

## Introduction

In conjunction with Princeton University's Irish Theatre Festival, McCarter presents two of Ireland's greatest contemporary theater artists. Tony-winner Garry Hynes directs *Translations*, one of the masterworks of the Irish playwright Brian Friel. A rural 19th century Irish village faces the arrival of a corps of British military engineers, there to map the area and rename its places. The presence of these outsiders forces the inhabitants to confront a changing and uncertain future, and under this shadow an impossible romance between a soldier and a village girl begins. The winner of the 1981 Ewart-Biggs Peace Prize, Friel's play is a moving reflection on Irish history, and a story about community, colonialism, identity and the power of language as it affects us all.

## Plot Synopsis

Summer, 1833. In a small hedge school in the Irish town of Baile Beag Manus is teaching the adult evening students in the absence of his drunk headmaster father, Hugh. One student, Sarah, has been mute most of her life and struggles to say her own name. An older student, Jimmy Jack, spends all day spouting ancient myths. Maire, a strong-minded woman with whom Manus seems to be romantically involved, arrives. She has encouraged Manus to apply for a teaching position at the new national school, but Manus knows Hugh has applied and doesn't want to compete with his father.

Hugh arrives, and Maire confronts him, arguing that the students should be learning to speak English. Hugh rejects her point, and as he finishes, Manus's younger brother Owen, who has been gone for six years, interrupts the lessons with two English visitors, Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland. Lancey and Yolland are officers in the Royal Engineers, sent to Ireland to take part in a survey that will create a detailed map of the country and standardize its place names. Owen works for the army translating the Irish language his family and neighbors speak into English, and assists Yolland in assigning names to places. Manus is wary of the soldiers, but many of the residents are initially cordial to them.

Yolland is happy in Baile Beag—he loves the air, the land and the language. He regrets the Irish history being lost as the countryside is renamed, but the progress-minded Owen is quite willing to proceed with their task. Manus tells Maire he's been offered a well-paid position at a nearby hedge-school, implying that they can finally be married. That night there is a dance in town. Drawn to each other but unable to communicate, Maire and Yolland escape to the fields. In one of the great love scenes of dramatic literature, they fumble with English and Irish words and eventually work up

the courage to kiss. Sarah catches sight of their kiss and, ever loyal to Manus, runs to tell him what she saw.

The following evening Manus prepares to leave town. Yolland is missing. Captain Lancey storms in, threatening to demolish Baile Beag if Yolland isn't found within two days. As he delivers this warning, one of the students announces that someone has set fire to the British soldiers' camp. Lancey hurries to deal with this crisis and Owen, reevaluating his loyalties and less sure about his role in the re-naming efforts, leaves to gather more news. Hugh agrees to teach Maire English, but the fate of Baile Beag remains uncertain.

## Character Profiles

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### Hugh

The headmaster of a small hedge school housed in an old barn. He drinks copious quantities of alcohol, but remains mostly lucid. He is a consummate Irish story teller and educator. He appears egocentric, but is absolutely charming and astute.

*Yes, it is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception - a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to...inevitably.*

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### Owen

Hugh's younger son. He is now in the employ of the English Army. A charismatic man of the city, he has returned to his rural roots with a purpose. Straddling both worlds, he is caught between them, belonging completely to neither.

*I am employed as a part-time, underpaid, civilian interpreter. My job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King's good English.*

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### Manus

Hugh's older son, Manus serves as his father's unpaid assistant at the hedge school, though he frequently takes the class because of his father's often-inebriated state. He is searching for a headmaster position of his own.

*Better hide that bottle. Father's just up and he'd be better without it.*

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### Jimmy Jack

Known as the "Infant Prodigy," Jimmy Jack is a perpetual bachelor in his sixties. He lives in one set of clothes and rarely washes. Eccentric and benignly mad, he is fluent in Greek and Latin. He lives alone and comes to evening classes at the hedge school partly for the company, and partly for the intellectual stimulation.

*But what I am really looking for, Hugh— what I really want-companionship, Hugh— at my time of life, companionship, company, someone to talk to.*

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### Maire

A strong-minded and adventurous woman. She wants to learn English.

*Honest to God, some of you people aren't happy unless you're miserable and you'll not be right content until you're dead!*

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### **Lieutenant Yolland**

A British soldier working with Owen on the renaming Donegal countryside for the Ordnance Survey. Though he does not speak Gaelic, he is fascinated with the Irish countryside and fantasizes about settling down in Baile Beag.

*Even if I did speak Irish I'd 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?*

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### **Sarah**

A student in the hedge school, she has such a serious speech defect that she is considered dumb. Only Manus sees her potential and teaches her slowly, painstakingly, to speak. She lives with an intensity borne of the need and inability to communicate.

*My name is ...*

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### **Captain Lanecy**

Lieutenant Yolland's commanding officer. Lanecy is the British captain leading the local Ordnance Survey efforts.

*His Majesty's government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country—a general triangulation which will embrace detailed hydrographic and topographic information and which will be executed to a scale of six inches to the English mile.*

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### **Doalty**

An open-minded, open-hearted, generous and slightly thick young man.

*"I've damned little to defend but [Lanecy'll] not put me out without a fight."*

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### **Bridget**

A fresh young girl, ready to laugh, vain, and with a countrywoman's instinctive cunning.

*"And wait till you hear this—I forgot to tell you this. He said that as soon as he crossed over the gap at Cnoc na mona—just beyond where the soldiers are making the maps— the sweet smell was everywhere."*

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## **Glossary**

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**Acquiesced:** Gave in.

*Hugh: And again to his credit he acquiesced to my logic.*

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**Aeschylus** (525-456 BCE): Greek dramatist best known for the *Oresteia*, the story of one family's fall after the Trojan War.

*Manus: Tell Father I only took the Virgil and the Caesar and the Aeschylus because they're mine anyway. [See "Caesar" and "Virgil."]*

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**Archaic:** Old-fashioned.

*Owen: My job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King's good English.*

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**Apollo:** Greek god of music, of medicine, of poetry, and of intellectual inquiry.

*Yolland: When I heard Jimmy Jack and your father swapping stories about Apollo and Cuchulainn and Paris and Ferdia—as if they lived down the road—it was then that I thought—I knew—perhaps I could live here...[See "Cuchulainn," "Paris," and "Ferdia."]*

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**Bastille:** A prison fortress in Paris, seen as a symbol of the monarchy. French revolutionaries destroyed the Bastille in 1789.

*Yolland: [My father was] born in 1789—the very day the Bastille fell. I've often thought maybe that gave his whole life its character. Do you think it could? He inherited a new world the day he was born—The Year One.*

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**Biddy:** Elderly woman.

*Manus: Biddy Hanna sent for me to write a letter to her sister in Nova Scotia.*

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**Blight:** Virus or disease that causes extreme damage to a crop. Here, "blight" refers to the potato blight, which spread throughout Ireland in the first half of the 19th century. It is estimated that during this time between 500,000 and 1 million people died of starvation and related diseases and that 2 to 4 million Irish became refugees or immigrants. Maire says there was never blight in Baile Beag, but the worst years of the blight—1848-1852—are still ahead.

