

THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING BRIAN FRIEL'S *TRANSLATIONS*

by

Federica Mazzara

and

Dimitra Philippopoulou

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INTRODUCTION

«*Translations* is a modern classic» (Daily Telegraph).

«[...] The most deeply involved with Ireland but also the most universal: haunting and hard, lyrical and erudite, bitter and forgiving, both praise and lament»¹ (Sunday Times).

In our essay we introduce Brian Friel's *Translations* starting from some historical data and we move on to an analysis of the major themes presented in the play.

Because translation holds a special place among them, we pay specific attention to the concept of translation, as Friel sees it: as metaphor of 'Irishness'.

Later on, we unfold our strategy in translating an extract of this work, explaining in as much detail as possible why we adopt the basic principle of *Skopos* theory.

Firstly, we present the unusual nature of the play, which 'plays' with Irish and English on stage.

Secondly, we describe our purpose, which is to maintain the original setting, in the sense that we do not 'acculturate' it. We feel that it is important to keep English as the theme of the play, changing of course the medium, since we translate it using the Italian and the Greek language.

Finally, we incorporate our individual translations with some commentary.

¹ Friel, B. 1981. *Translations* (London: Faber&Faber). (Back cover).

BRIAN FRIEL AND *TRANSLATIONS*

Brian Friel is considered one of the most representative Irish playwrights of the XX century. He was born a catholic in Omagh in Co Tyrone (Northern Ireland) in 1929, and he lived and studied in Derry to become a priest, but changed his mind and worked as a teacher between 1950 and 1960.²

In 1980 he founded in Derry, along with the actor Stephen Rea, the Field Day Theatre Company, with the intention of establishing the city as a theatrical centre, and creating a literary movement, which aimed at redefining Irish cultural identity in the last quarter of the 20th century.³ Friel has rewritten Anglo-Irish versions of five pieces of Russian drama, which earned him the reputation of 'the Irish Chekhov'.

What Richard Pine says about Brian Friel helps us get an idea of recurring motifs in his plays: «Friel's genius has created metaphors to make vital connections between past and present, between myth and narrative, creating meanings which have both public and private resonance» (Pine 1999: p. 1).

Friel resists the tendencies of the Postmodern, as he believes that our powers of ethical self-determination can help us overcome the fragmentation of value in the modern world, especially in Ireland.

Not accidentally, *Translations* by Brian Friel was the first play staged by The Field Day Theatre Company in 1980. He chose to set this play back in time, in 1833, in the County of Donegal, in particular in a Hedge School in the fictitious Gaelic-speaking farming village called Baile Beag.

Hugh, the old school master has two sons, Manus and Owen. The elder has remained loyal to his father, working as his apprentice in the school, while Owen has travelled off to the city of Dublin and become a prosperous businessman. Owen, a confident and successful young man, returns to his village of Baile Beag after many years to announce that officers from the British Army, for whom he works as an interpreter, will be re-mapping the Irish landscape and translating all of local Gaelic

² Brian Friel (1929-): <http://www.eng.umu.se/lughnasa/fieldday.htm>. He is the author of some important plays such as *Philadelphia, Here I Come* (1964), *Faith Healer* (1979), *Translations* (1980), *Making History* (1988), *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) and *Molly Sweeney* (1994).

³ Brian Friel (1929-): <http://www.eng.umu.se/lughnasa/fieldday.htm>. Soon the poets Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, the professor Seamus Deane and the musician David Hammond were added to the board. The company staged Irish plays, published pamphlets on language, law, myth and the interrelation of literature and colonialism with the emphasis on the relationship between England and Ireland. (Murray 1997: 208).

names into English.⁴ The story deepens when a young British lieutenant falls in love with the landscape and the people, longing to reject his British heritage and live among the Irish. He becomes infatuated with a young Irish woman and longs to be with her. Nevertheless, he realises that he can never be one of them, that he will always be an outsider in this place. In the end, he disappears and we are left to wonder if he has been murdered by the locals or has nearly decided to wander the Irish landscape. We are left wondering what will be the outcome of this conflict.

As Murray says, «The definition of Field Day, which appeared in the programme for the first production, *Translations*, whether ironic or not, is primarily a military one: 'a day on which troops are drawn up for exercise in field evolution; a military review...'» (Murray 1997: 208).

⁴ «The need for an accurate map of the country was brought to the fore in the 1800s by problems with a local tax, known as the county cess. [...] For revaluation a new survey was needed to redefine the boundaries and to calculate the acreages of each townland. [...] The first detachment was sent to Ireland in 1825 and were unarmed.[...] Reaction to the Engineers by the local people was mixed, but generally they were regarded with suspicion». (Owen, Pilbeam 1992: 27-28).

TRANSLATIONS THEMES

To become acquainted with the themes of the play, an analysis of which will soon follow, it would be useful to provide some historical facts concerning the colonial relationship between England and Ireland in a period of great significance.

Problems started after the battle of the Boyne (1690), when the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was firmly established as the ruling class of Ireland. The enactment of a set of Anti-Catholic Penal Laws, (1695) aimed at excluding Catholics from any office of state, from the Parliament, from the army, navy, voting and, of course, from the educational system. Therefore, Hedge Schools were the Irish answer-illegal, fee-paying educational institutions for the Irish peasants, who could read Homer and Ovid from the original, as these schools were excellent at teaching the classics.

They were first held behind hedges, but later, in the eighteenth-century, were allowed to move to barns or cottages, as a result of a more relaxed law enforcement. Although, initially, tuition was through Gaelic, this language, even in the Hedge Schools, started to decline. Irish people, indeed, became increasingly aware of the importance and power of the English language, which, at that time, was undoubtedly the dominant one in the areas of commerce, politics and law. Here it is important to stress, that as Kiberd says: «the native language declined, not as an outcome of British policy so much as because an entire generation of the Irish themselves decided no longer to speak it» (Kiberd 1995: 616).

Translations by Brian Friel presents this perfectly. It starts with a preoccupation about language but it clearly ends up handling social and political issues. It would be pointless, in fact, to argue that the play is an innocent comment on language as such, given that a language is never a self-contained system; rather, it is inextricably related to the question of power and, specifically, the power of naming oneself. That's why *Translations* resulted in being a post-colonial political text, since Translation from Irish to English is not simply an exercise with words-it is a forced corruption of a people and a culture that victimizes British and Irish alike.

