.2. The Greatness of Hugh O'Neill

The play's protagonist is the popular figure of a national hero, which provides Friel with an ideal subject for his intended re-examination of traditionally positive biographies generally accepted by the public. His particular choice was Hugh O'Neill, the last chieftain of Gaelic

[71] McGrath 13.

times, who fled Ireland in 1607 and participated in the Flight of the Earls. His defeat at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 represents the end of Irish resistance and started a new era of English rule over Ireland. O'Neill's centrality to this key transitional period in Irish history predetermines him to be subjected to mythologization, transforming his life into a myth favourable to Irish nationalism. In the process only suitable deeds and personal features are retained, and in the case of O'Neill there were many characteristics being discarded as undesirable, particularly due to his connections to the English.

Friel's main source of O'Neill's life and times was Sean O'Faolain's *The Great O'Neill*, a revisionist biography standing in direct opposition to the popular myth of O'Neill from the 1930s, when, how McGrath observes, he was predominantly viewed as a martyr who heroically united Gaelic Ireland and attempted to defeat the English forces.[72] McGrath then compares *The Great O'Neill* to the heroic myth by saying that

> O'Faolain saw the dangers and limitations of the ethos of the new Free State and set about to recast the image of O'Neill as Tyrone, a modern Renaissance man with an expansive European outlook that contrasted sharply with the myopic tribalism of his fellow Gaelic chieftains.[73]

In O'Faolain's biography O'Neill was born into Gaelic culture, but when he was eight years old he moved to England where he was being educated in Queen Elizabeth's court. He spent there eight years of his life and during the whole time he was exposed to English genteel society and met some of the most important figures of the court. Upon his return to Ireland in 1567 he was a faithful servant of the queen, a position he retained for fifteen years. For his devoted loyalty, including the assistance in suppressing the Desmond rebellion in Munster, he was recognized as Earl of Tyrone. In 1591 he married Mabel Bagenal, and in 1595 he attacked the fort near Blackwater, which brought his allegiance to the English court and the

[72] McGrath 213.
[73] McGrath 214.

queen to an end. He underwent a traditional Gaelic crowning ritual upon which he was titled the O'Neill, and was the leader of the triumphant Battle of the Yellow Ford, which spread resistant nationalist feelings around the whole country. O'Neill's power was growing steadily, but was suddenly stopped by the crucial Battle of Kinsale in 1601 after which he fled with Rorry O'Donnell from Ireland. It is important to note that throughout his whole life and rise in the Irish resistance movement he regularly promised fidelity to the queen.[74]

O'Faolain strongly disregarded O'Neill's mythologized biographies, stating that "the traditional picture of the patriot O'Neill, locked into the Gaelic world, eager to assault England, is not supported by the facts and must be acknowledged as complete fantasy."[75] Furthermore, he made a suggestion to other playwrights how this topic might be pursued in the future, an encouragement which later lead to Friel's *Making History*:

> If anyone wished to make a study of the manner in which historical myths are created he might well take O'Neill as an example [...] Indeed, in those last years in Rome the myth was already beginning to emerge, and a talented dramatist might write an informative, entertaining, ironical play on the theme of the living man helplessly watching his translation into a star in the face of all the facts that had reduced him to poverty, exile, and defeat.[76]

4.3. Lombard: The Poststructuralist and Nationalist Biographer

The internal level of the play concerns the fictional character Archbishop Lombard who is the creator of the "historical myth" being analyzed. He appears in Dungannon announcing his intention to write Hugh's biography and requesting an interview providing him with

[74] Quoted in McGrath 211.
[75] Sean O'Faolain, *The Great O'Neill* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1989) vi.
[76] O'Faolain vi.

important events and dates from O'Neill's life. Upon acquiring these, the plotline moves from the biography itself to the Battle of Kinsale and to its aftermath, following O'Neill to his exile in Rome. The nature of Lombard's work is discussed early at the beginning of the play before the work is produced and then at the end. In general, the biography demonstrates the traditional nationalist treatment of crucial moments in Irish history, and thus creating what O'Faolain would call "a complete fantasy" out of Irish past. Despite this fact, Lombard's attitude to history is highly innovative and he expresses opinions corresponding with intellectual movements developing in the twentieth century. Although his version might appear to stand in direct opposition to Friel's, these two works are, in fact, based on the same beliefs and their authors share a very similar approach to the function of history.