*Maire: God, did the potatoes ever fail in Baile Beag? Well, did they ever—ever? Never! There was never blight here.*

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**Buncrana people:** Residents of the town of Buncrana, to the north of Baile Beag.

*Bridget: You'll be taught to speak English and every subject will be taught through English and everyone'll end up as cute as the Buncrana people.*

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**Byre:** A barn, usually used for cows.

*Maire: [The officers] leave [their instruments] in our byre at night sometimes if it's raining.*

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**Caesar** (approximately 100-44 BCE): Great Roman military and political leader. Caesar's conquests extended the Roman Empire as far west as the Atlantic Ocean. He was also responsible for the first Roman invasion of Britannia, the land that would later become Great Britain.

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**Contour:** Shape.

*Hugh: It can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of...fact. ["Linguistic" means having to do with language.]*

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**Cuchulainn:** The greatest warrior in Irish mythology, especially well-known in Northern Ireland.

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**Dose:** An unpleasant experience or person.

*Bridget: God but you're a dose.*

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**Daniel O'Connell** (1775-1847): Irish politician known as "The Liberator." He supported the repeal of anti-Catholic legislation and the emancipation of Ireland.

*Maire: I'm talking about Daniel O'Connell.*

*Hugh: Does she mean that little Kerry politician? [Kerry is a county in Ireland.]*

*Maire: I'm talking about the Liberator, Master, as you well know.*

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**Engrossed:** Involved.

*Manus: And she got so engrossed in [dictating the letter] that she forget who she was dictating to.*

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**Erosion:** A wearing away.

*Owen: But what does Vree mean? It's a corruption of Brian—(Gaelic pronunciation)—Brian—an erosion of Tobair Bhriain.*

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**Ferdia:** Another hero of Irish mythology, he is Cuchulainn's foster-brother and best friend. The two are forced to fight each other in a fateful battle where Ferdia is finally felled by Cuchulainn.

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**Forfeiture:** Surrendering.

*Lancey: 'All former surveys of Ireland originated in forfeiture and violent transfer of property.'*

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**God, I'm dying about you:** God, you're fantastic.

*Doalty: Anyone got a bloody table-book?*

*(Sarah gives him one.)*

*Doalty: God, I'm dying about you.*

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**Grania:** From Irish mythology, she runs away from her older fiancé to be with the young warrior Diarmuid

*.Jimmy: Sure isn't our own Grania a class of goddess and—*

*Manus: Who?*

*Jimmy: Grania—Grania—Diarmuid's Grania.*

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**Greek goddesses Artemis (Diana):** Virgin goddess of the wild and twin sister of Apollo;

**Athene:** Fierce daughter of Zeus and the goddess of war and wisdom; **Helen:** Beautiful mortal daughter of Zeus.

*Jimmy: I was just thinking to myself last night: if you had the choosing between Athene and Artemis and Helen of Troy—all three of them Zeus's girls—imagine three powerful-looking daughters like that all in the one parish of Athens!*

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**Hedge-schools:** 18th and 19th century Irish Catholic schools. Although the Penal Laws passed by

Protestant England between 1702 and 1719 forbid any school in Ireland to be run by Roman Catholics, the hedge schools operated in secret and were the place many Irish children learned to read and write. By 1833, when *Translations* takes place, some of the strict bans on Catholic teachers had been lifted, and nationally run schools were more acceptable to Irish Catholics.

*Maire: Did you apply for that job in the new national school? [...] When it opens, this is finished: nobody's going to pay to go to a hedge-school.*

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**Homer** (8th century BCE): Greek author of the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*, the story of Odysseus (or Ulysses) and his journey home after the Trojan War.

*Jimmy: [Upon hearing Homer's description of Athene] 'Flashing-eyed!' Hah! Sure Homer knows it all, boy. Homer knows it all.*

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**In pieces:** Exhausted.

*Maire: Was it four [in the morning]? No wonder we're in pieces.*

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**Ovid** (43BC-18 CE): Latin poet best known for his work *Metamorphoses*, a story of mythological transformations and romantic entanglements among the gods and goddesses.

*Hugh: Barbarus hic ego sum quia non intelligor ulli—James?*

*Jimmy: Ovid. [...] 'I am a barbarian in this place because I am not understood by anyone'.*

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**Paris:** Prince of Troy who kidnaps Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, and brings the wrath of Greece down on his city.

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**Parish:** A small community centered around a church.

*Owen: Owenmore's the big river at the west end of the parish.*

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**Perambulation:** Walk.

*Hugh: On my perambulations today [...] I encountered Captain Lancey of the Royal Engineers...*

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**Poteen:** Very strong, home brewed Irish whiskey.

*Owen: We are going to go up to Anna na mBreag's.*

*Hugh: Not there, Owen.*

*Owen: Why not?*

*Hugh: Her poteen's worse than ever.*

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**Sappers:** Military officials who specialize in field work, sometimes clearing the ground for an approaching army.

*Maire: The English soldiers below in the tents, them sapper fellas, they're coming up to give us a hand [with the hay mowing].*

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**Spuds:** Potatoes.

*Jimmy: That's what you should have in that upper field of yours—corn, not spuds.*

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**Sweet smell:** Smell of rotting potatoes caused by potato blight.

*Maire: Sweet smell! Sweet smell! Every year at this time, somebody comes back with stories of the sweet smell..*

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**Syntax:** Pattern in which words are put together to form phrases and sentences.

*Hugh: Yes, it is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception—a syntax opulent with tomorrows. [Opulent means “rich.”]*

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**Theodolite:** A surveyor’s tool for measuring angles, useful in making maps.

*Doalty: Up in the bog with Bridget and her aul fella, and the Red Coats were just across at the foot of Croc na Mona, dragging them aul chains and peeping through that big machine they lug about everywhere with them—you know the name of it, Manus?*

*Maire: Theodolite.*

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**Verecund:** Humble, apologetic.

*Hugh: He speaks—on his own admission—only English; and to his credit he seemed suitably verecund.*

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**Vesperal salutations:** A fancy way to say “good evening.”

*Doalty: Vesperal salutations to you all.*

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**Virgil** (70- 19 BCE): Author of the *Aeneid*, an account of the Trojan War in Latin. He also wrote the *Georgics*, a long and patriotic poem about Roman agriculture.

*Jimmy: ‘And with cui putre—with crumbly soil—is in the main best for corn.’ There you are! [...] Virgil! There!*

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**Waterloo:** Famous battle in Belgium where Napoleon of France was defeated in 1815.

*Yolland: Father has that drive, too, that dedication...he says himself the longest time he ever sat still was the night before Waterloo when they were waiting for Wellington to make up his mind to attack. [See “Wellington.”]*

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**William Wordsworth** (1770-1850): Well-known English Romantic poet whose work often focused on the beauty of nature.

