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# Adapting Place, Embracing Hybridity: Brian Friel's and Frank McGuinness's Dramatic Adaptations of Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen

Nancy Elizabeth Raftery

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ADAPTING PLACE, EMBRACING HYBRIDITY:  
BRIAN FRIEL'S AND FRANK MCGUINNESS'S DRAMATIC ADAPTATIONS  
OF ANTON CHEKHOV AND HENRIK IBSEN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Nancy Elizabeth Raftery

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Nancy Elizabeth Raftery

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

---

Christopher Kuipers, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English, Advisor

---

David B. Downing, Ph.D.  
Professor of English

---

Todd N. Thompson, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English

---

James M. Cahalan, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus of English

---

Roslyn Blyn-LaDrew, Ph.D.  
Lecturer of Irish Gaelic  
University of Pennsylvania

ACCEPTED

---

Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.  
Dean  
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Adapting Place, Embracing Hybridity: Brian Friel's and Frank McGuinness's Dramatic Adaptations of Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen

Author: Nancy Elizabeth Raftery

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Christopher Kuipers

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. David B. Downing  
Dr. Todd N. Thompson  
Dr. James M. Cahalan  
Dr. Roslyn Blyn-LaDrew

In this dissertation, I examine adaptations of plays by Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov by the celebrated contemporary Irish playwrights Brian Friel (1929 - 2015) and Frank McGuinness (b. 1953). Critics have analyzed some of the individual adaptations, but I connect the adaptations done by Friel and McGuinness, discovering deeper relationships between these Irish playwrights and Ibsen and Chekhov. Moreover, I interrogate how these adaptations function as a way of redefining Ireland; they represent an attempt by writers in a newly hybrid and multicultural Ireland to engage with this identity from within, while framing Ireland as a multicultural nation directly connected in the richness of arts and history to the other members of the European Union and the global community at large.

My theoretical approach here is twofold: 1) to use place studies to situate my examination, and 2) to use adaptation theory for textual analysis of the works. I examine Friel's adaptations of Chekhov's *The Bear* and *Uncle Vanya*, as well as his adaptation of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*; I also discuss Friel's original play *Afterplay*, which follows the fate of two of Chekhov's beloved characters. I examine McGuinness's adaptations of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The Lady*

*from the Sea, John Gabriel Borkman, and Peer Gynt.* Finally, I end with a look at how both Friel and McGuinness adapted Chekhov's *Three Sisters*.

The mere existence of the adaptations examined here underscores a deeper connection between people across cultures and nations; they point to a more globalized notion of experience. As Ireland itself evolves in its role both as a European Union nation and as a global entity, the need for dramatic adaptations such as the ones discussed here will persist. The adaptations by Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness examined here pay homage to the past, while embracing a new future, replete with new experiences and new ideas.

## DEDICATION

*For Da who taught me to dream,  
and for my mother who showed me how to turn dreams into reality.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I went back to school for my Ph.D. when my older daughter turned one; I left for IUP the day after her first birthday party. It was emotional to say the least, but pursuing a terminal degree had been my dream for as long as I could remember. Of course, the exact degree transformed over time—I started out wanting to pursue an M.D., which then changed into a Ph.D. in biology, which then completed metamorphosed into a Ph.D. in English, once I discovered a passion for Irish literature—as I changed and life interrupted. There is no way to list everyone here who helped me along the way, so forgive me.

For all of my colleagues and the Administration at Camden County College, I wholeheartedly thank you for all of your support—emotional, educational and financial. I am especially indebted to the members of the English Department whose constant encouragement was always welcome. In particular, I have to acknowledge Professor Eileen Radetich, whom I met just as my journey into Irish literature was beginning. You traveled this road with me, and you were there, a true friend, at every step to laugh and cry with me.

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journey, if you have not traveled it yourself. Lisa Marzano and Dr. Michelle Gaffner Wood, thank you for your kind words, smiles, laughter, and support.

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I would spread the cloths under your feet:

But I, being poor, have only my dreams;

I have spread my dreams under your feet;

Tread softly because you tread on my dreams. (73)

You have certainly tread softly with me, and I am forever grateful.

All errors and omissions are mine and mine alone.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“ . . . the dramatist does not write for one man; he writes for an audience, a collection of people.”

—Brian Friel (Murray 18)

In this dissertation, I examine adaptations of plays by Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov by the celebrated contemporary Irish playwrights Brian Friel (1929 - 2015) and Frank McGuinness (b. 1953). Critics have commented widely on the original work of both Friel and McGuinness. Friel was arguably the greatest living Irish playwright, until his recent death on October 2, 2015; McGuinness is one of the most accomplished dramatists of the generation after Friel, yet a comparison of their dramatic adaptations has yet to be explored. Critics have analyzed some of the individual adaptations, but I connect the adaptations done by Friel and McGuinness, in the hopes of discovering deeper relationships between these Irish playwrights and Ibsen and Chekhov. Moreover, I interrogate how these adaptations function as a way of redefining Ireland; they represent an attempt by writers in a newly hybrid and multicultural Ireland to engage with this identity from within, while framing Ireland as a multicultural nation directly connected in the richness of arts and history to the other members of the European Union and the global community at large.