The major common feature determining the content of both works is the unquestioned precedence of satisfying the needs of the present and the consequent inevitable derogation of factual accuracy in their works. Early in the play there is a conversation between O'Neill and Lombard in which they discuss the degree of truthfulness of Lombard's work. O'Neill is concerned that his biography would not follow the facts of his life, and desires Lombard's assurance that he will "tell the truth." The following passage manifests Lombard's view on the proper character of a historiography and its desired extent of accuracy. To O'Neill's question he replies: "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'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."[77]

Friel's approach to language as the primary tool in the construction of historical works was greatly influenced by Steiner's thoughts in *After Babel*, a work that previously affected his writing of *Translations.* Lombard's statement about the possible overestimation of factual

[77] Brian Friel, *Making History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) 8-9.

accuracy in historical writings is a final deduction from a fundamental distrust in language as a vehicle of truth. Steiner expresses an idea that, in fact, the primary function of language is not merely a transition of truthful information but also its distortion and concealment: "Obviously, we speak to communicate. But also to conceal, to leave unspoken. The ability of human beings to misinform modulates through every wavelength from outright lying to silence."[78] In regard to this basic feature of language, its misconceptions of reality and history might appear, in a way, natural to human beings, and thus Lombard's statement might not be that "shocking" as he suggests.

The ability of language to lie is particularly helpful in historical moments presented in Friel's plays, featuring an oppressed nation at the brink of extinction. As Steiner says, "every generation uses language to build its own resonant past. At moments of historical stress, mythologies of the 'true past' follow on each other at such speed that entirely different perspectives coexist and blur at the edges."[79] In other words, historiographies composed in periods of a great tumult in a particular society are more or less subjected to deformation of facts, being written in a partly concealing and "lying" language. Such interpretation corresponds with Friel's and Steiner's view of history as "a creative act of lying,"[80] and assigns a specific role to historians, which is quite different from their traditional position among other writers. Lombard defends alternations of reality in his biography by claiming that "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." He then explains his method of structuring the work:

[78] Steiner 47-48.
[79] Steiner 31.
[80] McGrath 224.

> And that's what this will be: the events of your life categorized and classified and then structured as you would structure any story. No, no, I'm not talking about falsifying, about lying [...] I'm simply talking about making a pattern. That's what I'm doing with all this stuff – 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. And that narrative will be as true and as objective as I can make it. (66)

This speech parallels Maxwell's summary of the whole play in the conclusion of his article *Figures in a Peepshow: Friel and Modern Irish Drama*. As he puts it, "*Making History* – in a way the story Lombard will not tell – is about the strategems of transcribing – selecting? shaping? perverting? – historical facts in order to establish a version of reality whose 'truth' is verified by its acceptance."[81] From this perspective, historians literally make history, which might lead to the conclusion that historical works belong to the category of fiction. Lombard even stresses this almost fictional character of historical writing by stating: "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?" (8)

As mentioned previously, both Lombard and Friel are willing to sacrifice historical inaccuracy if needed, so that their writings serve the current situation in the society. In Lombard's case, the Gaelic Ireland was defeated in a crucial battle against the English and their most prominent lords together with their leader, Hugh O'Neill, fled the country. This is the first time when the whole country is about to be controlled by the English, and consequently, the purely Gaelic culture would transform under its influence. By 1600 an overwhelming majority of the population supported nationalists and put their faith in O'Neill; O'Faolain writes in his biography that "the only part of Ireland then in [the colonial]

[81] Desmon Maxwell, "'Figures in a Peep Show': Friel and the Irish Dramatic Tradition," ed. Alan Peacock, *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993) 64.