*Yolland: Some years again we lived fairly close to a poet—well, about three miles away.*

*Owen: His name?*

*Yolland: Wordsworth—William Wordsworth.*

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## Who’s Who in the Production

## ACTING COMPANY



*MANUS*  
David Costabile



*SARAH*  
Morgan Hallett



*JIMMY JACK*  
Dermot  
Crowley



*MAIRE*  
Susan Lynch



*DOALTY*  
Michael  
FitzGerald



*BRIDGET*  
Geraldine  
Hughe



*HUGH*  
Niall Buggy



*OWEN*  
Alan Cox



*CAPTAIN  
LANCEY*  
Graeme  
Malcolm



*LIEUTENANT  
YOLLAND*  
Chandler  
Williams

## ARTISTIC STAFF

<i>written by</i>	<b>Brian Friel</b>
<i>directed by</i>	<b>Garry Hynes</b>
<i>set and costume design</i>	<b>Francis O'Connor</b>
<i>lighting design</i>	<b>Davy Cunningham</b>
<i>original music</i>	<b>Sam Jackson</b>
<i>sound design</i>	<b>John Leonard</b>
<i>producing director</i>	<b>Mara Isaacs</b>
<i>director of production</i>	<b>David York</b>
<i>production stage manager</i>	<b>Richard Costabile</b>
<i>casting director</i>	<b>Laura Stanczyk, CSA</b>
<i>voice/dialect coach</i>	<b>Ralph Zito</b>
<i>production dramaturg</i>	<b>Carrie Hughes</b>

## Speaking of *Translations*

### A conversation with Garry Hynes and Emily Mann

*McCarter Theatre* is presenting Brian Friel's *Translations*, a play considered by many critics to be his masterpiece. The production, to be directed by acclaimed Irish director Garry Hynes, is being produced in conjunction with Princeton University's symposium on Irish theater which celebrates the new Leonard L. Milberg '53 Collection of Irish Theater at the Firestone Library. In preparation for the production, the play's director, Garry Hynes, and the theater's Artistic Director, Emily Mann, got together to talk about Friel, the play, and its implications.

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**EM:** I heard earlier today when someone said, "Oh, I think this is Brian Friel's best play," you say, "Well, isn't it wonderful you can fight about that?" He's such a good writer.

**GH:** Yes, he is such a good writer, and he's written so many fantastic plays. I think what's been particularly extraordinary about him is that he's had a long writing career. One is so used to writers who shine for a bright time and then appear to burn out. But with Brian, you know, he had very early success with *Philadelphia (Here I Come)*, which was a Broadway hit at a time when Irish plays weren't necessarily translating onto Broadway. And then he went through a period of time where he wrote plays that were very successful in Ireland, and he had a long association with the Abbey and with Joe Dowling. Then he went in to still another period where he founded his own company, Field Day. He had a long and extremely productive period there, and it was a culturally important period of time for Ireland as well, to which Field Day made a contribution, and that all started with *Translations*. Then, there is the more recent success—international success all over again—with *Dancing at Lughnasa*, and a continued long and varied career that's encompassed original plays and translations of other people's works. It's an incredibly rich career that is both rich in and of itself and rich in terms of its contributions made to Irish and to international theater, and we're very privileged to have him. He's a master writer, writing in a magisterial manner. He's regarded as such, and that's a great thing for any kind of national theater to have, or for any theater community to have.

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**EM:** Absolutely. Can you talk a bit about *Translations*? What it is that you love and why you would put it in the top of his body of work?

**GH:** I think simply the sheer theatrical conceit of it, in the first instance. I mean, if you just take his theatrical achievement—he writes a play about language; language not only in the verbal sense, but also in the cultural sense. He then has to communicate that, and yet has to find a way of theatrically suggesting that these people are unable to communicate with one another while we in the audience can understand them all perfectly. And I think the level at which he achieves that seems so easy and so perfect when you see it onstage, but the stretch from the idea, "Can one do this?" to the apparent effortlessness of the achievement. The extraordinary success of the achievement is stunning. Brian has a kind of meta-theatrical mind. He's capable of taking, I think, a

very inquiring and provocative set of attitudes and debates and ideas, and translating them into a theatrical language that is available to everyone...at whatever level they wish to approach it. So on the one hand, you can watch *Translations* and understand it as a play about a group of people caught in a huge situation, and understand it just on that level. And yet on the other hand, your brain is provoked by the sheer audacity of the debate and the ideas that he's promulgating. So in that sense, he's a thinker in the theater. And those people are rare.

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**EM: Tell us what some of those ideas are.**

GH: Having never directed this play before, I think the safest place for me to begin, prior to actually getting into an exploration of the play with the actors, is to refer to what Brian has said himself. He said, "I did not want to write a play about hedge schools. I did not want to write a play about the English conquering the Irish. I did not want to write a play about language." And of course he has done all that, and what he leaves out for directors who are searching for direction is what he wants the play to be about! But that's our job.

Certainly he makes us look at the gulf between cultures, cultures which are put into direct contact with each other, by virtue of having to occupy the same space. They occupy the same space, the same physical landscape, and yet Brian leads us to ask, "What is this physical landscape? Does it have an enduring reality outside of the people who occupy it, outside of the people who live and reside in it and have resided in it for generations?" He makes us ask those questions, and I think he's asking those questions of himself. I think another great achievement of the play is that the play is notionally a history play in the sense that it is set one hundred fifty years ago in a very distant past for Irish people because it's a pre-Famine time. And yet the play is intensely modern. It's intensely modern, and can really finally only be understood in terms of what's been happening on our island in the last thirty to forty years. So it's intimately connected with the now. It's an extraordinarily modern play, despite the fact that it's a strictly historical play in the sense that one wouldn't dream, for instance, of producing the play in anything other than the period in which Brian set it.

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**EM: Yes. So often, writers—fiction writers of all kinds—choose an historical subject to illuminate the present.**

GH: Yes.

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**EM: Do you think he consciously did that?**

GH: I don't know how consciously he did it. I do know that he would have been— like all of us coming where he comes from—intimately concerned with the issues of the day and the issues of what it was to be Irish. And then being of the inquiring mind that he is...in attempting to understand these things, he would have read widely in terms of the past. That he was able to make the match between the past and the present is one of his great achievements in *Translations*.

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**EM: Can you talk about the Irish language a bit? For example, did you grow up speaking Irish?**

GH: I grew up in a rather unusual situation. Neither of my parents were native Irish speakers because the Irish language has shrunk to very small areas of Kerry and the West of Ireland now.... My father, however, was a fluent Irish speaker and loved the language. And as a result, I was actually reared in Irish prior to going to school. So I actually spoke little or no English till I went to

school. And then, that having happened, I completely rejected it, with the result that I speak Irish less well than any of the rest of the members of my family. But the Irish language, I mean Brian says it in the play: “We don’t use your language very much except for reasons of commerce.” The Irish language died by an act of conquest and by an act of necessity. In order for anyone to have any sort of advancement, it became necessary to be able to speak English, and Irish increasingly became an old language. Because it had no economic or strategic importance, it became less and less used. Of course, what people gradually realized and are continuing to realize, is that in losing the language you also lose far more than that — it’s a way of communicating ideas, thoughts, and feelings that are not necessarily available in the language in which you speak.