My theoretical approach here is twofold: 1) I use place studies to situate my examination, and 2) I plan to use adaptation theory for textual analysis of the

works. I use the term “place” here as employed by place-studies scholars such as Yi-Fu Tuan, indicating that the spaces that I examine are clearly infused with meaning. According to Tuan, space and place are inextricably connected to experience. Tuan highlights three main themes in his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*:

- (1) The biological facts. Human infants have only very crude notions of space and place. . . .
- (2) The relations of space and place. In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. “Space” is more abstract than “place.” What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.
- (3) The range of experience or knowledge. Experience can be direct and intimate, or it can be indirect and conceptual, mediate by symbols. We know our home intimately; we can only know *about* our country if it is very large. (6)

I am mainly concerned with Tuan’s second and third themes here. Regarding the second theme, a space is transformed into a place by the performance of the play. In other words, a stage is transformed into a Chekhovian living space that transports us to that point in time and that place. The idea of place being infused with value is one that I continue with in my discussion of Tim Cresswell’s theories that follows. The third theme here is perhaps the most exciting. Drama allows us to experience other places; by its very nature, we are transported to the setting of the play. To go even further here, our experience or knowledge of a

particular play informs our reception of that work. Being an audience for a production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is different than viewing Friel's or McGuinness's adaptation of that work. Likewise, a strictly literal engagement with the work differs from viewing a production of the work. Throughout my discussion, I peel back these layers to attempt to engage with these works as fully as possible. However, my examination is limited by the amount of works that are currently in print.

Tuan's notion of topophilia is also critical to this dissertation. In his book *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, he outlines the term:

The word "topophilia" is a neologism, useful in that it can be defined broadly to include all of the human being's affective ties with the material environment. These differ greatly in intensity, subtlety, and mode of expression. The response to environment may be primarily aesthetic: it may then vary from the fleeting pleasure one gets from a view to the equally fleeting but far more intense sense of beauty that is suddenly revealed. The response may be tactile, a delight in the feel of air, water, earth. More permanent and less easy to express are feelings that one has toward a place because it is home, the locus of memories, and the means of gaining a livelihood.

Drama, as a performative art, allows the audience to see this expression of the experience of an environment. Indeed, patriotism is a subcategory of topophilia,

and this connection between land and nation is one that runs throughout my analyses of these plays.

For Tim Cresswell, place and humanity are inextricably linked. Like Tuan, place becomes space, once the space is infused with meaning or value. According to Cresswell, “Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. Place, at a basic level, is space invested with meaning in the context of power” (12). Cresswell, however, goes one step further in arguing that there can be no place without humanity:

It [place] is a construction of humanity but a necessary one – one that human life is impossible to conceive of without. In other words there was no ‘place’ before there was humanity but once we came into existence then place did too. A future without place is simply inconceivable. (33)

Thus, place is contingent upon humanity. However, the human experience is far from homogeneous. Therefore, place is kinetic; it is not static. It is dependent upon the society, culture, and people who occupy it. This theory is particularly fascinating when we consider how place has been problematized in Irish literature; I return to this idea shortly.

The stage does serve, at least to a certain degree, as a reflection of the world around it. A textual analysis of the works reflects how the Irish adaptations differ from the traditionally available translations. The non-Irish works examined here were not originally written in English; however, a study of their translations into English is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, this dissertation

attempts to compare the plays in light of place and adaptation theories in order to make broader conclusions. In R. Radhakrishnan's essay "Why Compare?" he connects these two practices: "Both translation and comparison foreground the problem of 'identity' and 'difference.' Whether we are translating or comparing, we come up with the theme of recognition and misrecognition, and the deeper problematic of Self and Other" (467). These notions of Self and Other are not foreign to Ireland or Irish literature. Indeed, Irish identity has often been defined by negation, being *not* English. In its early years the Abbey Theatre, the national theatre of Ireland, sought to establish an identity for Irish drama. More specifically, it aimed to isolate Irish drama from other dramas by producing only Irish drama. Such a move isolated Irish drama, but it also allowed for an in-depth examination of what exactly Irish drama meant. The differences examined here can take the form of language changes (English to Hiberno-English), in terms of word choice or rhythm changes. For example, Friel sometimes turns Chekhov's extended monologues into rapid conversation in order to mimic a more Irish sense of verbal repartee. I do not approach these works strictly on a linguistic level as products of translations, but I consider how language functions as a product of place. Thus, the act of adapting the text directly relates back to the problem of place.

Establishing working definitions of key terms is paramount for such an examination, and it leads to a discussion of adaptation theory. I use Julie Sanders' distinction between adaptation and appropriation for my work: "An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original. . . On



the other hand, appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain” (26). Thus, in using the term “adaptation,” I argue that the original (Ibsen or Chekhov) is connected to the adaptation (Friel or McGuinness). Since I am not fluent in Norwegian or Russian, I—like Friel and McGuinness—use English translations of these plays as my “originals.” It is important to note here that neither Friel nor McGuinness is fluent in Norwegian or Russian, so I am essentially starting from the same point that they did. To add an analysis of the translation of each play from the original language into English would bring in another dimension, more fitting for a linguistic study. In the process of adaptation, both Friel and McGuinness referred to multiple English translations in order to arrive at their adaptation of each work. These translations are renditions of the original works into English, whereas the adaptations examined here are versions of these plays altered for a contemporary Irish audience.

The Irish playwrights do not simply take the ideas of Ibsen and Chekhov and run with them. Rather, Friel and McGuinness consciously seek to adapt these plays for an Irish audience and sensibility. To help analyze these adaptations in the context of their transcultural nature, I use Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation*. These adaptations are not only crossing cultures, but also significant time periods. Hutcheon contends, “Even within a single culture, the changes can be so great that they can in fact be considered transcultural, on a micro- rather than macrolevel” (147). Ireland exemplifies this idea, as it has changed and continues to change dramatically as it assumes a greater role in the

European Union and the global community at large. However, these adaptations are successful, because the cores of the plots still echo in today's Ireland. Even more useful here is Hutcheon's concept of indigenization: "The context of reception, however, is just as important as the context of creation when it comes to adapting" (149). Both Friel and McGuinness are practitioners of theatre, ever conscious of how their works will appear on stage. My textual analyses of the adaptations, using adaptation theory, relate directly back to the larger theoretical framework of place studies.