The play presents an unbridgeable gap between two cultures, which is accounted for by the attempt of the British coloniser to 'rename' and 'rewrite' what has existed for centuries: «The history of English and Irish relations in the last two centuries might well present itself as a straightforward picture of England as oppressor, "rewriting"

Ireland into cultural submission, not only through political control, but also through the imposition of English as the language of high culture» (Lee 1995: 164).

The activity of mapping itself in the play illustrates the unequal relationship between the two languages, since Irish place names must be translated into English ones and placed on a map that the English Army will have constructed: they are the ones who set the rules. Inequality of languages, inevitably, leads to confusion and, hence, to problems of communication between cultures. What is dominant in the play, in fact, is the impression that the English and the Irish will never understand each other even if they speak the same language. As a consequence, the Irish can exist only in translation, which becomes the metaphor of their identity, and ultimately their *raison d'être*: «the alternative to translation is the muteness of fear» (Cronin 1996: 200). Being a play about various forms of translation, therefore, *Translations* by Friel almost becomes the symbol of what Irishness stands for.

The concept of translation as it is presented in this play echoes George Steiner's *After Babel*. Among all the critics, who have underlined this affinity, Richard Pine deserves a special mention for his systematic juxtaposition of extracts from the two works.⁵

Steiner's idea of translation as both an impossibility and a necessity is the one which Friel adopts in his play, to show that even if the British and the Irish can coexist, it is doubtful whether they can ever really communicate. To quote from Kiberd: «[...], once Anglicization is achieved the Irish and English, instead of speaking a truly identical tongue, will be divided most treacherously by a common language» (Kiberd 1995: 622).⁶

Clearly Friel's *Translations* treats language as a complex system, which both unites and divides and is both a "glorious heritage and a damnable barrier".

The central theme of the play, which is translation itself, is embodied in the figure of Owen, Hugh's youngest son. Owen is probably the most complex character in the

⁵ See Appendix pp.359-363 in Pine 1999.

⁶ The strong connection between *After Babel* and *Translations* is best portrayed in the following two extracts from these works respectively: «[...] No two historical epochs, no two social classes, no two localities, use words and syntax to signify exactly the same things [...]. There will be in every complete speech act a more or less prominent element of translation. All communication interprets between privacies». «**Hugh**: I will provide you with the available words and the available grammar. But will that help you to interpret between privacies? I have no idea. But it is all we have» (Pine 1999: 360).

play and undeniably controversial, since he defines himself as “the go-between” (Friel 1981: 37).

Owen is very naive in his perception of language. For him languages are merely sets of words and words are nothing more than arbitrary signs. He prefers to forget that these arbitrary signs acquire over the years special significance and become loaded with experience: «**Owen**: easy, man, easy. Owen-Roland what the hell. It's only a name. It's the same me, isn't it? Well, isn't it?» (Friel 1981: 37).

The difference between a collaborator, as the Irish see him, and a romantic Irish boy, who is overwhelmed by the British ‘civilised’ manners, is really subtle. The fact, however, remains that «a translator is often a traducer, especially when working out of a minor and into a major imperial language» (Kiberd 1995: 619).

In rejecting his language he rejects his culture, which he wants to replace with the English one, because he believes it to be an element of success. He considers language as something to manipulate in order to fulfil his needs. In the end he becomes the victim of this process of assimilation, as he realises that he will never be able to be a real English, but rather, only a translator, the bridge between two cultures. It is Lancey, the English captain in charge of the Survey, who brings him back to reality: “Do your job. Translate” (Friel 1981: 80).

In the play translation appears as a job for the one who is inferior in terms of political authority. Based on inequality, translation is impossible and «Characters experience only momentarily the optimistic belief that linguistic differences can be bridged» (Lee 1995: 176). Even Owen is disillusioned at the end.

THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING *TRANSLATIONS*

The staging of the play involves an interesting convention concerning the reception from the audience, since «language is both the subject and the medium» (Murray 1997: 212). Although the play is written and staged entirely in English⁷, the audience has to imagine that the languages used are more than one, and this explains the incomprehension and confusion among the characters, which can be likened to the babelian confusion. As Carla De Petris has noticed, the translation in the play is from English into English and the Irish is the “big absent” (De Petris 1996: 380).

Friel’s act of writing *Translations* is *per se* an act of translation, since he writes an Irish play from the beginning in English, so as to demonstrate the only possibility for Irishness to exist. Starting with Oscar Wilde’s belief that «the concept of the ‘original’ comes into existence only after it has been translated», Kiberd finally observes that «what is different about Friel’s *Translations* is that, although it is to be imagined as enacted in Irish, in fact there is no original» (Kiberd 1995: 624).

Because of its complex and unusual nature, further attempts to translate this play into other languages constitute a challenging undertaking. For our translation, it was very helpful to take into account the idea of translation being a purposeful activity, put forward by *Skopostheorie*. This theory was first proposed by Hans J. Vermeer in 1978, and later explained in detail in a book he wrote with K. Reiss in 1984 entitled *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*.⁸ According to this theory, the basic rule for any translation is the ‘Skopos rule,’ which Vermeer explained as follows: «translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function»⁹. The eternal dilemma of free vs faithful translation is thus resolved by the fact that in a translation everything is legitimate, as long as the translator is able «to justify (*begründen*) [his/her] choice of a particular *Skopos* in a given translational situation» (Nord 1997: 29).

Applying this concept to the approach we have used in translating an extract from Brian Friel’s *Translations*, we have decided to keep in our translations, into Italian and Greek, Friel’s convention: the audience has to imagine that the play is enacted in

⁷ Apart from some Latin and Greek words and quotations and some Irish place names.

⁸ Vermeer, H. J. Reiss, K. 1984. *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie* (Tübingen: Niemeyer) .