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**EM: And now in terms of the Irish language in 2006, say. How many people in Ireland — what percentage of the Irish in Ireland speak Gaelic?**

GH: Well, I’d say — I don’t know what — there’s about to be a census, which will be interesting. But certainly as a first language, as a language of the heart, it would have shrunk to less than 100,000 people.

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**EM: Really?**

GH: As a language which you learn in school, or acquire some smattering of, which you still require if you’re a civil servant, it would be a lot more. But as a language whose heart is beating—no, it’s increasingly less.

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**EM: Is there anything you think an American audience should know before seeing the play that might help them? Or do you think the play will speak for itself?**

GH: I would like to think the play would speak for itself. I suppose that there tends to be a kind of knee-jerk reaction to a curtain going up with a group of peasants and a little cow shed that, oh, this is another folk tale of Irish peasants. It’s a much harder play than that. I hope somehow or other — I hope that we’re successful in at least giving some indication of that in the production.

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**EM: Oh, I’m sure you will. And Mr. Friel helps you quite early on—we hear Latin and Greek. (Laughter)**

GH: Absolutely.

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**EM: You don’t usually expect that in a cow shed.**

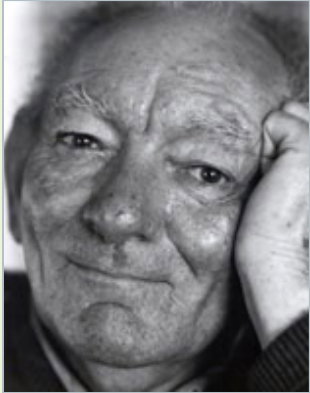
GH: Exactly. Well, I mean Friel upends your expectations right from the very beginning. So the opening scene of the play is a play about language and speech in which the first character to speak onstage, can’t speak.

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**EM: Yes. Can’t wait.**

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## Brian Friel Biography



Brian Friel was born in 1929, near Omagh, County Tyrone, in Northern Ireland, less than ten years after the Anglo-Irish treaty partitioned the country. All of his grandparents were Irish speakers, and his father was a schoolteacher and Nationalist. Friel's status as a minority Catholic in a Protestant dominated North colored his life from its very start: his birth certificate confirms the birth of Bernard Friel—a not-so-subtle demonstration of Protestant authorities' desire to eradicate traditional Irish names.

Friel worked for a few years as a math teacher in Derry in the 1950s, and during this time wrote a series of short stories published in *The New Yorker*, and a few radio plays. In 1962, he wrote the first full-length play he acknowledges, titled *The Enemy Within*. The next year, Tyrone Guthrie invited Friel to observe his new theatre company in Minnesota. Friel embraced the role of "The Observer": "I learned, in Guthrie's own words, that theatre is an attempt to create something which will, if only for a brief moment, transport a few fellow travelers on our strange, amusing, perilous journey." When he returned from the US, his next play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* became a hit, first in Dublin, and then later in New York and London.

In 1967 Friel moved out of Northern Ireland and across the border to County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. This was a move he later questioned, given the increasingly volatile situation in Northern Ireland: "Just to be part of the experience. Instead of driving into a civil rights march, coming out your front door and joining it might have been more real." He did cross the border to participate in those marches, however, including the infamous 1972 "Bloody Sunday" march, during which British paratroopers opened fire and killed thirteen Catholic protesters in Derry. As the political situation grew ever more tumultuous, Friel continued to write plays, wary of "writing to the headlines," but unable to ignore the struggles around him.

Friel confronted his avoidance of "political" plays head on when he started work on *Translations*. He wrote in a journal in 1979: "The thought occurred to me that what I was circling around was a political play and that thought panicked me. But it is a political play—how can that be avoided? If it is not political, what is it? Inaccurate history? Social drama?" A few weeks later he wrote "What worries me about the play...are the necessary peculiarities, especially the political elements. Because the play has to do with language and only language. And if it becomes overwhelmed by that political element, it is lost."

The premier of *Translations* at the Guildhall in Derry was an historic (and undeniably political) event. It was the first production of Field Day, a new company founded by Friel and the actor Stephen Rea to provide a theatrical voice for the Irish people free of the influences of Dublin and London. Derry, a city peopled by a Catholic majority but long governed by Protestants, had been the site of a number of infamous civil rights marches that devolved into violence, including Bloody Sunday. At the time of the production the Guildhall was under scaffolding, recovering from an IRA attack. For Friel, it was an ideal location: "I believe in a spiritual energy deriving from Derry which could be a reviving breath throughout the North...the dispossessed are coming into their own and if this island is to be redefined the essence of redefinition could come from here."

The sold-out opening night received multiple standing ovations from an audience that included the Unionist mayor, a Sinn Fein council member, and John Hume, a Nationalist who would go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize for helping to broker the Good Friday accords. After its run in Derry the production went on tour, traveling not just to Belfast and Dublin, but to small towns throughout the North and South.

After working ten years with Field Day and premiering his plays in Derry, Friel stepped away from the company in 1990. That year his play *Dancing at Lughnasa* premiered at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. It went on to London and New York, where it won multiply Tony awards. In 1999, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, he was honored with a Friel Festival in Dublin and Belfast, which included productions of many of his plays and exhibition at the National Library.

## Hedge Schools

Forced underground by the Penal Laws that prohibited Catholics from teaching or running schools, the education of Irish Catholics in the eighteenth century was a function of illegal hedge schools, so named because they sometimes took place out of doors, in the shelter of a hedge. Students paid fees directly to the hedge school master, often at great financial sacrifice—an academic quarter might cost as much as three days wages for a laborer. More dramatically, there are records of at least two cases in which parents kidnapped hedge schoolmasters to ensure the education of their children. While hedge schools varied considerably, instruction was often in Irish, particularly in the West of the country where the language was prevalent. Students learned reading, writing, and mathematics, Irish and European history, and sometimes Latin and Greek, even in the most rural areas. In his 1756 book *History of Kerry* the historian Dr. Charles Smith writes that “It is well known that classical learning extends itself, even to a fault, among the lower and poorer kind in this county; many of whom, to the taking them off more useful works, have greater knowledge in this way, than some of the better sort, in other places.” This education in the classics was considered unsuitable for “young peasants” by some in power, including Robert Peel, the Home Secretary from 1822-1827. The richness of the material taught in the hedge schools, which included medieval romances, neo-chivalric stories, biographies of highwaymen, and classics of the ancient world, was in sharp contrast to duller, more rote learning of the government sponsored National Schools that began to take hold in the 1830s, which emphasized basic literacy, numeracy, and time and work discipline.

## Irish as a Language

Irish is both a language and a symbol of a rich national identity. It has been spoken for more than 2000 years, and from 1200-1600 it was the dominant language in Ireland. However, the political turmoil of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including the Elizabethan wars and increasingly repressive anti-Catholic legislation like the Penal Laws, eliminated the governing Irish-speaking class, replacing them with English speakers. By the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Penal Laws began to be relaxed, native Irish who hoped to improve their position socially and economically adopted English. By the nineteenth century English was the language of commerce and power, and the only language of public institutions. Instruction in the National Schools was in English, and students who spoke Irish in school were punished.