The question of place exists throughout Irish literature and history, and it is inextricably tied to manifestations of Irish identity. For a country that has undergone invasion and colonization, the idea of "the land" has remained a turbulent constant. Land has been the source of perennial conflict in Ireland. Indeed, one of the first plays to be performed at the Abbey Theatre, the national theatre of Ireland, was Pádraic Colum's *The Land* (1905). Land divides Ireland, yet it also separates Ireland from the rest of western Europe. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of Partition of 1922 established the six, Protestant-majority, counties in the northeast section of the island as Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but was immediately contested in a two-year Civil War between Irish supporters and opponents of the Treaty, underscoring just how contentious the land is in Ireland. The remaining twenty-six, Catholic-majority, counties became the Free State and, in 1948, the Republic of Ireland. The construction of these lines was heavily influenced by religion used as an indicator of political affiliation. Nonetheless, people change location, religion, and

politics; the demarcations of the land remain. Much as Colum's play underscored the importance of place in early-twentieth century Ireland, John B. Keane's play *The Field* (1965)—adapted in a popular film starring Richard Harrison—illustrated how persistent this subject was, with the play's protagonist willing to commit murder in order to hold onto a small, rented piece of land. In accordance with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the Nineteenth Amendment to Bunreacht na hÉireann (the Constitution of Ireland) took effect on 2 December 1999; the Amendment reworked Articles 2 and 3, whose previous wording had laid claim to the entire island as Ireland in direct response to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922. The heart of this debate is critical to the following study, as it poses this all-important question: What is the relationship between people and land in Ireland? Does land identify people, or rather, do people identify the land? Land's association with socio-economic status is clear, but the more volatile association involves land and identity, both religious and political.

The process of decolonization in Ireland is thus severely handicapped by the bifurcation of the island. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Ireland saw unprecedented immigration, as refugees from Northern Africa and Eastern Europe sought political asylum there. Multiculturalism was thus thrust upon a relatively ethnically homogenous nation. Theatre becomes critical here, because it inherently crosses boundaries; the audience becomes voyeurs to the action of the stage. Friel and McGuinness have adapted Ibsen and Chekhov for the Irish stage and audience. In doing so, they have attempted to break down the boundaries, in order to relate the issues of these classical plays to a

contemporary, multicultural Irish audience. Since the Republic of Ireland stands on its own as a member of the European Union, there is no need for England to act as an intermediary of theatre, as it often had in the past.

Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness have interrogated place in both their personal and professional lives. The reality of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has marginalized both writers, so it is not surprising that these borders appear throughout their plays. Friel was born in Omagh, County Tyrone, in Northern Ireland, although he lived in Donegal, which is part of the Republic of Ireland, is situated on the northernmost tip of the island, and, like Tyrone, was part of the historical province of Ulster. McGuinness was born in Buncrana, County Donegal; although Buncrana is situated in the Republic of Ireland, it is close to Derry, the major shopping and industrial center for the area, which is located in Northern Ireland. While the official name of this city is Londonderry, I use Derry throughout this dissertation, because Brian Friel calls the city by that name. Although they span a large time frame in history, Friel's plays are concentrated in County Donegal, Ireland in a fictional town called "Ballybeg," which translates to the generic "small town" in English. McGuinness, on the other hand, frequently posits his characters outside of Ireland; however, these characters always directly relate back to his native island, either in ethnicity, personal struggle, or both. The journey towards self-actualization occurs for most of the characters in these two authors' plays, yet these journeys are often unrealized. Lines of demarcation, whether real or imagined, block their paths.

Place is constantly being negotiated in the works of these authors; the characters illustrate place-studies pioneer Yi-Fu Tuan's notion that people define place. Tuan's ideas are critical here, because he argues that place is directly related to people's experiences and culture. These theatrical adaptations are ways of presenting "shared traits that transcend cultural particularities and may therefore reflect the general human condition" (Tuan 5). If people define place, then it is a fluid concept, as opposed to the rigid notion of defining place strictly by land. However, in Ireland, place has historically been defined by the land itself. If people define place, then borders can become arbitrary physical constructions. In adapting Chekhov and Ibsen, these playwrights seek to cross borders in a search for communities to some degree similar to the ones that they inhabit. These playwrights, themselves born on the border, adapt playwrights who themselves occupy the border of the European continent. By applying place-studies theory in this dissertation, I connect Ireland to Norway and Russia.

Homi Bhabha argues that "political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause, come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective" (3). In other words, people need to take a step back to approach the situation. Another lens is necessary here, and I argue that the stage provides such an "interstitial perspective" (Bhabha 3). He further states that "'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the

idea of society itself" (1-2). Theatre is precisely one of these "in-between spaces" that provides an "interstitial perspective."

There are striking similarities between the cultural landscapes of these three countries, both during the time period of Ibsen's and Chekhov's plays and continuing until today. Ireland, Norway, and Russia are rural countries punctuated by urban spaces. Their economies at the turn into the twentieth century were largely agrarian, with Ireland and Norway also heavily dependent on fishing. The role of land as a source of sustenance is marked perhaps most prominently in Chekhov's plays. However, water serves as not only a source of livelihood, but also as physical division, which creates isolation, as we see in the Irish plays and in those of Ibsen. In her book *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy*, Toril Moi highlights the connection between Ireland and Norway, both in terms of the authors and the countries themselves:

In some ways Ibsen's cultural and social position is close to that of the great Irish writers emerging towards the end of the nineteenth century. It may be no coincidence that George Bernard Shaw and James Joyce both responded so spontaneously and strongly to Ibsen. Oscar Wilde, another Irishman, also appears to have admired Ibsen, albeit as a playwright essentially different from himself. Nineteenth-century Norway and Ireland shared many important traits: a geographical location on the North Atlantic fringe

of Europe, a fast-growing, overwhelmingly rural population, an extremely high rate of emigration to the United States . . . (65)

The fact that Ireland, Norway, and Russia are situated on the periphery of continental Europe binds these countries together as “other,” when compared to the countries within continental Europe. It is this otherness that perhaps attracts the writers of one country to the others. It is interesting to view Ireland, Norway, and Russia as thriving cultures on the periphery of Europe, which are influenced by continental movements yet removed enough to pursue their own identities.