government control was a tiny tract twenty miles by eight miles between Dublin and Drogheda."[82] Lombard talks to O'Neill about the desperation of the years after the defeat at Kinsale and assures him that for this particular reason his biography is crucially important. In their final conversation, he thoroughly explains why Ireland needs his mythologized version of O'Neill's life rather than an accurate account of events:

> Now is the time for a hero. Now is the time for a heroic literature. So I am offering Gaelic Ireland two things. I'm offering them this narrative that has the elements of myth. And I'm offering them Hugh O'Neill as a national hero. A hero and a story of a hero. [...] If I were a holy man, not some kind of a half priest, half schemer, I suppose I would offer them God and prayer and suffering. But there are times when a hero can be as important to a people as God. (67)

Deane, in his essay *Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea*, explains the presence of heroic figures in Irish literature, in particular their intended affect on the Irish audience, as a result of "an understandable form of anxiety in one who sought to find in a single figure the capacity to give reality to a spiritual leadership for which [...] the conditions had already disappeared."[83] And such is the case of Archbishop Lombard's biography.

This particular perception of history and its presentation to the public are also expressed in Nietzsche's theories. According to White, Nietzsche believed that history should be "the servant of human needs rather than their master for life *does need* the service of history,"[84] and that such a "creative, life-serving historiography [should] depend on the life needs of men as the historian conceives them."[85] Consequently, there should be countless perspectives on

[82] O'Faolain 223-224.
[83] Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles" 48.
[84] White 349.
[85] White 356.

history, each belonging to a different person. Lombard shares this view of the past and attempts to explain it to O'Neill:

> I don't believe that a period of history – a given space of time – my life – your life – that it contains within it one 'true' interpretation just waiting to be mined. But I do believe that it may contain within it several possible narratives: the life of Hugh O'Neill can be told in many different ways. And those ways are determined by the needs and the demands and the expectations of different people and different eras. (15-16)

Throughout the play Lombard unwittingly expresses some of the most important thoughts of the twentieth-century philosophical movements. Kevin Barry, in his essay entitled "*Translations* and *A Paper Landscape*," defends Friel's dramatic treatment of history, especially in *Making History*. He claims that Lombard is a typical poststructuralist historian, and he contrasts his attitude to O'Neill's biography with traditional positivist notion of history. He states that the latter approach prides its "claim to objectivity [and by doing so] it appears to stand in contrast to fiction," and that history in this case "projects itself not as a plurality of written histories, but as a chapter of History itself, of one total human narrative."[86] On the other hand, poststructuralist history acknowledges its status as writing and also its intertextuality. This history "is always already written: first, because the past of society is never an unstructured or unimagined memory; second, because history, more than any other discourse [...] depends upon what has been written, upon the surviving documents which are the past's versions of itself."[87] The ultimate effect, as he says, is that "history becomes a set of histories, conflicting versions of the past each of which pretends to authorise one differentiation of events."[88] McGrath rewords Barry's view and explains that postructuralist history "is not the recording of facts but the construction of convincing readings, translations,

[86] Quoted in McGrath 226.
[87] Quoted in McGrath 118.
[88] Quoted in McGrath 118.

and fictions that organize and interpret information of various kinds; and not all readings, translations, and fictions are consistent with one another,"[89] which is an almost identical statement to Lombard's opinion.

