



Colonial And Hybrid Desire: A Postcolonial Reading of Translations by Brian Friel

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ABSTRACT

European countries imposed their dominance on other communities and cultures, and the aftereffects of colonialism need to be discussed in the context of the postmodern era. To that end, this presentation will examine Brian Friel's *Translations* from a postcolonial perspective. This research proposes a postcolonial reading of *Translations*, focusing on the story's characters and central ideas. Lieutenant Yolland, Maire, Owen, and Captain Lancey illustrate Western imperialism's devastating nature. The study will focus solely on the play's use of postcolonial ideas, as defined by Homi K. Bhabha and Gramsci's appropriation, hybridity, imitation, hegemony, and exoticism.

Keywords:

Postcolonialism, appropriation, hybridity, mimicry, hegemony, exoticism.

Introduction

The British colonizer's harsh subjection and oppression took a significant toll on the colonized. According to Loomba (2007), colonialism turned 84.6% of the world's landmass into colonies or former colonies (04). Culture, society, history, and economy are all crucial cogs in the postcolonial wheel. Individuals who are colonized are those who are powerless to resist their oppressors, the Western powers.

One of Ireland's best playwrights is Brian Friel. An integral part of his poetic vision is a theatrical language for conveying complex thoughts. The scope of his poetic sensibility is expansive. While his country struggled to gain independence from the British, Friel was born in Northern Ireland. Friel was born in Derry, Ireland, to a family of teachers. There was a "generation of northern nationalists" of which Friel was a part. He was profoundly impacted by Ireland's social and political climate and by England's dominion over the country. As a

result, he wrote extensively about these topics and his Irish heritage. Friel's controversial play *Translations* was inspired by these events.

In 1980, a film titled *Translations* was made. In 1980, Brian Friel and Stephen Rea founded Field Day Theatre Company, with *Translations* as their flagship product. Kevin Whelan claims that on 5 November 1979, during "the height of the Northern War," Friel penned *Translations*. In light of the post-partition Catholic community in Northern Ireland, the play might be read as "both a parable about, and a diagnosis of, the problems of that community" (Whelan, 4). The play is set in an Irish-speaking community in the late afternoon of August 1833, in a school called Baile Beag, whose boundary is marked by a row of shrubs. This was in the years leading up to the Great Famine of the 1840s. During the same period, Ireland launched two proactive state initiatives. The Ordnance Survey, which standardized mapping throughout the country and translated Gaelic place names into English, and the

establishment of national school systems to revive the preexisting ad hoc system of hedge schools are two such initiatives. The national education system was to be conducted entirely in English, and the older place names were to be phased out in favor of their English equivalents on the new maps.

For this reason, Friel places both contentious English-language projects in the play's setting (Whelan 4). As such, it is a symbolic representation of the longstanding ties that bind Ireland and England together. The drama focuses on the cultural identity and historical revisionism that permeated Irish society in the late 20th century. "a chain of events in history which are converted by his writing into a parable of events in the current day," Seamus Deane was quoted as saying in Irish Times (Obituary: Brian Friel). Christopher Murray praises Brian Friel's brilliance in *Translations*, calling it "an objective correlate for a nation's agony" because of how Friel skillfully combines his subjective experience with historical context to convey a story. Without a doubt, Brian Friel's crowning achievement is *Translations* (3). The play recounts the history of colonial rule by the British over the Irish. Friel expertly depicts the far-reaching individual and societal ramifications of a colonial endeavor. Friel exposes the imperial proclamation of authority over Ireland's language, culture, and politics. As Whelan points out, colonization is always "a psychic one" as well as a political and community issue. The "psychodynamic implications of colonialism as they play out in the language arena, where private and public realms converge" are what *Translations* look into (4). The English language was portrayed throughout colonialism as a means of liberation, a "golden bridge" that allowed locals to cross over from their limited perspective and into the global community. However, the native language was lost in the process, along with the native people's rich history and culture (Whelan 4). The play's portrayal of colonialism was praised by critic James Fenton, who called it a "Vigorous example of corrective propaganda." Friel stated that "language and only language" could be identified with the play

(Obituary: Brian Friel). Redrawing Ireland benefits its imperialist creators but hurts Irish culture and language.