The influence of continental European authors on Irish authors is most extensively evident in the literature starting at the beginning of the twentieth century. The connections among Norwegian, Russian, and Irish writers are striking. For these writers, there is an urge to remain true to one’s nation that sometimes conflicts with the need to engage in a global community of writers. It is precisely this tension—external versus internal—which causes many of Ireland’s most prominent writers to choose exile. In most cases, exile involved a move to the European continent, which is most notably evidenced in the figure of James Joyce. Joyce’s protagonist in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, like Joyce himself, seeks to evade the nets censoring him in Ireland in pursuing the perceived open-minded atmosphere of continental Europe, thus illustrating Una Chaudhuri’s concept of the “dramatic discourse of home” (xii):

The dramatic discourse of home is articulated through two main principles, which structure the plot as well as the plays’ accounts of

subjectivity and identity: a *victimage of location* and a *heroism of departure*. The former principle defines place as the protagonist's fundamental problem, leading her or him to a recognition of the need for (if not the actual enactment of) the latter. (xii)

Her ideas apply to this examination as a whole, since the act of adaptation inherently involves a reexamination of home. If one does not belong in one's home, then one generally leaves. The "new" home is replaced by the "old" one.

The plots of the plays discussed in this dissertation illustrate this idea, but the notion can be extended to the adaptations themselves, as they may become the new normal for these classic works. Joyce's review of Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken* in the *London Fortnightly Review* in 1900 led to a letter of gratitude from the Norwegian playwright, which was mediated by the Scottish critic William Archer, due to language issues. It is important to note here that Archer was the main translator of Ibsen into English during this time; Joyce would have thus been familiar with Archer's translations of Ibsen. Richard Ellmann argues that Joyce "became a European" at that point. Joyce's drama *Exiles* clearly illustrates Ibsen's influence.

Writers who chose to stay in Ireland, and not go into permanent exile on the European continent, are also connected to continental European playwrights. Although outside the particular scope of this dissertation, the drama of Sean O'Casey clearly connects to that of Maxim Gorky, as the two authors' gritty portrayals of urban life parallel each other. Both writers exposed a side of their countries that most people would rather have left unseen. Indeed, even in their



personal lives, striking similarities can be found, as both were considered outsiders in their respective societies for their Socialist leanings. Gorky was eight years younger than Anton Chekhov, and the two men were friends. Both Gorky and O'Casey were eclipsed by the more palatable talents of their day. The impact of Russian authors on Irish ones extends into Irish fiction, as with the influence of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Gorky on Daniel Corkery and Liam O'Flaherty. However, exile can also occur within the island itself. Both Friel and McGuinness moved from Northern Ireland, although McGuinness grew up technically just within the border of the Republic of Ireland, to squarely inside the Republic. Thus, there are many different notions of self and other at work, which I examine here. Nevertheless, Irish writers have consistently exhibited an urge to connect and relate to the European continent.

The national theatre movements of Ireland, Norway, and Russia occurred at approximately the same time—with the Abbey Theatre opening in 1904, the National Theatre in Oslo in 1899, and Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre in 1898. Of course, theatre existed in these countries prior to the establishment of these national theatres; however, these theatres advocated and emphasized a naturalist approach to theatre, with a determination to present characters believable with each country's culture. Thus, the audiences in all three countries began to see representations of themselves on stage. Identity was being formed, at this stage, from within; I want to focus, on the other hand, on what happens when the playwrights look outside for definition. The Abbey Theatre movement prided itself on producing native Irish works, and it is important to note

here that the Abbey is reputed to be the longest running state-subsidized theatre in Western Europe. Thus, the works of influential continental European dramatists were excluded from the Irish national theatre stage, until the founding of the Dublin Drama League in 1918. Of course, these works did find homes on other Dublin stages; however, such influences were not always welcomed until the Abbey sanctioned such performances, employing Irish actors and Irish theatre practitioners to produce the works. Miglena Iliycheva Ivanova's dissertation, "Staging Europe, Staging Ireland: Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov in Irish Cultural Politics, 1899—1922," explores the intersections between Irish and European drama, during the early, and politically turbulent, years of the twentieth century in Ireland. Her work establishes the great influence of these continental European dramatists on the Irish dramatists in the early years of the Abbey Theatre, but she does not examine how this influence has continued to permeate Irish drama up to the present day.

The fact that the works of these continental European dramatists continue to influence contemporary Irish playwrights is evidence of a lasting, deeper connection between the countries involved. My work takes the next logical step and considers these influences in a more global context, since both Friel and McGuinness have been influenced by the Abbey Theatre tradition of Irish drama, while Ibsen and Chekhov were both clearly involved in their own national theatre movements. Ivanova argues that Ibsen and Chekhov were clearly relevant to the early years of the Abbey Theatre, the national theatre of Ireland, but how are Ibsen and Chekhov relevant to contemporary playwrights such as Friel and

McGuinness? What lessons can be learned, and what do these connections say about the nature of Irish drama today? The works of Friel and McGuinness are clearly indebted to the drama of earlier Irish playwrights, so the question then shifts to the method of transmission. Does Friel show an affinity for Chekhov because Chekhovian themes are clearly evident in the works of earlier Irish playwrights? The same question can then be asked about McGuinness and Ibsen. I am particularly interested in why and how Ibsen and Chekhov, considered foreign during the early years of the Abbey Theatre, have become so heavily assimilated into Irish drama.