⁹ Vermeer, H. J. , *Skopos und Translationsauftrag-Aufsätze*, quoted in Nord 1997: 29 (her translation).

more than one language, although only English is employed. This means that we do not adopt a 'cultural approach,' according to which we should rewrite the play, transposing the English and Irish situation into a similar Italian/Greek reality. The ideal would be to maintain Friel's original purpose to present, as we saw, English as both the medium and the theme of the play he wrote. But, because we cannot present this in English (so we lose English as the medium) since we are translating, we expect our audience to imagine that the characters are using English and/or Gaelic, although, of course, they are using Italian /Greek as 'staging languages'. This is the 'convention' we add to the already existing one, introduced by Friel.¹⁰ Obviously, the play has a very strong effect on the Irish audience, which identifies with the Irish characters, and deeply feels the dilemmas surrounding Irish identity. In this respect, our translation, indeed every attempted translation of this play, is a 'loss' in the degree of involvement from the part of the audience.

If we are losing English as the medium of the play though, at least, we are keeping English as its theme, instead of discarding both and rewriting it in another cultural context. This would lead to a translation, which, in our opinion, would be too remote from Friel's play and only inspired by it.

It is not our intention, in what we have discussed so far, to discourage different approaches in translating this play. Any approach is acceptable as long as it is sufficiently substantiated. In this case, we chose not to apply a technique of 'rewriting', which was introduced, as a term, by A. Lefevere¹¹ referring to the re-interpretation, or alteration, or manipulation of a source text. This approach would dictate to us to 'acculturate' the play in our own cultural context. We felt that we could not seriously argue that Italian or Greek could have the same impact as English had on an audience, who felt the pressure of an imperialistic language like English.

For the simple reason that neither Italy nor Greece have had any 'glorious' recent history, as colonial powers, our approach in translating Friel's play could not help being one which maintains the original context, linked with English and not with Italian or Greek.

¹⁰ In our translation we try to achieve the 'natural effect' that a play-text is supposed to have since it is intended to be staged.

¹¹ Lefevere, A. 1992. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London: Routledge). «According to Bassnett and Lefevere, translators, critics, historians, professors and journalists are all text producers whose output can be classified as 'rewriting'». As they claim, «rewriting is linked to the 'image' of a writer and/or a work of literature. By the term image they mean «the projection of an original work in a given culture». (Shuttleworth, Cowie 1996: 147).

This is to claim, in other words, that a translator has first to cope with the purpose for which he/she is translating and then follow the approach that most appropriately serves that purpose, on condition that he/she can provide an acceptable justification of the strategy they employ.

This is what we have tried to achieve above, saying that our translations want to be as 'faithful' as possible to Friel's text. 'Faithful', in the sense that the main theme in Friel's text and in our own are identical. Our attempt aspires at giving the opportunity to non-English audiences, in this case Italian and Greek audiences, to know as much as possible what Friel's intention was; to show that «In modern Ireland, language embodies the conflict that is the end result of imperialism: a country torn within itself seeking to unify against the Other that is also itself. [...]. Translations ultimately still works as nostalgic tribute to the necessity of ideals of essential Irishness, prompting its audience to believe that, as Hugh says, 'It is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language... we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilise» (Lee 1995: 179)

ITALIAN TRANSLATION OF AN EXTRACT FROM BRIAN FRIEL'S *TRANSLATIONS*¹²

p.31¹³ ...

...Maria si allontana da Manus.

Owen entra con Lancey e Yolland. Il capitano Lancey è un uomo di mezza età; un piccolo e vivace ufficiale, esperto nel suo campo come cartografo ma per niente a suo agio con la gente, soprattutto civili, e in particolare questi civili stranieri.

È più abile coi fatti che con le parole.

Il tenente Yolland è tra i venti e i trent' anni. È alto, magro e allampanato, timido e dai modi goffi. Militare per caso.

Owen Eccoci qui. Capitano Lancey, le presento mio padre.

Lancey Buonasera.

Hugh diventa espansivo con i suoi ospiti, quasi smanceroso.

Hugh Io e lei ci siamo già incontrati, signore.

Lancey Sì.

p.32...

Owen E questo è il tenente Yolland – entrambe ingegneri Reali – mio padre.

Hugh Siate i benvenuti Signori.

¹² This extract is taken from Act One of Brian Friel's *Translations*, the setting of which is a disused barn, where lessons are being held. At this stage Owen has just come back from Dublin after many years, bringing with him two English officers involved in the Ordnance Survey. Owen introduces them to his father and to the locals, who are the pupils of the Hedge School. Captain Lancey is supposed to explain the project to the people there. Since nobody speaks English except from Hugh and his son Manus, Owen 'translates'. His translation is clearly trying to foresee and prevent any reaction against the Survey, since he is aware of the fact that the Survey is a military operation. In so doing he simplifies, sometimes changes, or even adds in order to beautify the operation. He tries to be diplomatic, a kind of negotiator. His skill to translate makes him feel superior to his countrymen, but he does not realise that this means to betray his *Irishness*. He works for the English and his translation becomes a support for the English interests, more than an attempt to create a 'bridge' between the two cultures.

There is already an Italian version of Brian Friel's *Translations* by Carla De Petris, who translated the play in 1996 and published it in a book, where she collects the translations of other two plays by Friel (*Faith Healer, Dancing at Lughnasa*). Her book, *Traduzioni Ed Altri Drammi* (De Petris 1996) is, I would say, very academic. She starts with a very analytical introduction where she speaks about Friel, the theatre and Ireland, and later on, she presents the translation of the plays. Even the translation is very well executed. I have especially appreciated the fact that she justifies her approach in a note at the end of the book, where she discusses the challenge of translating Friel. At every translation, when it is required, follows a further scientific analysis. In the case of *Translations*, for instance, she presents the Italian translation of all the classical quotations and a kind of guide to the pronunciation and the meaning of the Gaelic words that Friel uses in his play.

As De Petris informs us the play has never been staged in Italy, and I think that this is probably due to its 'linguistic' complexity and to the 'imaginative effort' that is required from the audience, especially a non English or Irish audience.

¹³ The original text presents a variety of linguistic registers, from a standard English, rich of technical expressions, like that one spoken by the soldiers and by Owen when he addresses them, and a colloquial English spoken by the locals. This double use of the English allows the author to underline the difference on the stage between English and Irish, since the characters who are supposed to speak Gaelic, are actually speaking in English as well. In my translation I have tried to maintain this 'duplicity' of registers, applying a formal/informal parameter to the Italian language.