Friel uses his characters to explore the fading of Irish culture. Deluded in a world of Gaelic and classical tales, Jimmy Jack cannot see the reality around him. His inability to adjust stems from his inability to distinguish between myth and truth. He has a very vivid imagination. He can no longer perform any bodily actions. Maire's desire to leave Ireland and the potato blight behind her can be interpreted as a desperate need to escape the country. Captain Yolland's abrupt departure after becoming enamored with the Irish language and Ireland serves as a cautionary tale on the challenges of communicating across linguistic boundaries. Owen is a complicated figure due to his function as a translator for the British. Hugh refuses to give up on teaching in Irish even though he knows English will soon eclipse the language. By the play's conclusion, he has accepted the inevitable and is preparing to teach English. Thus, the play investigates the emotional toll that shifts in language, government, and culture have taken on the Irish people. As a result, many essential concepts in postcolonialism are relevant to the study of *Translations*.

Literature Review

More than one lens has been used to analyze *Translations*. This section will go over a few of them. In their book *Translations*, Adineh Khojastehpour and Behnam Mirzababazadeh Fomeshi (2016) delved into the concept of words as messages. They illustrated Friel's perspective on Irish cultural nationalism, including his thoughts on the significance of language and the translation process. By discussing the colonists' need to feel colonized before they could fully absorb the new culture, they also investigated the bond between language and culture. The use of intertextuality was central to Edmund F. Dehoratius's (2001) analysis of *Translations*. Using intertextuality between *Translations* and its classical materials, Dehoratius investigates the play as a modern odyssey. Friel makes an effort to heal the rift between the cultures. New names and

locations for Ireland are discussed in the work of Maria Laura Barberan Reinares (2007). Using Ngugi's theories as a guide, the study investigates the dynamic between language and culture. Furthermore, it uses Declan Kiberd's language, culture, and individuality theories.

Methodology

To that end, this study is qualitative and exploratory in character. Data collection and analysis is accomplished through careful reading of *Translations*. We will be analyzing the text in this article. Hybridity, mimicry, appropriation, hegemony, exoticism, and many more concepts are highlighted through textual analysis.

Analysis and Discussion

The term "appropriation," as defined by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *Post-Colonial Studies*, is used to track how diaspora communities adopt and embrace aspects of imperial culture that help them better understand their own social and cultural identities. These aspects may include language, forms of writing, film, theater, and even ways of thinking and arguing. This term is frequently used to refer to the way in which the dominating imperial power adopts and subsequently dominates the culture and territory it conquers. Different cultural experiences are expressed through appropriations of the dominant language and its discursive structures (15). The most important assertion in post-colonial discourse is by Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, who writes that language can "carry the burden of another experience" (16). Basically, appropriation is the act of using someone else's work for one's personal benefit without their permission.

The concept of appropriation is crucial in the study of *Translations*. The play's plot centres around the dominance of the British Empire, which incorporates the manipulation of communication through language and culture. The Irish language and Irish territory are conquered by the British because they are useful tools in the spread of British culture and

its ideas. The significance of place names stems from their uniquely individual nature. Changing the Irish names of places would make the entire country unrecognizable. According to Roland Rollins, naming something has always been appealing since it represents an assertion of control over that thing. The naming of a child always follows certain traditions and rituals. As a result, the ability to give something a name has grown increasingly important and distinctive. Each thing we give a name to carries with it a little bit of our power and our presence (1). The British anglicize place names, changing them to sound more like English and be easier to pronounce for native English speakers. They replace the Irish language with their own since the names fit better with their culture and are simpler to say. The title of Brian Friel's play alludes to the possibility of corrupting the influence inherent in the act of translating one language into another. It's the investigation of potential methods of incursion that don't involve the use of direct violence. It's a great example of how translation can alter an entire society. The film "*Translations*" investigates the futility of trying to "translate" a culture by displacing the native language, which leads to "cultural clash." The tensions between the Irish and the British are on full display. Furthermore, language and its impact are significant themes. One's ability to wield language and the control that comes with doing so is intrinsically linked to the process of translation. Taking away a people's language is the first step toward eradicating their culture and even their entire nation. Because everybody uses language to communicate with one another. When a language dies, with it goes a culture, history, and way of life that have been passed down for generations. Friel lays the groundwork for the idea that language and communication are intricately linked to authority and self-definition. What's more, Friel zeroes in on the fact that translation is more than just giving something a new name. Because translation creates a new meaning, the original meaning of the thing is lost in the process. The object undergoes a metamorphosis into a new meaning, and its new name reflects the culture into which it is