However, these playwrights work under the influence of not only the Abbey Theatre tradition, but also of the Field Day Theatre Company. The Field Day Theatre Company began in 1980 as a collaboration between Brian Friel and the actor Stephen Rea; the first task was to produce Friel's play *Translations*. The goal was to create a "fifth province." Traditionally, Ireland has been divided into four provinces: Ulster, Leinster, Connaught, and Munster. This fifth province was to be an artistic space free of the confines of politics, particularly the politics with which Northern writers and artists have struggled. In her essay "*Translations*, The Field Day debate and the re-imagining of Irish identity," Martine Pelletier explains this tension:

*Translations* was therefore understood to be the foundation stone, the defining text that had set the agenda for later developments in the debate initiated by Field Day, since there was an obvious coincidence between the topics addressed in the pamphlets and

the issues, linguistic, literary and cultural/historical, addressed in the play. There was a growing anxiety that these Northern Irish intellectuals were promoting a revamped nationalism in a climate characterized by political instability in Northern Ireland. (73)

In this respect, the movement is akin to a Northern version of the Abbey Theatre. Indeed, the Irish Literary Revival, which occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and spurred on the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, occurred during a time of great political turmoil in Ireland. The evolution and refashioning of a national identity is a violent process, although not the physical violence that we normally think of in this situation. There is a clear connection here between violence and identity formation in Ireland, particularly as a postcolonial nation. The Field Day movement, headquartered in Derry, soon attracted other notables such as Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney, and Tom Paulin. Field Day Publications still exists, but the other facets of the project have waned. The fact that both Friel and McGuinness participated in the Field Day Theatre Company is exemplified by these adaptations. McGuinness's adaptations were produced by the Field Day Theatre Company, but Brian Friel was far more involved in the steering of this enterprise. In this light, these adaptations serve as attempts to return to the spirit of the original works working against the historically British translations of these works into English that had been previously dominant. In this respect, these adaptations can be viewed as deliberate political acts. Both Friel and McGuinness seek to revisit these works and adapt them in way that makes them relevant to Irish audiences.

In adapting these works, Friel and McGuinness have attempted to translate place. I explore how these productions have been received by the contemporary Irish public, particularly since so many works have been adapted for the Irish stage. Helen Heusner Lojek's book *The Spaces of Irish Drama: Stage and Place in Contemporary Plays* (2011), examines, among a dozen other playwrights, works by both Friel and McGuinness in light of place studies. She argues that accepted interpretations and analyses of these plays are directly related to the use of space, which can either create or dissolve boundaries, in each play. However, Lojek focuses only on the playwrights' treatments of Ireland, and she does not highlight adaptations by either playwright. Nevertheless, Lojek's work is very useful to me, because she is one of the first critics to examine how place functions in Irish drama. In another obviously useful book by Lojek, *Contexts for Frank McGuinness's Drama*, she states:

This is not, for example, a theoretical study, and it makes minimal attempt to situate McGuinness in the context of other Irish playwrights. Nor is there a significant effort to contextualize McGuinness in relationship to world drama, particularly the plays of Ibsen, Chekhov, Lorca, and Brecht that have, as his adaptations make clear, influenced him in major ways. Such additional studies must come—I hope soon—from others. (viii-ix)

I begin such a dialogue here and inspire others to conduct additional research. Lojek analyzes the role of place from within Ireland in her work, while I place the adaptations by these authors into the larger framework of world literature. I

interrogate not only how McGuinness's adaptations relate back to the originals, but also how McGuinness's work relates to Ireland as a contemporary European nation.

While I focus here on twentieth-century adaptations, there is a long-standing internationalism of Irish playwrights. The engagement ranges from influence to complete homage, paid in the form of an adaptation. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, George Farquhar, and Dion Boucicault, although they were all Irishmen writing in England, looked outside of England and Ireland for inspiration. Oscar Wilde, G. B. Shaw, and W. B. Yeats looked to the European continent for both material and dramatic technique. James Joyce exiled himself to the European continent as a way to free himself from the restrictions of religion and politics in Ireland. As a final step in this evolutionary process, Samuel Beckett not only sought exile on the European continent, but he wrote in French, fully immersing himself in his new place. Thus, these authors paved the way for the adaptations by Friel and McGuinness. Friel and McGuinness, thanks to a new global identity for Ireland, were able to create these adaptations while still resident in Ireland.

Irish playwrights have frequently adapted the works of other playwrights, ranging from the Greeks to European counterparts. The goal of these adaptations has often involved the perennial search for identity that pervades Irish literature. The adaptations of the Greek works, as Brian Arkins notes in his book *Irish Appropriation of Greek Tragedy*, focus primarily on the work of Sophocles, noting the power of the individual to exact change. In the latter half

of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, there has been a shift towards adapting the work of continental European authors. This shift reflects an attempt to clarify identity by examining countries with similar historical conflicts. The playwrights of Norway and Russia represent a more modern counterpart to Ireland; there is an inter-connectedness here that is lost in adapting the Greeks. Adapting the works of Ibsen and Chekhov can lead to a better picture of the Irishmen and the Irishwomen of today, particularly how they fit into the European Union and the global community.