Yolland Molto lieto.

Hugh *Gaudeo vos hic adesse.*¹⁴

Owen Non c'è nessun'altra presentazione da fare, aggiungo solo che questi sono alcuni abitanti di Baile Beag e – che altro? – adesso vi trovate tra la gente migliore dell'Irlanda.

Si ferma per permettere a Lancey di parlare. Lancey non parla.

Vuole dire qualcosa, capitano?

Hugh Che ne dite di un gocchetto?

Lancey Un che?

Hugh Forse meglio dire, un modesto rinfresco? Un assaggio della nostra acqua vitae?

Lancey No, no.

Hugh Forse dopo, quando...

Lancey Dirò ciò che ho da dire, se mi è concesso, e nel più breve tempo possibile. I presenti parlano un po' d'inglese, Roland?

Owen Non si preoccupi, tradurrò io.

Lancey Giusto. (*Si schiarisce la voce. Parla come se si stesse rivolgendo a bambini – a voce un po' troppo alta e scandendo esageratamente le parole*). È possibile che mi abbiate già visto – visto – lavorare a questa sezione – sezione? – lavorare. Noi siamo qui – qui – in questo luogo – mi capite? – per redigere una mappa – una mappa – una mappa e –

Jimmy *Nonne Latine loquitur?*¹⁵

Hugh gli fa segno di stare zitto.

p. 33...

Hugh James.

Lancey (*rivolgendosi a Jimmy*) Mi dispiace signore ma non parlo neanche un po' di Gaelico¹⁶. (*Guarda Owen.*)

¹⁴ In Latin in the original text. Engl.: 'Welcome' (Friel 1981: 93); It.: 'Mi rallegro che siate qua' (De Petris 1996: 265).

¹⁵ In Latin in the original text. Engl.: 'Does he not speak Latin?' (Friel 1981: 93); It.: 'Non sapete parlare Latino?' (De Petris 1996: 265).

¹⁶ Lancey does not speak Latin, which is why he misunderstands Jimmy's Latin for Gaelic, he does not speak, either. The effect is quite comic, this 'civilised' Englishman is, in classical terms, less educated than an Irish peasant.

Owen Vada pure avanti.

Lancey Una mappa è una rappresentazione su carta – un’illustrazione – capite il termine illustrazione? – un’illustrazione su carta – che mostra e rappresenta questa regione? – Sì? – che mostra la vostra regione in miniatura – una illustrazione cartacea su scala di – di –

Improvvisamente Doalty comincia a ridacchiare. Poi Bridget. Poi Sarah. Owen interviene subito.

Owen Sarebbe meglio che lei *assumesse*¹⁷ che la capiscano. –

Lancey Dice?

Owen Io tradurrò man mano che lei procede.

Lancey Capisco. Sì. Molto bene. Forse hai ragione. Bene. Ciò che stiamo facendo consiste praticamente in questo.

Guarda Owen. Owen annuisce assicurandolo.

Il governo di Sua Maestà ha ordinato il primo sopralluogo globale di questo Paese mai effettuato prima – una triangolazione generale che conterrà dettagliate informazioni idrografiche e topografiche e che sarà eseguita su una scala di sei pollici al miglio Inglese.

Hugh (*Versandosi da bere*) Eccellente – eccellente.

Lancey guarda Owen.

Owen Si sta redigendo una nuova pianta dell’intera regione.

Lancey guarda Owen: È tutto? Owen sorride assicurandolo e indica di procedere.

Lancey Questo enorme incarico è stato intrapreso in modo da permettere alle autorità militari di entrare in possesso di informazioni aggiornate e accurate su ogni angolo di questa parte dell’Impero.

p. 34...

Owen Questo lavoro è stato affidato a militari perché molto abili in questo campo.

Lancey E anche in modo tale da rivalutare la stima totale del terreno al fine di determinare tassazioni più eque.

Owen Questa nuova pianta sostituirà quella fatta dal fattore, in modo che, da ora in poi, saprete esattamente cosa vi appartiene per legge.

¹⁷ Friel uses the term ‘assume’ in italics. In my translation I have used the Italian equivalent ‘assumesse’ (subjunctive form), even if it would sound better ‘desse per scontato’, which corresponds to the English expression ‘take for granted’. I guess, thought, that Friel uses this ‘latinism’ on purpose and almost ironically, in order to stress Owen’s affected way of speaking English. That is why, I have preferred to maintain the term ‘assume’, which, I think, is closer to Friel’s intention.

Lancey Per concludere vorrei riportare due brevi estratti dalla ‘carta bianca’¹⁸ che è il nostro documento costitutivo: (*Legge.*) ‘Tutte i precedenti sopralluoghi in Irlanda hanno dato luogo a confische e a violenti passaggi di proprietà; il presente sopralluogo ha per oggetto la soluzione di tassazioni inique, offerta a proprietari ed occupanti di terra’.

Owen Il capitano spera che il pubblico collaborerà con gli artieri e aggiunge che la nuova mappa determinerà una riduzione delle tasse.

Hugh Una degna iniziativa – *opus honestum!*¹⁹ E l’estratto B?

Lancey ‘L’Irlanda è privilegiata. In Inghilterra non si sta intraprendendo nessuna iniziativa di questo tipo. Dunque, tale rilevamento non può che essere considerato una prova dell’attenzione che questo governo, e anche io personalmente, ha per gli interessi dell’Irlanda’.

Owen Questo rilevamento dimostra l’interesse del governo per l’Irlanda e il capitano ringrazia per averlo ascoltato così attentamente.

Hugh il piacere è nostro, Capitano.

Lancey Tenente Yolland?

p.35...

Yolland Io – io – io in realtà non ho nulla da dire –

Owen È Il capitano che redigerà concretamente la nuova mappa. Il compito di George è quello di controllare che i nomi dei luoghi sulla mappa siano...corretti. (*a Yolland*) Solo qualche parola – A loro piacerebbe ascoltarvi. (*alla classe*) Vi va di ascoltare anche George?

Marie Ha qualcosa da dire?

Yolland (*a Marie*) Come dice? – scusi?

Owen Dice che le piacerebbe molto ascoltarvi.