Irish remained the language of the poor and of rural areas, and for a time, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the population of Irish speakers increased as the rural population did. The Great Famine and the resulting emigration saw by 1891 a decrease in the number of Irish speakers to 680,000, from over 4 million in 1835. Irish nationalist movements and groups at the end of the nineteenth century, including The Gaelic League, actively promoted the use of Irish. While English remained the dominant language, this movement continues in Ireland and Irish communities abroad, including the United States.

Today, Irish is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland, an official European Union language, and is required in schools. It is the primary spoken language of only few small communities, mostly the West of Ireland, but in the 1991 census nearly a third of Irish citizens identified themselves as “proficient” speakers.

Irish is in the Celtic group of Indo-European languages. It is most usually referred to as Irish or Gaeilge (in the language itself), but sometimes (particularly outside of Ireland) as Gaelic or Irish Gaelic, to distinguish it from its close cousins Scottish Gaelic and Manx Gaelic. Brought over by the invading Celts, Irish also takes words from the Viking invaders of the fifth and sixth centuries and Norman French.

## **Tradition of Irish Theater**

The earliest records of theater in Ireland concern the religious mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages. Among the several professional theaters formed in the seventeenth century were Dublin’s Werburgh Street Theatre and Smock Alley Theatre, which frequently showcased imported work from London. The reverse was also common. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Irish playwrights, such as George Farquhar, often took their work to London stage. Nineteenth-century Ireland introduced the world to two Irish expatriates, Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. Their contemporary, Dion Boucicault, met international success with his comedies of manners and melodramas.

The Irish national theater movement was born at the turn of the twentieth century, when Irish Nationalists sought to create a common cultural identity that would counter the negative portrayal of their people throughout. When the Irish Literary Theatre was formed in 1897 by playwrights

William Butler Yeats, Edward Martyn and Lady Isabella Gregory, its manifesto read in part: “We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation.” In 1906, Yeats and Lady Gregory formed the Abbey Theatre in Dublin with John Millington Synge, best known for his controversial *Playboy of the Western World*. Yeats was interested in experimenting with stylized, symbolic theater, but peasant dramas and comedies were so popular with Irish audiences that the Abbey’s actors were trained in both styles.

As Irish theater gained momentum and recognition, younger playwrights took on the mantles of earlier Irish dramatists. Whereas Synge had written mostly about the rural poor, Sean O’Casey wrote about their urban counterparts. Taking his own tack altogether was the incomparable Samuel Beckett, whose plays retain a distinctly Irish sense of tragic-comedy, despite his emigration to France. Often compared to O’Casey, Beckett’s contemporary Brendan Behan was known for *The Hostage* and *The Quare Fellow*, which premiered at the Pike Theatre in Dublin in 1954.

The list of renowned contemporary Irish dramatists begins with John B. Keane, Hugh Leonard, Thomas Murphy, Thomas Kilroy, and Brian Friel, whose play *Translations* launched Derry’s Field Day Company with its world premiere in 1980. Younger Irish playwrights produced around the globe include Marie Jones, Christina Reid, Frank McGuinness, Marina Carr, Conor McPherson, and Martin McDonagh. In this respect, the Irish stage is increasingly an international one, as Irish playwrights are commissioned in England, the U.S., and beyond. And even as there is a surge of interest within Ireland for drama in the Irish language, theater in the country is growing ever more diverse, adapting the dramatic traditions of other cultures into theater with Irish sensibilities. While perhaps reflecting a less unified Ireland than that dreamed of by Yeats and Synge, today’s theater invokes a range of definitively Irish voices and experiences, as its participants strive to continually re-imagine their country’s political, geographical and emotional past and to suggest new shapes for its future.

## Irish History: A Timeline

### **c. 8000 BCE**

First people cross into Ireland on a landbridge from Scotland.

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### **c. 100 BCE**

The Gaels arrive in Ireland. Gaelic language remains the most common language in Ireland until the nineteenth century.

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### **350 CE**

Christianity reaches Ireland’s southeast coast.

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### **432**

A Romano-British missionary later known as St. Patrick comes to Ireland to convert Gaelic kings to Christianity. Christianity fuses with Gaelic culture, giving rise to what is sometimes called the Gaelic Golden Age.

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**795-895**

Vikings invade Ireland. Many remain and integrate with the Irish people.

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**1014**

Brian Boru, Ard Ri (High King) of Ireland, dies defeating the Norsemen at the Battle of Clontarf, the last Gaelic-Viking battle.

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**1170**

Norman armies under nominal allegiance to England enter Ireland.

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**1172**

Henry II orders an invasion of Ireland. Welsh marchers invade the southeast coast and establish fiefs.

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**1210**

King John, Henry's son, visits Ireland. Over the next two centuries the "Old English" assimilate into Gaelic society until the English government, fearing loss of sovereignty, instigates the Statutes of Kilkenny.

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**1366**

The Statutes of Kilkenny forbid trade and intermarriage between the Normans and the Irish.

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**1507**

Henry VIII becomes King of England and converts England to Protestantism. Much of Ireland refuses to convert.

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**1558**

Elizabeth I takes the throne. Elizabeth asserts England's dominance over Ireland by enforcing its role as landlord over all the Gaelic kings.

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**1595-1603**

Hugh O'Neill wages the Nine Year war against the English in Ulster (in the North). O'Neill and Hugh O'Donnell make a last stand for Ireland's independence but are defeated by the British at Kinsale in 1601, and surrender in 1603. English law is enforced throughout Ireland.

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**1641**

Gaelic Irish Catholics demand the return of their lands in a bloody rebellion against the Protestant settlement in Ulster. The violence of this rebellion still resonates in the memories of Protestants in Northern Ireland. Aligning against the Protestants brings the Old English and the Gaelic Irish closer together. Fifty-nine percent of land still held by Catholics.

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**1649-1653**

Oliver Cromwell defeats King Charles I in England's Civil War and turns to deal with Ireland. He enacts a brutal strike at Drogheda (which had not even participated in the 1641 rebellion) and banishes all Catholic landowners east of the Shannon River to the western part of the country. The percentage of land owned by Catholics shrinks to twenty-two percent.

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**1688**

Protestant William of Orange replaces Catholic King James II in England. Facing a Catholic army, the Protestants of Derry barricade the city. Thousands die of sickness and starvation, but none at the hands of the ill-equipped Catholic army. The British ends the siege a few months later. James II is crushed at the Battle of the Boyne.

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**1695**

The first Penal Laws are enacted in Ireland. These laws ban Catholics from voting, holding office, serving as lawyers, or buying land. At this point, only 14% of land is owned by Catholics. While the codes do not specifically prohibit practice of the Catholic faith, monasteries are to be closed, and friars, brothers, and new priests are prohibited from taking their orders. Ostensibly, this should lead to the decline of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The religious portions of the law, however, are the least enforced.

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**1775**

American Revolution inspires unrest in Ireland. Over the course of the 1700s, Protestants in Ireland have begun to argue for independence from Britain, imagining, in part, that they can deal with Irish Catholics better than the British can. In 1775, Henry Grattan becomes the leader of the "Patriot" Party.