The Irish Literary Revival produced many adaptations of Greek plays, as the writers of the time sought to connect themselves to the Greeks as guardians of a rich civilization and culture. The most obvious and famous instance of this pattern is Joyce's *Ulysses*, which modernizes Homer's epic *The Odyssey* by positioning it in the Dublin of 1904. Much as Odysseus became a foreigner to the Ithaca from which he was absent for twenty years, Leopold Bloom is an outsider in Catholic Dublin. Both men attempt, to varying degrees of success, to negotiate place. Joyce does not merely adapt Homer's epic; rather, he appropriates and modernizes the storyline. This return to the Greeks has continued, as seen in works of writers like Seamus Heaney, such as *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (1991) and *The Burial at Thebes: A version of Sophocles' Antigone* (2004). I use Brian Arkins' *Irish Appropriation of Greek Tragedy*, which establishes a framework from which to view such works, as he formulates working definitions for adaptations, versions, and translations. Arkins notes the Irish proclivity to revise Sophocles more so than other Greek

playwrights, and he argues that this affinity reflects the power of the individual in Irish sensibility, which also connects the works examined in this dissertation.

Thus, I do not approach these works strictly on a linguistic level as products of translations, but I consider how language functions as a product of place. Arkins' work centers on Irish authors' revisions of ancient drama, which, while certainly relevant today, are in some respect only a rite of passage for these authors, and the Greeks clearly cannot respond. In the global community, Friel's and McGuinness's adaptations of the work of playwrights from modern nations are clear attempts to engage Irish audiences in matters on a world stage. Thus, we have the possibility for a global dialogue here, with continental European playwrights adapting Irish works. To my knowledge, such adaptations have not been produced yet, but it is certainly an exciting possibility to look forward to in the future.

Both Friel and McGuinness have widely adapted other dramatists' works. However, in my examination, I establish a rationale as to why Friel favors Chekhov and McGuinness favors Ibsen, although both playwrights have adapted works by both Ibsen and Chekhov. I chose these specific Irish authors, because there is such a strong connection between the two of them and their Irish counterparts. McGuinness grew up seeing Friel's plays and appreciating his work; he also wrote the screenplay for the film version of Friel's celebrated, Tony Award-winning play *Dancing at Lughnasa*. While Friel eased into the adaptation process only gradually, across many years in his long career, McGuinness jumped right in, and he has produced many more adaptations than Friel, in a



much shorter amount of time. This is not to say that McGuinness is not deliberate and meticulous in this work. Friel was born in 1929, and his first stage play, *A Doubtful Paradise*, was produced in 1960; his first adaptation was of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, which premiered in 1981. It is important to note here that Friel was working on both his own play *Translations* and his adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* at the same time; I return to this point in greater depth in Chapters 2 and 4. McGuinness, born in 1953, had his first play, *The Glass God*, produced in 1982, and his first adaptation, Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, was produced in 1987. Each work has been carefully chosen by him to make a particular statement. While Chekhov's plays traditionally hold more of a relevance to older Irish audiences, I argue that younger audiences favor Ibsen's approach. The isolation of Chekhov's work is physical; the characters are often literally separated from people. However, Ibsen's isolation is one of the mind, to which today's audiences can relate. While the actual physical spaces of Chekhov's work are easily traveled today, the turmoil and struggle of an individual's mind, a frequent topic in Ibsen's work, is an ever-present plague in society. On a broader scale, what do these adaptations and connections say about the evolution and future of Irish drama? Also, these playwrights have adapted several of the same plays—Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, as well as Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*—and I compare and contrast their adaptations of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* to see how the treatment of the text varies between the two Irish playwrights. Many of McGuinness's adaptations have not been published, which is why only one Chekhov play (*Three Sisters*) is being

examined in this study and his *Hedda Gabler* is not being discussed at length here.

In his highly influential book *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd, arguably today's leading Irish literary critic, discusses Friel's watershed *Translations* as an example of paradox. Although the characters are speaking in Irish, the audience hears them in English. Kiberd argues that this longstanding conflict was intensified with the establishment of the Republic, whose Constitution, written bilingually in English, declared Irish to be the nation's official language. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, there have been Irish-language translations of works by European playwrights; however, as is the case with many of McGuinness's adaptations, these works are difficult to find in print. My focus here is more akin to what J. M. Synge envisioned: that the English language should be transformed to accommodate Irish Gaelic. The rhythm of Irish is reflected in how Irish is spoken in Ireland; the terms Irish English and Hiberno English are used to denote this dialect of English. Both Friel and McGuinness adapt these works using "Irish English" words, phrases, and rhythms to capture and engage the Irish audiences. The use of Irish English assimilates these works and makes them more resonant to Irish audiences; the audiences can thus identify with the characters as self, rather than other, which breaks down a critical barrier for the drama.

Friel did not rework Chekhov, or any other playwright's work, until he tackled his great play *Translations* (1980); however, it must be noted that he was working on his adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, his first adaptation, while

he was finishing *Translations*. *Translations*, as the inaugural and central text of the Field Day Theatre movement, holds as central a position in contemporary Irish drama as Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) did in the early twentieth-century Irish Literary Revival. At the heart of this play lies a paradox of not only language, but also place, as the play centers on the translation of place names and the politics of language. Although it hears English coming from their mouths, the audience must imagine the characters speaking in Irish, and Friel is so skilled in his use of language that the audience has no trouble doing so.

Several prominent Irish actors—such as Stephen Rea, as Owen, and Liam Neeson, as Doalty—starred in the premiere of this play, which took place in the highly politically charged setting of the Guildhall in Derry, Northern Ireland. Thus, place functions on many different levels here. In terms of place studies, Friel interrogates how *place* (space infused with meaning via experience) is converted back to *space* via the Anglicization of the Irish place names, as the Guildhall was a bastion of British rule in Northern Ireland; thus, staging *Translations* here was a deliberate political act by Field Day to move beyond lines and borders. I

position *Translations* as a gateway text here from which to approach Friel's reworkings of these continental European plays. Richard Pine has referred to Friel as the "Irish Chekhov." Both playwrights' works often center on the family and its struggle in a changing society. Friel has revisited Chekhov's short stories as well, and he has examined the works of other Russian writers, such as Ivan Turgenev; however, this project focuses on Friel's reworking of Chekhov's plays, as well as Friel's *Afterplay*, a sequel of sorts to *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, is

an original play that follows characters from some of Chekhov's best known works. At this point, there is no equivalent for *Afterplay* in McGuinness's repertoire.