Yolland (*a Marie*) Molto gentile da parte sua – grazie...(*alla classe*) posso solo dire che mi sento ridicolo a – a – lavorare qui senza parlare la vostra lingua. Ma intendo rimediare a ciò e – con l’aiuto di Roland – ce la farò.

Owen Vuole che gli insegni l’irlandese!

Hugh Lei è doppiamente il benvenuto, signore.

Yolland Penso che il vostro Paese sia – sia – sia – sia splendido. Me ne sono già innamorato. Spero non costituirò una presenza troppo indiscreta nella vostra vita. E so già che mi troverò bene qui, anzi benissimo.

¹⁸ I have translated literally the English word, ‘white paper’, the inverted commas are mine.

¹⁹ In Latin in the original. Engl.: ‘an honorable task’ (Friel 1981: 93); It.: ‘Azione onesta’ (De Petris 1996: 265).

Owen È già un impegnato Ibernofilo.

Jimmy Cioè ama –

Owen D'accordo Jimmy – lo sappiamo – ama Baile Beag; e vuole bene a tutti voi.

Hugh Scusate...posso...?

Hugh adesso è ubriaco. Si aggrappa al bordo del tavolo.

Owen Vai pure avanti, Padre (*fa cenno di fare silenzio*) Per favore – fate silenzio.

p. 36...

Hugh E noi, signori, siamo da parte nostra felici di offrirvi la nostra amicizia, la nostra ospitalità, e qualsiasi assistenza di cui possiate avere bisogno. Signori – siate i benvenuti!

Qualche applauso. Le formalità sono superate. Conversazioni generali. I soldati familiarizzano con quelli del luogo. Manus e Owen si incontrano sotto al palcoscenico.

Owen Lancey è un maledetto idiota George invece è a posto. Ma dimmi come stai tu?

Manus Ma che razza di traduzione era mai quella?

Owen Ne ho fatto un casino?

Manus Non traducevi ciò che diceva Lancey.

Owen 'Incertezza nel significato è incipiente poesia' – Chi lo ha detto?²⁰

Manus Non c'era nulla di incerto in quello che Lancey ha detto: è una sporca²¹ operazione militare, Owen! E qual'è la funzione di Yolland? Cosa c'è di 'sbagliato' nei nomi dei luoghi che abbiamo qua?

Owen Assolutamente niente. Saranno solo standardizzati.

Manus Intendi cambiati in inglese.

Owen Dove c'è ambiguità, saranno anglicizzati.

Manus E poi perchè ti chiamano Roland! Entrambi ti chiamano Roland!

²⁰ «Uncertainty of meaning is incipient poetry» (Steiner 1998: 246). There is irony in this question, because obviously in 1833 Steiner had not yet written *After Babel*, so nobody had said that yet; it is Friel who speaks through Owen.

²¹ The original word is 'bloody', which De Petris translates in her version with the strong, and I would say vulgar expression 'fottutissima'. In my opinion it is better to appease this expression, because I do not think it fits with the character of Manus, a well-educated and polite man. For this reason I have preferred to use the less strong word 'sporca' ('dirty').

Owen Ah sì, Non è ridicolo? Sembra abbiano capito male sin dall'inizio – oppure non sanno pronunciare il nome Owen. Avevo paura che qualcuno di voi bastardi ridesse.

Manus Non vuoi dirglielo?

Owen Sì – sì – presto – presto.

p.37...

Manus Ma loro...

Owen Calma fratello calma. Owen – Roland²² – al diavolo. È solo un nome. Sono lo stesso io, no? Allora, no?

Manus In effetti sì. Sei lo stesso Owen di sempre.

Owen E tu lo stesso Manus. E in un certo senso ci completiamo a vicenda (*Da una leggera pacca a Manus, scherzosamente, e poi si volta per unirsi agli altri. Si allontana*) Ok allora – chi ha conosciuto chi? Non è forse lavoro per un intermediario questo?²³

Manus osserva Owen muoversi in modo confidenziale, prendere Maire per mano e presentarla a Yolland.

Hugh sta tentando di superare i gradini.

Jimmy è immerso in un libro.

Doalty e Bridget stanno ripensando alle loro risate soffocate.

Sarah sta fissando Manus.

²² As Pine brings to the fore in his Appendix, the name 'Roland' is not accidentally used by Friel, since as he has found out, G. Steiner uses it in *After Babel* in the chapter 'Word Against Object', where he speaks about the act of naming, saying: «Two men meet at a narrow place [...], and each in turn tries to force or bar a crossing [...]. The outcome is an act of naming. Either the one combatant names the other, [...] of each of the two discloses his name to the other-'I am Roland' [...] 'I am Robin of Sherwood forest' [...]. To falsify or withhold ones real name [...] is to guard one's life, one's *Karma* or essence of being, from pillage or alien procurement. To pretend to be another [...] is to employ the 'alternative' powers of language in the most thorough ontologically liberating way» (Steiner 1998: 235-236). This can be considered as the source Friel has taken into account in building up the 'duality' of Owen's character. 'Roland' is the name Owen uses to guard his own life from the alien procurement, the defence mechanism.

²³ The English word in the original text is 'go-between', which in Italian can be simply translated as 'intermediario'. Carla De Petris translates this term with the Italian word 'ruffiano', which actually corresponds to the English word 'go-between' when this is used in an extended way, in other terms when this means 'pander'. I do not think that the Italian term 'ruffiano', used by De Petris, translates properly the English 'go-between', because, in defining himself a 'pander', it could seem that Owen makes fun of himself, and I do not think this is the case. Rather, I think Friel uses this term referring to its common meaning of 'intermediary', 'negotiator' that, besides, has more sense in this context, because Owen, the translator, is using it to define himself.

GREEK TRANSLATION OF AN EXTRACT FROM BRIAN FRIEL'S *TRANSLATIONS*²⁴

Μετάφραση αποσπάσματος από το έργο *Translations* του Brian Friel²⁵, σσ. 31-37²⁶.

σ. 31...

Η Maire απομακρύνεται από το Manus.