translated. So the message and spirit of the original are sometimes diluted or lost altogether in the translation. Roland Rollins thinks it's terrible that the Irish names were substituted with generic English ones throughout the translation process. Consequently severing ties to their previous way of life, language, and culture, leaving them feeling helpless and marginalized in a foreign land with strange writing systems (2). In this sense, the etymological significance of place names and other linguistic markers of Irish identity are being lost as the English language spreads throughout the country. These things are lost forever when an alien culture overwhelms the indigenous people, leading to the demise of the Irish language. Sarah "has a speech problem... regarded locally to be dumb and she has accepted this" because she cannot speak (1). With her role, Friel emphasizes the value of talking to one another. Sarah has a really hard time voicing her thoughts and feelings. Since it is difficult for the local people of Ireland to pronounce English language, Friel symbolizes the idea that if Ireland becomes an English speaking country, then all the people would become as confused in communicating as Sarah is. When Sarah struggles to articulate herself, she stands in for Ireland, which, like Sarah, cannot speak English and appears mute to the British.

According to Roland Rollins, the dual English offensive against the island colony was primarily a commercial endeavor meant to facilitate the sale and distribution of Irish goods and services throughout the country by providing them with standardized English labels. There were two goals in mind when the arrangement was made. One was to alter and modify Irish geography and the national school system, notably language usage, to distance the Irish from their past and ideals to exert control over their future. The British imperialists will first carry out a frontal lobotomy on the people of Ballybeg and the rest of Ireland, reducing them to cultural illiterates and turning them into mute, bewildered youngsters who do not know who they are or how to respond to the new road signs popping up all over the place. Afterward, the British, who run the schools,

will impose a new script on the Irish slate, transforming the confused Irish into the confused, inarticulate laborers who will survive and toil in yet another of colonial England's marketplaces (3). Maire, the "strong-bodied" milkmaid, describes how life at the new national school will be different for her Irish-speaking colleagues. "Big Hughie" and his disabled son Manus live in the loft of this school barn. She believes the new school will eradicate the Irish language, as all subjects will be taught in English, and students will be required to speak English. As a result of everything being in English, she predicts that they will become "as cute as the Bunrana folks" (5).

Suzy Clarkson Holstein claims that the British have particular aims in this situation. After hearing Captain Lancey's first few statements, everyone fluent in English will know that the Ordnance Survey will support taxation and military operations. Subjugation follows conquest (3). Changing titles in this way, as noted by critic George O'Brien, "is to replace... assumptions," and in this case, "to speak of the townland of Bally- beg not just in terms of hill and stream, but in words of control, such as law property, taxation, and the like" (106).

Hybridity is another crucial idea. When a colonized individual adopts some of the colonizer's behaviors and develops a "subjectivity" that combines aspects of both cultures, this is known as hybridity. The philosopher Homi K. Bhabha has been linked to this concept. New transcultural forms emerge in the sphere established by colonialism (108). Both Maire and Owen illustrate the concept of hybridity. Maire hopes to leave Ireland for Brooklyn or another city. However, she has difficulty relating to the Irish or the British. Though she has many opportunities to leave, she keeps returning to the hedge school, symbolizing the Irish people who cannot find their place in the world.

"Nobody is going to pay to go to a hedge school," in the opinion of Maire (16). However, she is a student at that particular institution. "We should all be learning English," as Maire sees it (24). She, too, thinks that the archaic

language is holding back development. She needs English because of this.

On the other hand, Owen has adapted to British culture yet retains some of his native heritage. For instance, there is a legend of how the well got its name, Tobair Vree (53). Even though he has fond memories of his homeland, he now wishes to sever all ties to it to conform to British norms. He sees nothing evil in using English for geographical names (52). Once Yolland vanishes in Act 3, Owen is obliged to translate the violent threats of Lancey, and he learns that his duty as a translator makes him an ambivalent figure, which in turn is a prison. When people agree to one group being in charge, that group is said to have hegemony. Gramsci analyzed the elite's self-serving contributions to society. The dominant social group can persuade the subgroups that its goals are the goals of the entire society. Power is exercised not through physical force but by manipulating less tangible factors like language, culture, education, and the economy to establish hegemony (106). Hegemony lies at the center of this translation, as the British arrives in Baile Beag with their "Theodolite" and are met with complete submission by the natives. The British presence contributes to the erosion of the Irish language and culture by encouraging the adoption of English. While bolstering Ireland's imperialist creators, the effort of re-mapping Ireland hastened the decline of the Irish language and culture. No one contests the British on their right to measure the land. Since they are so open, everything is proceeding with their approval. When things are standardized, Ireland loses some of its humanity. This play emphasizes the importance of language and the control that comes with it. The British hegemony promotes the idea that "Ireland is privileged," which is false (34). According to Kelvin Whelan, the study places a premium on the military aspects and armed details: "weapons-carrying sappers," army searches, "prodding every inch of the ground with bayonets," and (in a notable pun) "leveling the whole country." The stolen theodolite is on full show as if it were a weapon. Similarly, the frightening Donnelly twins express the significance and threat of the