I argue that McGuinness's focus on Ibsen represents a shift in ideology, from his original work, towards viewing Ireland as a modern society, one that exemplifies Bhabha's notion of hybridity. In his book *Location of Culture*, Bhabha presents the concept of international culture as a product of hybridity:

For a willingness to descend into that alien territory – where I have led you – may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and merge as the others of our selves. (38-39)

Thus, a culture's hybridity is an innate concept. This Third Space, of which I argue drama is a prime example, provides a venue by which to explore the deeper connections between cultures. Friel's and McGuinness's adaptations serve to mystify the cultures of these adapted works; these cultures are not

presented as foreign, but rather as intimately connected to Irish culture. The places that are being negotiated in these plays serve as a microcosm of greater global dialogues. The notion of Third Space here reveals that both parties must become vulnerable; each one must leave its own place in order to occupy, if only temporarily, a space in communion with the other party. This location is indeed only a space at this point, as it is not yet infused with experience and memory which would transform it into a place. Of course, such dialogues across national lines are not new to Irish literature or drama.

Yeats's work, of course, immediately comes to mind here, as he looked to the Greeks, Shakespeare, and even the Japanese for inspiration. His attempts were not always well-received at the time, but they are indicative of an artist who looked beyond boundaries. Yeats's experimentation certainly paved the way for McGuinness's adaptations. Yeats saw beyond national identities, in searching for a suitable dramatic form for his work. Ibsen's work often highlights the clash between individual and society, revealing the effects of modernization. Just as *Translations* marks a shift for Friel into the field of adaptation, McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) serves as a starting point in this examination. Two years later, McGuinness adapted his first play by Ibsen: *Rosmersholm*. War serves as a backdrop in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, but the focus is on individuals. His treatment of place in this play—four pairs of characters inhabiting four different places concurrently—reflects his inclination to travel beyond Ireland with ease in his work. In Ibsen's work, the outside world continuously looms in the

background, and the same can be said of McGuinness's plays. His treatment of Ibsen is thus an extension of his own creative work; as with Friel's adaptations, McGuinness's adaptations form a vital part of his repertoire.

I examine these two playwrights together also because they come from similar backgrounds. However, they are separated by a quarter of a century in age, and this gap represents a time of transition for Ireland. Brian Friel's work often deals with issues of nationhood and identity that have plagued Ireland for centuries. However, he has revitalized Irish drama as a theatre practitioner who has used the Irish stage as a medium for communication and discussion with the world. Frank McGuinness's body of work illustrates an attempt to reconcile the position of Ireland in a changing world. Ireland's involvement in the European Union is both economically and culturally beneficial. As a genre, drama is an attempt to reflect the world of its composition; thus, it must inherently be adjusted to a changing environment. In order for drama to make such an impact, it must be staged and witnessed by an audience. To return to my opening quotation in this chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, Brian Friel argues that drama is written not just for one person, but for an entire audience, multitudes of people. These adaptations represent Ireland's attempt to engage in the ever-changing global community, and as art that can reach a large amount of people, they are vehicles for change.

Irish drama has a long history of commenting on the political issues of the day. I mentioned the function of Colum's *The Land* in the early days of the Abbey Theatre, the national theatre of Ireland. One of the most striking

examples of the intersections of Irish drama and politics involves *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), written by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory. As a note here, this play is traditionally ascribed to Yeats, although research has proven Lady Gregory's immense influence on this work, particularly in terms of the use of Irish and Irish English within the play. Yeats, despite his ability to manipulate the English language to new levels, did not successfully master Irish. In the play, a poor old woman (known in Irish as "*seanbhean bhocht*" and "Shan Van Vocht") bemoans the loss of her four green fields—representations of the four provinces of Ireland—to a young man on the eve of his wedding. Ireland is traditionally personified as a woman, and *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is one such representation. The young man becomes hypnotized by this old woman and, turning against his fiancée and his family, he vows to assist the old woman in avenging her wrongdoers. At the end of the play, the old woman dramatically crosses the stage, transforming into a young woman, and seductively leads the young man away from his wedding and into a mythological world of self-sacrifice for her. The play was seen as a call to arms for the younger generation in Ireland, to fight to get back what had been lost to mother Ireland. In his poem "Man and the Echo" (1938), Yeats wrote, "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?" (345). Yeats died in 1939, so this poem represents an older man's questioning of his earlier actions.

Indeed, politics and literature are inextricably linked throughout Irish literature. About twenty years after *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Sean O'Casey's Dublin trilogy traces the effects of both the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil

War on ordinary Dubliners. O'Casey's distinctly unromantic depictions of the Irish population were gritty and real; the truth that he presented was not always well accepted by the population or theatre critics. Patricia Burke Brogan's *Eclipsed* (1992) served to rejuvenate an interest in the trauma of Magdalene laundry survivors, who have been recently acknowledged and promised compensation by the Irish government. The Magdalene laundries were set up in the eighteenth century in Ireland and run by Roman Catholic nuns; unwed mothers and women who were clashed with the strict morality imposed by the Church on Irish society were sent to these laundries, where they would cook and clean for the nuns, often for the rest of the women's lives. Children born of women in the laundries were adopted, often by American families. Most recently, Colin Murphy's play *Guaranteed!* (2013) dramatizes the events leading up to the Irish banking scandal made public in the release of the infamous tapes. In his newspaper article "Drama's Representation of Night of Guarantee Reminds Us Politicians Play with Live Ammunition," Stephen Collins ends by saying that "Whatever happens next [in the banking scandal] it is imperative that all the major actors in the drama say what happened." Thus, Irish drama is a mimetic art. It serves as a venue through which the population can address larger issues. Irish drama has a long history of performing the relevant questions of the day, and this tradition certainly continues today. Instead of simply performing the past, I argue that these adaptations by Friel and McGuinness offer lenses through which Irish audiences can engage with a past that is indeed still relevant today.