Μπαίνει ο Owen με το Lancey και το Yolland. Ο λοχαγός Lancey είναι ένας μεσόκοπος, μικρόσωμος και μονοκόμματος αξιωματικός, άριστος γνώστης της ειδικότητάς του ως χαρτογράφου, αλλά αμήχανος με τους πολίτες, και ειδικά με τους συγκεκριμένους ξένους πολίτες. Τα καταφέρνει καλύτερα στα έργα, παρά στα λόγια.

Ο υπολοχαγός Yolland είναι γύρω στα τριάντα. Ψηλός, αδύνατος ξανθομάλλης, άχαρος στις κινήσεις του, ντροπαλός και αδέξιος στους τρόπους του. Είναι φανερό ότι έγινε στρατιωτικός κατά λάθος.

Owen Φτάσαμε. Ο λοχαγός Lancey –ο πατέρας μου.

Lancey Καλησπέρα.

Ο Hugh αποκτά ύφος επίσημης εγκαρδιότητας, καθώς υποδέχεται τους επισκέπτες του.

Hugh Σεις κι εγώ έχουμε ήδη γνωριστεί, κύριε.

Lancey Ναι.

σ. 32...

Owen Και ο υπολοχαγός Yolland –αμφότεροι του Βασιλικού Μηχανικού –ο πατέρας μου.

Hugh Κύριοι, καλώς ήλθατε.

Yolland Πώς είστε.

²⁴ This extract is taken from Act One of Brian Friel's *Translations*, the setting of which is a disused barn, where lessons are being held. At this stage Owen has just come back from Dublin after many years, bringing with him two English officers involved in the Ordnance Survey. Owen introduces them to his father and to the locals, who are the pupils of the Hedge School. Captain Lancey is supposed to explain the project to the people there. Since nobody speaks English except from Hugh and his son Manus, Owen 'translates'. His translation is clearly trying to foresee and prevent any reaction against the Survey, since he is aware of the fact that the Survey is a military operation. In so doing he simplifies, sometimes changes, or even adds, in order to beautify the operation. He tries to be diplomatic, a kind of negotiator. His skill to translate makes him feel superior to his countrymen, but he does not realise that this means to betray his *Irishness*. He works for the English and his translation becomes a support for the English interests, more than an attempt to create a 'bridge' between the two cultures.

²⁵ The play has never been staged in Greece, and there is no previous translation. The Hellenic Centre for Theatrical Research –Theatre Museum provided me with the titles of all the plays by Friel, which have been translated and staged in Greece, and *Translations* is not to be found among them. Nobody seemed to have heard of it in the National Book Centre, in Athens, either, and the same applies to all the major bookstores.

²⁶ I have, generally speaking, tried to be precise, and to keep the translation close to the original text, in terms of phrasing, also keeping in mind that my target is to achieve a 'natural' and lively, humorous and colourful effect in Greek. In some cases, where a close translation would sound odd in the target language, to the degree of being unacceptable, I have used parallel phrases to express the content as best as I can. The text is quite accessible, otherwise. In the names of the characters, I decided to keep the Latin alphabet, and not to transliterate them into Greek, but this only expresses a personal preference.

Yolland's translated speech may sound 'odd' in Greek, in the sense that the average Greek person does not use this kind of phraseology. Although his speech is not 'odd' enough to be 'unacceptable', his different 'register' creates in Greek the effect of 'foreignness' and 'awkwardness', associated stereotypically with English people, which is very true for Yolland in this case. The interesting thing is that even Friel writes in different kinds of English, shifting between different forms of English language use (for instance, formal/informal, awkward/relaxed, artificial/spontaneous), while he portrays and colours his characters from the beginning. This, in a way, is a 'compensation' for the 'loss' of not really using English and Irish as two distinct languages.

Hugh Gaudeo vos hic adesse²⁷.

Owen Και οι τελευταίες συστάσεις: από δω, ορισμένοι κάτοικοι του Baile Beag. Τώρα βρίσκεστε ανάμεσα στους εκλεκτότερους ανθρώπους στην Ιρλανδία.

(Σταματάει για να αφήσει το Lancey να μιλήσει. Ο Lancey δε λέει ούτε κουβέντα.)

Θα θέλατε να πείτε δυο λέξεις, λοχαγέ;

Hugh Ένα ποτηράκι, κύριε;

Lancey Ένα τί;

Hugh Ίσως ένα ελαφρύ αναψυκτικό; Ένα μικρό δείγμα από αυτό που εδώ λέμε «νερό της ζωής»;

Lancey Όχι, όχι...

Hugh Ίσως αργότερα, αφού...

Lancey Άν μου επιτρέπετε, θα πω ό,τι έχω να πω, και όσο το δυνατόν συντομότερα. Roland, δε μιλούν καθόλου²⁸ Αγγλικά;

Owen Μην ανησυχείτε. Θα μεταφράζω.

Lancey Μάλιστα. (Ξεροβήχει. Μιλάει σα να απευθύνεται σε παιδιά –μάλλον δυνατά, προφέροντας με υπερβολική ευκρίνεια.) Ίσως με έχετε δει –δει, εσείς εμένα –να δουλεύω σε αυτόν τον τομέα –τομέα; -να δουλεύω. Είμαστε εδώ... εδώ... σε αυτό το μέρος – καταλαβαίνετε; -για να φτιάξουμε ένα χάρτη –χάρτη –ένα χάρτη και-

Jimmy Nonne Latine loquitur²⁹?

(Ο Hugh κάνει νόημα στο Jimmy να μη διακόπτει.)

σ. 33...

Hugh James.

Lancey (στο Jimmy) Δεν ομιλώ την Γαελική³⁰, κύριε. (κοιτάζει τον Owen).

Owen Συνεχίστε.

Lancey Ο χάρτης είναι μια αναπαράσταση σε χαρτί...μια εικόνα –καταλαβαίνετε εικόνα;- μια χάρτινη εικόνα...που δείχνει, που αναπαριστά αυτή τη χώρα –ναι; -που δείχνει τη χώρα σας σε μικρογραφία, –ένα –ένα –ένα –ένα –ένα σχέδιο σε χαρτί, με –με –με –με –με κλίμακα

Ξαφνικά ο Doalty χαχανίζει. Μετά η Bridget. Και η Sarah. Ο Owen βιάζεται να τα μπαλώσει.