modern Provos (6). Natives have shown no interest in the British invasion.

Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts argues that "Mimicry" is a crucial and growing concept in post-colonialism since it shows how the colonizer and colonized have an inherently conflicted relationship. Colonialism encourages the colonized to "copy" the colonizer in every way possible, including adopting the colonizer's norms of behavior, cultural practices, beliefs, and ideals (125). Owen is used to introducing the notion of Mimicry. Owen thinks having a British colony in Ireland called New Ireland is a beautiful idea. "Owen is a young man who dresses neatly and is a city man," we are told (26). Owen exemplifies translations' mimetic trope. His performance is a parody of English society, etiquette, and diction. Owen is there to help the colonizers because he understands their language. He has a distant relationship with his native land. He is driven by an obsession with fitting in with the colonizers and is always trying to do so. He accepts the role that colonizers perform in his homeland without inquiry. Owen calls Captain Lancey and Yolland his "friends" (28), but Lancey's personality is more dominant. Owen softens Captain Lancey's brusque and inconsiderate announcement that the Ordnance survey is underway. According to Rollins, one of the most critical passages in this play about the use and misuse of language occurs after Lancey's performance when the two brothers, the fashionable Owen and the disabled Manus, meet offstage to assess the English police officers and discuss Owen's interpretations (5). Manus provides his translation of Lancey's statements and boldly accuses Owen of not "stating what Lancey was saying," adding that the map-making project is nothing more than "a bloody military operation" (36). What the British are doing in Ireland is Okay with Owen.

When Maire talks, Owen misinterprets her words as "she says she is yearning to hear you." He erroneously translates the entire dialogue (35). Owen disapproves of how his fellow citizens strive to adopt British culture. Owen pretends he did everything correctly when

Manus confronts him about the inaccurate translation. Nothing is unsettling to him about the anglicization of the Irish language. Because he wants to act like them, he does not question why they name him "Roland" instead of "Owen." It is just a name, he says to himself (37). Owen, who is helping create a six-inch map of the United States, thinks they are just changing the names of the places because the old ones are "filled with uncertainty and.." (52). He believes that "as correctly and sensitively as we can," they are standardizing those names (52). He needs to pay attention to the reality that the names' meanings and connotations will be lost in translation. Owen, thus, comes to embrace colonial norms fully.

Ireland and the Irish language are the 'exotic other.' Yolland wants to live in Ireland as he tells Owen, "Do you think I could live here?" "Settle down here—live here" "It is heavenly" (45). Yolland, who falls for Maire, expresses his grief over the gap which is present between the two cultures and laments in front of Owen that even if he learns the native language, he would still be an outsider in this community: "Even if I did speak Irish I would always be an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password, but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be ... hermetic" (48). Owen says, "You can learn to decode us" (48). However, Friel suggests that such 'decoding' is not possible. As Suzy Clarkson Holstein suggests, a fundamental misunderstanding happens between Maire and Yolland as they see each other as a door that opens into a new world. Maire thinks Yolland will take her away from her overpopulated home and overburdened land. On the other hand, we have Yolland, who considers Baile Beag a Gaelic paradise where he will "always" live with Marie only because they do not speak each other's language so that they can fall in love with each other (7).

Conclusion

The play emphasizes the significance of the post-colonial concepts of appropriation, hegemony, imitation, hybridity, and exoticism. The language of translation provides a voice to all the people of colonized space. The alienation

caused by the forced integration resulting from the loss of language and culture is another factor contributing to the image of the dominant invader, as is pointed out in the play. Sarah's character is indicative of alienation. Her main character becomes withdrawn from everyday conversation. She has such a total collapse of identity that she has trouble reciting her name. The act of saying her name becomes almost supernatural to her. Therefore, coerced assimilation leads to estrangement.

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