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**1782**

Grattan's parliament persuades the British to declare Irish legislative independence.

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**1789**

The French Revolution.

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**1796**

The French try to land several ships in Bantry Bay to aid Irish Republican efforts. Weather prevents them from landing.

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**1798**

United Irishmen uprising. Originally founded by Belfast protestants, the United Irishmen worked for parliamentary reform and the unification of Protestants and Catholics to form an Irish nation. By 1798 they were allied with the Defenders, an underground Catholic agrarian group, and were waiting for French assistance to act for independence. Shortly before the planned uprising, most of the United Irishmen's leadership was swept up by authorities after tips from informers. Unable to hold off longer, the rebellion moved forward in May 1798. It was bloody and disorganized, and by the time the French did land in August in County Mayo, it was too late and the uprising had been defeated.

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**1801**

The Act of Union abolishes the Irish Parliament and unites the kingdoms of Ireland and England. Protestants begin to believe that the best way to protect their status is to associate themselves with England. Catholics hope that alliance with the more tolerant Protestants of England will shelter them, but the Union worsens their conditions. Catholics began to embrace independence just as the Protestants are rejecting it.

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**1823**

Daniel O'Connell forms the large, democratic Catholic Association, which agitates for Catholic presence in Parliament. O'Connell wins a seat in 1828. Catholic emancipation is passed in 1829.

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**1825**

The British Parliament authorizes the Board of Ordnance, a military division, to undertake an extensive survey of Ireland, standardizing maps and reassessing the value of the land for taxation.

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**1833**

The year *Translations* is set. Although Baile Beag is a fictional town, it appears consistently in many of Friel's plays, and is perhaps modeled on the town of Muff in Donegal, a few miles outside of Derry.

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## **1837**

Ascension of Queen Victoria.

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## **1845-9**

The largest blight of the century settles on the potato harvest, with four consecutive years of failing crops. The Great Famine begins. Famine mortality rates continue until 1852. During those years population falls by more than 3 million, including more than 1.25 million deaths from starvation and famine-related disease.

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## **1858**

James Stephens founds Fenian brotherhood in Ireland (later to become the Irish Republican Brotherhood).

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## **1870s**

Gladstone's Land Acts make some progress toward the rights of tenant farmers, but do not actually transfer land ownership to the tenants.

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## **1875-1885**

The Land War: Charles Stewart Parnell encourages boycott of rents. Five hundred thousand are evicted from their homes and farms.

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## **1886-1893**

Two "Home Rule" bills to give self-government to Ireland are defeated in the British Parliament. In Ireland, divisions increase between the Nationalist, Catholic, agrarian majority and the Unionist, Protestant, industrialized Northeast. In 1914, Home Rule passes, but disagreements between Nationalists and Unionists and the onset of World War I prevent full implementation.

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## **1905**

Formation of the Nationalist party Sinn Fein.

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## **1916**

The Easter Rebellion, a rising to overthrow British rule and establish an Irish republic, is brutally suppressed.

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## **1918**

Sinn Fein wins a majority of seats in Ireland's Parliament and declares Ireland's independence. Civil war breaks out.

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## **1920**

The first "Bloody Sunday" occurs when the Irish Republican Army (known as the IRA) executes fourteen British officers in Dublin. Over a dozen people are killed in retaliation, and one month later, British forces burn the entire center of the city of Cork.

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## **1921**

The Anglo-Irish Treaty puts an ostensible end to the Civil War. The treaty creates the thirty-two county "Irish Free State" with the understanding that the six largely Unionist counties in Northern Ireland can withdraw from the state at the end of the month. If this happens, a border is to be drawn "in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants," a stipulation Nationalists hope will eventually be resolved in their favor. The treaty also includes an oath of loyalty to the English King, which Irish Republicans hate. After one month, the six counties in Northern Ireland withdraw as expected and establish their government by the Ulster Unionist Party at Stormont in East Belfast.

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## **1922-1923**

Further civil war in Ireland between those against the treaty (who want a republic to encompass the entire island and to be free of any allegiance to Britain) and those who see the division of the North and South as an acceptable beginning. The population of Protestants in the Free State at this point is less than 10 percent; by the 1960s it has halved.

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### **1932**

The first transition of government in the Irish Free State is peacefully achieved and Eamon De Valera is elected President without taking an oath of loyalty to the King of England. A twelve-year period of leadership for the party Fianna Fail (of the anti-treaty faction) begins.

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### **1937**

The Constitution of "Eire" is passed. Ireland is neutral in World War II.

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### **1949**

Ireland becomes "The Republic of Ireland" and separates from the British Commonwealth. The IRA in Northern Ireland continues its violent agitation for border removal and the creation of one Irish state.

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### **1967**

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association is formed. Based on the Civil Rights Movement of the United States, it is intended to secure more than second-class citizenship for the Catholics of Northern Ireland.

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### **Late 1960s**

When the Civil Rights Movement fails to achieve many of its desired ends, the IRA steps up to fill the power vacuum. The IRA organizes increasing violence and riots in Catholic areas of Northern Ireland, especially in Belfast. Northern Ireland's official army is ineffective at halting the violence. Another paramilitary group, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), retaliates against the IRA, causing more bloodshed. Eventually, British troops are deployed to the area to restore order, although even they are unable to bring real peace to the region.

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### **1970**

Gerry Fit and John Hume form the Social Democratic and Labour Party to foster peace and justice through democratic methods.

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### **1971**

174 people are killed over the course of the year in Northern Ireland.

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### **1972**

On January 30, thirteen unarmed Catholic citizens are shot by British soldiers in Derry in the second "Bloody Sunday." The IRA strikes back by killing nearly ten people and injuring over two hundred. In March, British Prime Minister Edward Heath institutes direct rule, giving England governance over Northern Ireland.

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### **1973**

The Sunningdale Agreement of December 9 attempts to end the violence by creating a Northern Ireland Assembly, a power-sharing executive council which includes Unionists, Nationalists, and a cross-border Council of Ireland.

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### **1980**

Charles Haughey, Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland, meets with Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Britain. Northern Unionists are concerned about being forced by England to cooperate

with the Republic.

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### **1980-1981**

Republican hunger strikes in Long Kesh prison. Ten strikers die.

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### **1985**

The Anglo-Irish Agreement affirms that there can be no change in Northern Ireland's relationship to Britain and to the Republic without the consent of the majority of the population. An Intergovernmental Conference is intended to bring about a government that considers the rights of its Catholic minorities. Unionists feel devastated and betrayed. They protest in the streets and to the Queen of England, but eventually realize they need to negotiate with the new Intergovernmental Council.

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### **1989**

Peter Brooke becomes the first Northern Ireland Secretary to admit that the IRA cannot be completely defeated through military means.

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### **1993**

The Downing Street Declaration states (as other agreements had) that the question of self-determination must be decided by a majority. The important step at Downing Street is the recognition that hope for real success lies with the appeasement of the Unionists.