As suggested, poststructuralist history resembles fiction much more than positivist history. In Barry's view, both history and literature satisfy the needs of the current society as they both

> enable the entry of what has been lost into a society's understanding of its present [...]. As forms of discourse [they] both emphasize memory, loss, composition of character and event, human action, plots that go awry [... and] both history and fiction imagine and structure a past which neither could make known without sharing the images and structures of narrative.[90]

Barry's overall message strongly echoes Steiner's own conviction: "By far the greatest mass of the past as we experience it is a verbal construct. History is a speech-act, a selective use of the past tense. [...] We have no total history, no history which could be defined as objectively real because it contained the literal sum of past life."[91] Although Lombard's biography is generally considered to belong to the traditional nationalist category and hence representing an undesirable backward-looking approach to life; his character proves to possess much more progressive and forward-looking thinking than any other figure in the play. Almost all Lombard's comments on history and on O'Neill's biography paraphrase Barry's definition of poststructuralist history and its main features. He questions truth as the ideal criterion of a historiography, defines history as "a kind of story-telling," and his own effort as "imposing a pattern on events that are mostly casual and haphazard and shaping them into a narrative that is logical and interesting." He claims that there are many possible narratives concerning

[89] McGrath 226.
[90] McGrath 226.
[91] Steiner 30-31.

O'Neill's life and by choosing a heroic version he simply "fulfils the needs and satisfies the expectations" of the society. (15-16)

4.4. Friel: The Revisionist yet Creative Biographer

Brian Friel, the biographer, also senses particular needs in his own society and attempts to fulfil them; however, his intentions and view of the contemporary era is quite different to the situation of his fictional historian. Lombard's nationalist work aims at a spiritual revival and a renewal of lost confidence of Irish people in the difficult times after the Battle of Kinsale and the subsequent Flight of the Earls. On the other hand, Friel's biography is produced in order to assist in the resolution of the Troubles by suppressing the power of the same nationalism so needed in Lombard's times. From this point of view Lombard's and Friel's versions of O'Neill's life and times differ merely in the desired effect on their audience which necessarily determined the degree of mythologizing or demythologizing of Irish history.

In Friel's case, the dissolution of nationalist myths about the Irish past lies at the centre of his artistic endeavours linked with Field Day. As the re-examination of Irish history should solve the present hardships of Irish society, Friel follows O'Faolain's revisionist work and his own biography also attempts to recreate a more truthful picture of Hugh O'Neill which would be deprived of popular myths. However, *Making History* was always supposed to be a fictional work, and with this fact in mind Friel did not copy every detail of O'Faolain's version, but instead, decided to distort some of the information he gained from *The Great O'Neill*. He explained the presence of the play's factual inconsistencies in its programme note:

> *Making History* is a dramatic fiction that uses some actual and some imagined events in the life of Hugh O'Neill to make a story. I have tried to be objective and faithful [...] to the empirical method. But when there was a tension between historical 'fact' and the imperative of fiction, I'm glad to say I kept faith with the narrative. [...] Part of me regrets taking these occasional liberties. But then I remind myself that history and fiction are related and comparable forms of discourse and that an historical text is a kind of literary artefact. And then I am grateful that these regrets were never inhibiting.[92]

Nevertheless, the main difference between Friel's and O'Faolain's biographies does not lie in particular fictionalized details from O'Neill's life, such as a wrong date of Mabel's death, but rather in his general characterizations of protagonists. According to McGrath, "[O'Faolain's] O'Neill is great, not because he was the last of the Gaelic heroes, but because he was a great Renaissance intellect, the first modern European intellect Ireland had produced, thanks largely to his exposure to English culture and society."[93] On the other hand, Friel's O'Neill is missing this sense of worldliness at the expense of a love story which, in Kiberd's words, should represent the "impossible but desirable fusion of Gaelic and English tradition."[94] McGrath does not share Kiberd's view and proclaims that Friel's love story does not work as a structural device and does not fulfil its pronounced purpose: "Unlike the love scene in *Translations*, however, the love story in *Making History* does not make us feel or understand much and it introduces a number of improbabilities into the narrative."[95] One of them concerns a lack of tension between O'Neill's divided loyalties, which should be mostly portrayed in his marriage to an English woman. In Friel's version Mabel becomes, McGrath says, "very improbably, her husband's political confidante and co-strategist [...] and is more

[92] Brian Friel, "Programme Note for *Making History*," ed. Christopher Murray, *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews, 1964-1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 135.
[93] McGrath 211-212.
[94] McGrath 220.
[95] McGrath 220.