Owen Ίσως είναι καλύτερα εάν υποθέσετε³¹ ότι σας καταλαβαίνουν.

²⁷ Latin in the original, it simply means 'welcome'.

²⁸ The emphasis in the use of italics is maintained in the translation, as it is in the original.

²⁹ Latin in the original: 'Does he not speak Latin?'.

³⁰ Lancey does not speak Latin, which is why he misunderstands Jimmy's Latin for Gaelic, which he does not speak, either. The effect is quite comic, since this 'civilised' Englishman is, in classical terms, less educated than an Irish peasant.

³¹ Italics exists in the original, also. Friel is ironic here, building on the fact that the English word 'assume' is of Latin origin. Earlier in the first act, Hugh and his pupils play a game of words: each time he uses an English word with a Latin etymology, he stops to ask a person to tell him which that Latin word is. The irony is, of course, that

Lancey A, ναι;

Owen Και εγώ θα μεταφράζω όσο μιλάτε.

Lancey Μάλιστα. Ναι. Πολύ καλά. Ίσως έχεις δίκιο. Λοιπόν. Η δουλειά μας έχει ως εξής. *(Κοιτάζει τον Owen. Ο Owen κουνάει το κεφάλι καταφατικά.)* Η κυβέρνηση της Μεγαλειότητός Του έχει διατάξει την πρώτη αναλυτική χαρτογράφηση ολόκληρης της χώρας – μια γενική τριγωνομέτρηση που θα συμπεριλάβει διεξοδικές υδρογραφικές και τοπογραφικές πληροφορίες, και που θα εκτελεστεί σε κλίμακα έξι ιντσών προς ένα αγγλικό μίλι.

Hugh *(ρίχνοντας ένα ποτό)* Λαμπρά –λαμπρά.

Ο Lancey κοιτάζει τον Owen.

Owen Φτιάχνουν έναν καινούριο χάρτη όλης της χώρας.

Ο Lancey κοιτάζει τον Owen. Τί; Αυτό είναι όλο; Ο Owen χαμογελάει καθησυχαστικά και κάνει νόημα στο Lancey να συνεχίσει.

Lancey Αυτή η τεράστια επιχείρηση έχει δρομολογηθεί έτσι ώστε οι στρατιωτικές αρχές να είναι εξοπλισμένες με τις τελευταίες (και τις πιο ακριβείς) πληροφορίες για κάθε γωνιά αυτού του κομματιού της Αυτοκρατορίας.

σ. 34...

Owen Η δουλειά γίνεται από στρατιώτες, γιατί είναι ειδικευμένοι σ'αυτό.

Lancey Και επίσης, ώστε ολόκληρη η βάση της αποτίμησης των εκτάσεων γης να τεθεί σε νέα βάση και να επανεκτιμηθεί, με σκοπό την επίτευξη πιο δίκαιης φορολογίας.

Owen Αυτός ο νέος χάρτης θα αντικαταστήσει το χάρτη του μεσίτη, για να ξέρετε από δω και πέρα τί είναι δικό σας, σύμφωνα με το νόμο.

Lancey Εν κατακλείδι, θα ήθελα να διαβάσω δυο μικρά αποσπάσματα από τη λευκή Χάρτα, που αποτελεί το καταστατικό μας: *(Διαβάζει)* «Όλες οι προηγούμενες χαρτογραφήσεις της Ιρλανδίας προέρχονταν έπειτα από κατασχέσεις και βίαιη μεταφορά περιουσιών. Η παρούσα χαρτογράφηση έχει στόχο να ανακουφίσει τους ιδιοκτήτες και τους νομείς της γης από την άνιση φορολογία».

Owen Ο λοχαγός ελπίζει ότι ο κόσμος θα συνεργαστεί με τους άνδρες του Μηχανικού, και ότι ο νέος χάρτης θα φέρει μειωμένη φορολογία.

Hugh Αξιέπαινο εγχείρημα –opus honestum³²! Και το δεύτερο απόσπασμα;

Lancey «Η Ιρλανδία θα πρέπει να αισθάνεται προνομιούχος. Τέτοια χαρτογράφηση δε γίνεται στην Αγγλία. Αυτό και μόνο το γεγονός, δεν μπορεί παρά να θεωρηθεί ως απόδειξη της διάθεσης της κυβέρνησης να προαγάγει τα συμφέροντα της Ιρλανδίας». Πράγμα που εκφράζει και τη δική μου θέση.

they are supposedly speaking Irish, not English, and that they do not speak English, although they know Latin very well. In this sentence, Owen is being ironic, as the underlying meaning is that, the Irish peasants can actually understand English also, since they were able to play the word game previously. Ultimately, Friel comments on his own theatrical convention of using one stage language, instead of two. The irony is lost in the translation, since in Greek there is no synonym of 'assume', that is based on a Latin root.

³² Latin in the original: 'an honourable task'.

Owen Αυτή η χαρτογράφηση φανερώνει το ενδιαφέρον της κυβέρνησης για την Ιρλανδία, και ο λοχαγός σας ευχαριστεί που τον ακούσατε τόσο προσεχτικά.

Hugh Ευχαρίστησή μας, λοχαγέ.

Lancey Υπολοχαγέ Yolland;

σ. 35...

Yolland Εγώ –εγώ –εγώ δεν έχω να προσθέσω τίποτα...

Owen Αυτός που φτιάχνει τον καινούριο χάρτη είναι ο λοχαγός. Η δουλειά του George είναι να βεβαιωθεί ότι τα τοπωνύμια στο χάρτη είναι... σωστά. (Στο Yolland) Μόνο δυο λέξεις –θα ήθελαν να σ'ακούσουν. (Προς την τάξη) Δε θα θέλατε ν'ακούσετε και το George;

Maire Έχει τίποτα να πει;

Yolland (Στη Maire) Συγνώμη;

Owen Λέει ότι πεθαίνει να σ'ακούσει.

Yolland Πολύ ευγενικό εκ μέρους σας –σας ευχαριστώ... (Προς την τάξη) Μπορώ μόνο να πω πως νιώθω... νιώθω πολύ ανόητος που... που εργάζομαι εδώ και δε μιλώ τη γλώσσα σας. Αλλά σκοπεύω να επανορθώσω –με τη βοήθεια του Roland –αλήθεια, σκοπεύω να επανορθώσω.