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### **1994**

The IRA declares a ceasefire. Two months later, Protestant paramilitary groups also cease fire.

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### **1995**

United States President Bill Clinton visits Belfast to aid in peace talks.

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### **1996**

An IRA bomb at Canary Wharf in London ends the ceasefire. Senator George Mitchell begins peace talks again with everyone except Sinn Fein, which is associated with the IRA.

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### **1997**

Tony Blair becomes the new Prime Minister in Britain.

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### **1998**

George Mitchell gathers the relevant parties for talks once more (this time Sinn Fein attends) and sets the April 9th deadline for the agreements. One of the most contentious issues is that Sinn Fein doesn't want to be responsible for the difficult task of removing the IRA's weapons.

After nightmarish negotiations, the Agreement creates a Northern Ireland Assembly and introduces three structures: (1) the North/South Council to address questions of agriculture, education, transportation, environment, social security, and health across the North and South regions; (2) the British-Irish Inter-Governmental Council to smooth cooperation between Britain and Ireland; (3) the British-Irish Council, which includes representatives from countries like Scotland and Wales, to give the Unionists a feeling of solidarity with the United Kingdom. Sinn Fein agrees to assist with arms removal, but makes no promises. In 1999, George Mitchell chairs another series of talks that end with the IRA's agreement to consider decommissioning their arms.

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# Theater Artist Spotlight: Casting Director

## An Interview with McCarter Casting Director Laura Stanczyk

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### What does a Casting Director do?

A casting director essentially guides a creative team to actors they will see (audition) for any given project. This includes making lists of actors the casting director knows, has worked with, has seen for other projects and has researched for the project at hand. It may mean extensive searching for specific qualities (I'm currently looking for a little person for Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty's new musical), traveling to a lot of other places (LA, London, Chicago, Atlanta – wherever we think the talent may be), investigating non-professional talent through open calls, making offers to established actors and a host of other scenarios which changes from project to project. Artistry in this field is genuinely about background and taste— an ability to make people comfortable in the room (actors and creative staff) and to help large groups of artistic types arrive at the best decision for a show.

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### What have been some of your most rewarding experiences as a casting director and why?

Working with Garry Hynes is tremendously rewarding because she knows what she is looking for and is extremely respectful about the process of finding it. I have also loved working on the Encores! Series in New York because the work there is always great, classic musical theater, and the creative staff is looking for a kind of actor I feel is terrifically undervalued today.

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### Are there projects or plays that you are particularly attracted to?

Of course. Plays with great language or scores (O'Neill, August Wilson, Synge, Comden and Green, Richard Rogers, Shakespeare, Sondheim and many others). The better the material, the easier my job.

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### What are some of the greatest challenges you face?

Getting actors to commit to theater is the single greatest challenge I face. Theater is the poor cousin to film and television. Actors and their representatives avoid theater because it eliminates the possibility of a big paycheck. This is a crazy and debilitating point of view because the more theater an actor does, the better and more able they become to score in film and TV. But this is a long term view of a career in the arts and most actors' representatives don't know what that means any more.

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### What were some of the particular challenges you faced on this play?

Getting Actors Equity Association to agree to allow actors without green cards to work at the McCarter was huge. Finding first rate actors who would be willing to devote the amount of time we are asking for was also huge, but, finding a quality authentic cast of actors (both European and American) who could speak the same language and act on the same stage, that was the real job.

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### Can you talk about some of the specific guidelines you discussed with Director Garry Hynes in terms of the nationality or heritage of the actors you sought for *Translations*? What impact will this have on these rehearsals and performances of your performers?

Garry was clear that her vision of the play depended largely on an authentic cast – a group of

actors who could understand and interpret Friel's debate about communication and its very specific Irish setting. And, of course, we had to have a group of actors who were, if not actually from Baile Beag, whose ear could find Baile Beag and who could understand what it is to be a peasant, not dumb, mind you, but unsophisticated in a way which doesn't truly exist in most of America today.

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### **What would people be surprised to hear about being a Casting Director?**

It isn't glamorous. It's a lot of hard work, a lot of detail, a lot of nagging and an enormous amount of compromise.

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### **What advice would you give to a young person who was considering a career as a Casting Director?**

Develop yourself as an artist. Find a language as an actor or director so you can communicate with them when the time comes. Develop your taste. See everything you can, read everything you can. Be an historian. Know where work comes from and how it originates. Be kind and remember, actors put themselves on the line every time they open their mouths. The very least you can be is respectful of their courage.

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## **Drama Praxis**



This resource guide enables teachers and leaders to explore drama as a mode of learning. Through this collaborative art form, teachers and students can act out, reflect upon and transform the story of *Translations*, allowing their individual experiences with the material to give them a better appreciation of the play. In addition, by engaging with one another, students utilize skills that are vital to communication and interpretive analysis.

Drama-in-Education seeks to synthesize the activities of creative drama, arts-based curricula and theater convention into experiences aimed at developing imagination, awareness of self and others, aesthetic taste and life skills. Often these goals are achieved through the examination of a particular theme or topic, which contributes to critical thinking about the world in which we live. By providing structures and contexts which both excite the interest of participants and call for creative problem-solving, Drama-in-Education promotes deeper thinking about a wide variety of issues.

This guide has been designed for teachers to utilize drama methods in an exploration of the themes and situations presented in the play. We encourage you to adapt these lessons and activities to your individual teaching strategies and curricular needs, and thereby discover the importance and power of drama in the classroom.

The following questions and activities are designed to help students prepare for the performance, and then to build on their impressions and interpretations afterwards.

## Core Curriculum Standards

According to the New Jersey Department of Education, “experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education.” Our production of *Translations* and the activities outlined in this guide are designed to enrich your students’ education by addressing the following specific Core Curriculum Standards for Visual and Performing Arts:

<b>1.1</b>	All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater and visual arts.
<b>1.2</b>	All students will refine perceptual, intellectual, physical and technical skills through creating dance, music, theater and/or visual arts.
<b>1.4</b>	All students will demonstrate knowledge of the process of critique.
<b>1.5</b>	All students will identify the various historical, social and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts.
<b>1.6</b>	All students will develop design skills for planning the form and function of space, structures, objects, sounds and events.

Viewing *Translations* and then participating in the pre- and post-show discussions suggested in this resource guide will also address the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy:

<b>3.3</b>	All students will speak in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
<b>3.4</b>	All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.
<b>3.5</b>	All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, non-print and electronic texts and resources.

In addition, the production of *Translations*, as well as the resource guide activities, will help to fulfill the following Social Studies Core Curriculum Standards:

<b>6.1</b>	All students will utilize historical thinking, problem solving and research skills to maximize their understanding of civics, history, geography and economics.
<b>6.6</b>	All students will apply knowledge of spatial relationships and other geographic skills to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment.