of a political tactician than [O'Neill]."[96] Mabel's abilities are demonstrated after the Battle of Kinsale when she encourages her husband to quickly recover from the devastating defeat, explains to him the political situation of England in relation to Spain and the probable actions of the Queen, and advises him to offer his submission to the colonial government so that he can be reunited with his nation again. (37-38) McGrath criticizes Mabel in reference to O'Faolain's *The Great O'Neill* where she eventually leaves her husband as she cannot endure the strangeness of Gaelic culture any longer. In conclusion, he proclaims Friel's Mabel as unconvincing and improbable compared to O'Faolain's version.[97] O'Faolain's perspective on the mutual disappointment between O'Neill and his wife is demonstrated in this passage:

> This poor child cannot have brought any great experience of life from that close-fisted, prudish, petit-bourgeois house at the Newry. [...] this inexperienced English girl may finally have seemed to his humiliated eyes nothing but a silly little weakling when he realized that his passion had betrayed his pride into a misalliance, and he saw the contemptuous looks of his own full-blooded women and heard the sniffs of neighbouring amazons like O'Donnell's Ineen Duv [...] On her side his wife must have been utterly broken when she saw at last, quite clearly, to what a rude life she had surrendered herself, with its lapses into cloaked assassination and plain murder, so that when she refused to countenance his mistresses any longer, acknowledged to herself that she hated him, fled from him to her brother and laid public complaint against him before the Council, the humiliation was bitter and mutual.[98]

O'Neill's inner ambivalence is displayed in *Making History* using three main strategies. The first method is the most obvious one and lies in O'Neill's explicit thoughts on his problematic situation. He admits:

[96] McGrath 221.
[97] McGrath 222.
[98] O'Faolain 121.

> I have spent my life attempting to do two things. I have attempted to hold together a harassed and a confused people by trying to keep them in touch with the life they knew before they were overrun. [...] And I have done that by acknowledging and indeed honouring the rituals and ceremonies and belief these people have practised since before history, long before the God of Christianity was ever heard of. And at the same time I have tried to open these people to the strange new ways of Europe, to ease them into the new assessment of things, to nudge them toward changing evaluations and beliefs. Two pursuits that can scarcely be followed simultaneously. Two tasks that are almost self-cancelling." (40)

Secondly, in Mabel's presence O'Neill seems to resort to insolence immediately followed by an apology. For example, he calls his wife an Upstart, a term used for English colonists, but instantly expresses his regret. (39) McGrath interprets O'Neill's reaction as a mixture of "his instinctive disdain and his intellectual respect for the invading colonists."[99] The third device consists of parallel conversations during which O'Neill is unable to focus on a particular theme and, instead, performs a monologue displaying his own thoughts. Most notably, this technique is applied to the last passage of the play which is formed by regular alternations of O'Neill's final submission to Queen Elizabeth and of Lombard's nationalist narrative. Thus, Friel concludes his play with a touching scene that embodies the central conflict of the narrative.

All in all, *Making History* is a play encompassing two versions of Hugh O'Neill's life, none of which is factually accurate or pretending to be so. In fact, as O'Toole points out, "*Making History* is not a play about O'Neill. It is a play about the impossibility of writing a play about O'Neill."[100] Friel's deliberate distortions of historical facts are intended to recreate a traditional picture of Irish past, which should lead to a revaluation of the present situation

[99] McGrath 222.
[100] Fintan O'Toole, "Marking Time: *Making History* to *Dancing at Lughnasa*," ed. Alan Peacock, *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993) 206.

and open new possibilities for the future. Specifically, through his plays Friel asks the Irish audience to abandon the nationalist ideal of a pure Gaelic Ireland, accept the already existent hybridity of Anglo-Irish nation, and then watch the current troubles in Northern Ireland resolve themselves by the change in people's minds. The utmost evidence of this peaceful purpose of the play is its nomination for Ewart-Biggs Memorial Prize that serves to acknowledge "any writer, historian, novelist, playwright or journalist whose work is considered to most strongly promote and encourage peace and understanding in Ireland and Britain or closer co-operation between the partners of the European Community."[101]

[101] McGrath 233.

5. CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters I have attempted to follow the development of Brian Friel's notion of history and its fictional representations throughout his literary career. For my purpose I have selected three of his "history plays" and analyzed them chronologically according to their year of publication – *Translations*, *The Communication Cord*, and *Making History*. The first and the last mentioned works are set in a specific period in Irish history, whereas *The Communication Cord* takes place in contemporary Ireland. Friel has always been interested in one's personal past and memories, which is apparent in his other plays dealing with individual characters, focusing on their inner lives and their partly truthful and partly fictionalized recollections. However, the three plays chosen for this thesis occupy much larger scope than singular remembrances of individual figures; instead, Friel attempted to explore the memory of the whole Irish nation and test the degree of truth and myths in their historical awareness.

Although Friel's focus in the discussed plays slightly differs, they all share a common theme which enables them to transmit a certain message to the Irish audience. This common purpose of Friel's plays concerned with the (Irish) past is determined by their staging for the Field Day Theatre Company whose main goal was a redefinition of the modern Irish identity. This aim was supposed to be achieved by a re-examination of myths embedded in the perception of Irish history, and thus providing an alternative past from which a fresh understanding of the present situation would result, all leading to a possibility of a peaceful future. To apply Field Day terminology and Friel's own words, their artistic endeavours aim at a creation of the Fifth Province which should be followed by a formation of a cultural state from which a political state might eventually emerge. The Field Day focus on a reformed

culture and art suggests that their works do not serve nationalist propaganda as some of their revisionist critics pronounce.

Such criticism has been also used for Friel's plays examined in my thesis as they imaginatively recreate certain motifs and themes from the Irish past. Friel's purpose of the deformation of historical facts lies in the before mentioned dissolution of nationalist myths encompassing the Irish historical knowledge. However, if demythologization be achieved, there is a great danger in the play's capability to create new myths replacing the old ones. This liability is well illustrated in *Translations*, although Friel applies various undermining methods, mainly sarcasm and ironical situations, in order to prevent such reading of his text. The concerned motifs with the prospect of turning into myths are the portrayal of the hedge school, the fall of the ancient Gaelic culture, and the notion of the Irish language.

Due to the play's myth-making potential and its mostly serious tone, Friel has been accused of creating a mere elegy for the lost Gaelic society. As a response to this criticism, his next play countered all possible sympathies contained in *Translations* and recreated the identical themes in the form of a farce. In this play, as I have demonstrated, Friel focused on the attitude to one's heritage and national history in contemporary Ireland and scrutinized both a hypocritical admiration of the older generation and the open disgust of the younger generation. When interpreted in connection to the preceding play, it is evident that Friel described three possible approaches to one's past – *Translations* supports the desirable critical nationalism, whereas *The Communication Cord* provides a view of its two alternatives, one being traditional nationalism, and the other an extreme antipathy to nationalism in general.

The third play, *Making History*, is entirely concerned with the theme of the Irish past and its representation, and as such it provides most hints of Friel's attitude to history itself. It offers a thorough overview of the main objectives of the poststructuralist view of history, all

voiced by the play's historian Archbishop Lombard. Nevertheless, the most important feature of this play is its structure consisting of two separate layers, each presenting a writer composing a biography of a nationalist Irish hero Hugh O'Neill. In fact, the character of Lombard and his opinions serve as a mirror to Friel's own artistic beliefs. The aim of both of their works is the satisfaction of the present life needs of their audience, and the reason why the nature of their biographies is so different lies in the contrasting social situation of their times. In Lombard's case, Irish people suffer from colonial oppression and require a nationalist account of a national hero that could raise their self-confidence again, whereas Friel senses that traditional nationalism is, in fact, the true oppressor of his times, and therefore, he provides a revisionist perspective of the identical person.

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