Owen Θέλει να του μάθω Ιρλανδικά!

Hugh Είστε διπλά καλοδεχούμενος, κύριε.

Yolland Νομίζω ότι το φυσικό περιβάλλον εδώ είναι... είναι... είναι πολύ όμορφο. Ήδη το έχω ερωτευτεί. Ελπίζω η εισβολή μας αυτή στις ζωές σας να μην είναι υπερβολικά άξεστη. Και ξέρω ότι θα είμαι ευτυχισμένος, πολύ ευτυχισμένος εδώ.

Owen Είναι ήδη ολόψυχα δοσμένος στην Ιρλανδία!

Jimmy Του αρέσει—

Owen Εντάξει, Jimmy, ξέρουμε –του αρέσει το Baile Beag. Και σας συμπαθεί όλους.

Hugh Παρακαλώ... Μπορώ να...;

Ο Hugh είναι πλέον μεθυσμένος. Κρατιέται από την άκρη της έδρας.

Owen Συνέχισε, Πατέρα. (σηκώνει τα χέρια του για να κάνει ησυχία) Παρακαλώ – παρακαλώ.

σ. 36...

Hugh Και για μας, κύριοι, και για μας είναι ευτυχία να σας προσφέρουμε τη φιλία μας, τη φιλοξενία μας, και κάθε βοήθεια που ίσως χρειαστείτε. Κύριοι –καλωσήρθατε!

Μερικά σκόρπια χειροκροτήματα. Οι επισημότητες παίρνουν τέλος. Γενική συζήτηση. Οι στρατιωτικοί γνωρίζουν τους ντόπιους. Ο Manus και ο Owen τα λένε μπροστά από τη σκηνή.

Owen Ο Lancey είναι κλασικός ανεγκέφαλος³³, αλλά ο George είναι εντάξει. Πώς είσαι, αλήθεια;

Manus Τί σόι μετάφραση ήταν αυτή, Owen;

Owen Τα έκανα θάλασσα;

Manus Δεν έλεγες αυτά που έλεγε ο Lancey!

Owen «Η αβεβαιότητα είναι η αρχή της ποίησης». Θυμάσαι ποιός το είπε³⁴;

Manus Δεν υπήρχε τίποτα το αβέβαιο στα λεγόμενα του Lancey: είναι μια καταραμένη στρατιωτική επιχείρηση, Owen! Και ο Yolland, τί ρόλο παίζει; Δηλαδή, τα τοπωνύμια που έχουμε είναι «λάθος»;

Owen Όχι, καθόλου. Απλά, θα τυποποιηθούν.

Manus Θες να πεις, θα γίνουν Αγγλικά;

Owen Όπου υπάρχει αμφισημία, θα Αγγλοποιηθούν.

Manus Και σε φωνάζουν Roland! Και οι δύο σε φωνάζουν Roland!

Owen Σσσστ... Δεν είναι γελοίο; Όλο λάθος το λένε, από την αρχή. Μια εξήγηση υπάρχει: δε μπορούν να προφέρουν το «Owen»! Φοβόμουν μην αρχίσετε να γελάτε, παλιοκαθάρματα...

Manus Δε θα τους το πεις;

Owen Ναι, ναι. Σε λίγο, σε λίγο.

σ. 37...

Manus Μα αυτοί...

Owen Ηρέμησε, φίλε μου, ηρέμησε. Owen, Roland³⁵ –τί διάολο. Ένα όνομα είναι. Εγώ, δεν είμαι ο ίδιος; Δεν είμαι;

Manus Αλήθεια. Πάντα ο ίδιος, Owen.

³³ The words 'bloody ramrod' of the original were translated like this, as it seemed to be the best 'solution'. Alternative words seemed too strong, or too weak to express what Owen says. He still does not really fully realise Lancey's power and how dangerous he is, until towards the end; his use of 'bloody' is just habitual, casual.

³⁴ 'Uncertainty of meaning is incipient poetry' (Steiner G., 1998, *After Babel, Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford UP: Oxford, p. 246). There is irony in this question, because obviously in 1833 Steiner had not yet written *After Babel*, so nobody had said that yet; it is Friel who speaks through Owen.

³⁵ As Pine brings to the fore in his Appendix, the name 'Roland' is not accidentally used by Friel, since as he has found out, G. Steiner uses it in *After Babel* in the chapter 'Word Against Object', where he speaks about the act of naming, saying: "Two men meet at a narrow place [...], and each in turn tries to force or bar a crossing [...]. The outcome is an act of naming. Either the one combatant names the other, [...] of each of the two discloses his name to the other-'I am Roland' [...] 'I am Robin of Sherwood forest' [...]. To falsify or withhold one's real name [...] is to guard one's life, one's *Karma* or essence of being, from pillage or alien procurement. To pretend to be another [...] is to employ the 'alternative' powers of language in the most thorough ontologically liberating way." (Steiner G., 1998, pp. 235-236). This can be considered as the source Friel has taken into account in building up the 'duality' of Owen's character. 'Roland' is the name Owen uses to guard his own life from the alien procurement, the defence mechanism.

Owen Πάντα ο ίδιος, Manus. Και, κατά κάποιον τρόπο συμπληρώνουμε ο ένας τον άλλο. (Δίνει μια χωρατατζίδικη ελαφριά γροθιά στο Manus, και γυρνά πίσω στους άλλους. Καθώς πηγαίνει:) Ωραία, λοιπόν: Ποιός γνώρισε ποιόν; Αυτή δεν είναι δουλειά για το διαμεσολαβητή;

Ο Manus παρακολουθεί τον Owen, που διασχίζει με αυτοπεποίθηση τη σκηνή, καθώς παίρνει τη Maire από το χέρι και τη συστήνει στο Yolland. Ο Hugh προσπαθεί να 'ζυγίσει' τα σκαλοπάτια. Ο Jimmy έχει απορροφηθεί σε ένα κείμενο. Ο Doalty και η Bridget αρχίζουν πάλι να χασκογελούν. Η Sarah έχει καρφώσει το βλέμμα της στο Manus.

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