## Pre-Show Discussion Questions

A pervasive theme in *Translations* is the place of remembering and forgetting one's own cultural or familial past. Have your students go home and do some research on their own families. See how far back they can find relatives in their family tree. Who is the most distant great, great, great grandparent or long lost aunt they can find? Often, we can find several generations of important names. Have your students identify the most distant ancestor about whom someone in their family has a story. Have them share an anecdote which might tell us a little about what he or she was like. How many of your students have a story about the ancestor who is also the most chronologically distant? What does this information say about the erosion of memory in our own lives? Can we speculate about the people we have no record or memory of, for example the parents or siblings of your most distant relative? Is the memory of that person completely erased from history? What are some of the ways people fight against being erased from the world's memory? Can you think of examples where it might be better to forget?



2. To get an idea of the action of the play, read the plot summary included in this guide. Now imagine that you are designing the set for this play. What would be your visual design concept which would tie the whole production together? Is there a feeling or emotion that you would want to express through your design of this production? Prepare a design presentation for your class through drawings, visual aides or writing. Be prepared to field your classmates' questions about your design choices.

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3. The etymology of words, particularly those associated with geographical locations or buildings, is discussed often in *Translations*. Have your students choose the name of a street, town, lake or building to investigate the roots of its naming. Ask them to avoid choosing names like George Washington School or Martin Luther King Boulevard, whose significance is evident because of the national historical impact of that person or theme. Rather, ask them to find names such as Milltown or Bank Street or Witherspoon Street, which have a greater chance of having some community significance. The more research they can bring, the better.

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4. Brian Friel wrote *Translations* in the late 1970s, when the situation in Northern Ireland was particularly volatile. Have your students do research on the English/Irish conflict, both in the early 19th century and the 1970s. Why might Friel have employed the former as a tool for discussing the latter?

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## Post-Show Discussion Questions

Ask your students how their viewing of *Translations* compared to their preconceived expectations. What surprised them? Were there any moments that played out in a similar fashion to how they imagined?



- Below is a list some of the characters from the play. Have your students make at least one observation about each character's manner of speaking. Next, discuss the concept of social status with your students. Have them arrange the characters in a list, from high status to low, based on their observations from having read or seen the play. Afterwards, observe whether the ways the characters speak have any impact on their position in the social hierarchy.

HUGH  
 MANUS  
 JIMMY JACK  
 MAIRE  
 OWEN  
 LIEUTENAT YOLLAND  
 CAPTAIN LANCEY  
 SARAH

- Have your students describe the design elements they noticed in *Translations* (e.g. costumes, scenery, lighting, sound, etc.). What did they find most surprising about the design? How did they feel the design elements helped in telling the story? Did they notice any links between the elements of design and the themes addressed in the play?
- When playwrights and dramaturgs discuss "clean" playwriting, they often measure the necessity of including a character, scene, or concept within a given play. When one of these elements is seen as extraneous, or not contributing to the advancement of the story, it is often cut. There are a number of ancillary characters in *Translations*. Have your students consider the importance of the inclusion of specific characters, scenes and concepts from *Translations* with the following questions: Why is Jimmy Jack in the play? Why is his "marriage" at such an age an important enough piece of information to stay in the play? What purpose does Sarah play in the story? What do Bridget and Doalty add? Why does the majority of the play take place in a school room? Speculate about what other smaller details have particular cause for inclusion in Friel's play.
- Brainstorm about Friel's possible reasons for naming his play *Translations*. How does the title influence your students' perception of the play? Is there another title which may be befitting?

## Enhance the Performance



1. **"Barbarus hic ego sum quia non intelligor ulli."** Translated: "I am a barbarian in this place because I am not understood by anyone." Hugh's drunken quotation of Ovid towards the end of *Translations* is significantly connected to many of the conflicts in the play. Often people are treated as unequal because of the way they speak, be it with a regional or second-language accent, or a style of speaking based on one's education or one's culture. Have your students brainstorm a list of people in our own society who are often marginalized because of the way they speak. Remind your students that sometimes people are esteemed or treated better due to the way they speak. Ask your students to talk about a time when they themselves have felt they have been treated differently because of the way they speak.
 

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2. **Excuse me, what did you say?** Central to the play is the scene of romantic expression which occurs between Maire and Lieutenant Yolland. People often communicate with each other through tone, gesture and inflection. Have your students split up into pairs and perform short improvisational scene in gibberish. Using no actual words at all, have them convey one simple idea to their partners and have the rest of the class try and guess what they are trying to communicate. Some ideas for objectives to give the students include:
  - To get your partner to leave because you are angry at them
  - To tell your partner you need them to call an ambulance because you are sick
  - To borrow some money
  - To tell your partner you love them
  - To tell your partner you are quitting your job
  - To tell your partner a secret

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3. **Translations, Part Two** : At the end of the play, there are a number of unanswered questions. Ask your students to consider:
  - What happened to Yolland?
  - What happened to the twins' boat, and what did they actually know?
  - What will become of Maire and Manus?
  - Why was Manus going away?
 Discuss with your students other unanswered plot points at the end of the play. Have your students write a monologue which could begin the sequel to *Translations*. Make sure your students use facts from the original play to bolster the believability of their characters' monologue. Encourage students to include quotations from the play and to pay close attention to the style of the character's language. Have the students perform their speeches in front of the class.
 

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4. Select a scene from *Translations* to read in class with different students playing different characters. As a class decide on the theme of this scene: love, influence, respect, etc. Have your students brainstorm other plays that involve the theme. Is this theme present in their own lives? Their own society? The world? Divide the class into three groups. Each group will present this theme in a different style:
 

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**The Realism Method:** This group will reenact the original scene upon which this discussion is based. They should perform the scene to the best of their ability, using whatever means possible to make the scene as realistic as can be. If there are more students than there are

characters, you may have a student become the director, the stage manager, etc.

**The Tableau Method:** This group will convey the theme assigned in a barrage of different tableaux. A tableau is a frozen picture that tells a story or conveys an idea. Allow the students to devise six or seven frozen pictures that focus on the theme. They can become characters in *Translations*, or other plays, or depict scenes from movies or people in the world. The more creative the better.

**The Pastiche Method:** This group must use an abstract approach to depict their theme. They can employ dance, art, pantomime, TV clips, etc. to convey their message. They cannot, however, use conventional scenes or dialogue in their presentation.

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## Additional Resources

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- Doherty, Gilliam M. *The Irish Ordnance Survey: History, Culture and Memory*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004.
- Fitzgerald, Richard and Edna O'Brien. *Vanishing Ireland*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1986.
- Friel, Brian. *Brian Friel: Plays One*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1996.
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- Gorham, Maurice. *Ireland from Old Photographs*. London: B.T. Batsford Limited, 1971.
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- McGrath, F. C. *Brian Friel's (Post) Colonial Drama: Language, Illusion, and Politics*. Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1999.
- Morash, Christopher. *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601 - 2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- O'Connor, Laurence. *Lost Ireland*. New York: Rainbow Publications Ltd., 1984.

- Owens, Doilin D. and Joan N. Radner, eds. *Irish Drama 1900 - 1980*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990.
  - Sexton, Sean. *Ireland: Photographs 1840 - 1930*. Slovenia: Laurence King Publishing, 1994.
  - Sternlicht, Sanford. *A Reader's Guide to Modern Irish Drama*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998.
  - Trotter, Mary. *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001.
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