The proverbial mirror has been held up to Ireland as a nation, so the question then becomes what the reaction will be. The works just mentioned focus inwards on issues that predominantly affect Irish men and women. However, particularly in light of the banking scandal, the matters that confront the Irish are increasingly products of Ireland's engagement in the global community, particularly the European Union. For a country that is still trying to cultivate its own identity separate from that of its colonial power, joining the European Union presents many challenges as well as opportunities. The physical, fiscal and emotional effects of globalization are apparent not just in Ireland, but throughout the world. In this dissertation, I interrogate how Friel's and McGuinness's adaptations provide insight into redefining the Irish individual in the context of the global community. Analyzing the plight of the individual can provide some intriguing extrapolations for the population as a whole.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PUTTING BALLYBEG ON THE MAP:

#### AN OVERVIEW OF BRIAN FRIEL'S ADAPTATIONS OF ANTON CHEKHOV AND HENRIK IBSEN

Brian Friel has adapted the work of numerous playwrights, but his adaptations of Russian writers' works form the clear majority of this portion of his oeuvre. In sum, Friel has done four adaptations of Anton Chekhov, two of Ivan Turgenev and one of Henrik Ibsen. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation focused on drama, it is important to note that Friel has adapted works across genres. In 1987, his dramatic adaptation of Ivan Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Sons*, premiered. His dramatic adaptation of Chekhov's short story "The Lady with the Lapdog" (1899) premiered in 2001 under the title of *The Yalta Game*. Friel does not directly translate the texts himself; rather, he works from existing literal translations into English in order to create his adaptations. Thus, my concern here is not a primarily linguistic one; my focus is on the overall adaptations themselves, as Friel's mark is evident on these works.

At this point, I want to review the working definitions of the terms that I am using. In her work *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders argues that "[a]n adaptation signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original" (26). Thus, an adaptation implies an original work. The adaptation may involve a new genre; for example, a novel can be adapted into a film. One of the most recent examples of a film adaptation of an Irish novel is *Brooklyn* (2015), written by

Colm Tóibín with the screenplay written by Nick Hornby. Comparing adaptations across genres, however, is much more complicated. Film clearly offers possibilities that the written word cannot afford an author. A novel demands the imagination and participation of the reader, whereas a film is much more transparent in terms of presenting the information to the viewer. A film can bring places to life for the viewer; on the other hand, the film forces the viewer to see the place as presented on the screen, rather than using his own imagination based on the author's words.

However, for my purposes, I am looking solely at dramatic adaptations of dramatic works. In Linda Hutcheon's seminal work *A Theory of Adaptation*, she takes Sanders' ideas further in her definition of an adaptation:

In short, adaptation can be described as the following:

- ☐ An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- ☐ A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- ☐ An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work. (8)

The net cast here is deliberately broad, because she examines adaptations across genres. For my purposes, I am concerned with investigating works that explore the third path: "An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (Hutcheon 8). Both Friel and McGuinness are fully cognizant of the fact that they are adapting these original works. They are not merely referencing these original plays; rather, they are reinterpreting them in a new context.

To illustrate why Hutcheon's first two ideas are too broad for my purposes, I want to present the example of *The Playboy of the Western World*, which Brian Arkins, author of *Irish Appropriation of Greek Tragedy*, claims is a "comedy that inverts the parricide theme of *King Oedipus*" (12). Once this connection is made, it becomes difficult to ignore, when analyzing *Playboy*, one of the most performed works of Irish drama. The play, written by John Millington Synge, premiered in 1907. Arkins points out that Synge knew Greek, and *Riders to the Sea* (1904) is reminiscent of Greek tragedy (54). Synge died at the age of thirty-seven, so, unfortunately, we have only a glimpse of what he could have done. Arkins outlines the working definitions for his examination: "The transposition of the source text (an Athenian tragedy) in the source language (Greek) to a target text (an Irish tragedy) in the target language (English) involves one of three manoeuvres: straight interlingual translation; version; loose adaptation" (25). According to his definition, *The Playboy of the Western World* is a loose adaptation of *King Oedipus*, since the setting is transferred to the modern world. Arkins presents two other examples of loose adaptations that are of interest here: James Joyce's *Ulysses* from Homer's *Odyssey* and Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* from Euripides' *Medea* (26). While Linda Hutcheon's definitions are too broad, Arkins' ones are too narrowly defined for my purposes. Thus, a middle road is necessary here. I argue that a change of setting is not a requirement of an adaptation. However, it must be noted that Frank McGuinness often includes the term "version" in the titles of his adaptations; I return to this point in my next chapter, where I examine his adaptations at length. What Friel does in his

adaptations is not literal translation. He looks at various translations to formulate his own adaptation of the original work. The setting does not change in these plays, but Friel does rework situations and language in order to appeal to a contemporary Irish audience.

I examine the trends present throughout Friel's adaptations in order to make conclusions about the greater significance of these adaptations. Friel's first dramatic adaptation was of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1981), which he was working on alongside his own celebrated and significantly named *Translations* (1980). The timing of these two works is significant enough, but when one considers that Friel was spearheading the Field Day Theatre, which produced *Translations* as its opening work and Friel's *Three Sisters* as its second one, the situation becomes even more intricate. Field Day represented a search for identity; indeed, *Translations*, at its core, seeks to define people, places, and things. In this atmosphere, Friel works on his first dramatic adaptation of Chekhov. The timing of these two projects is critical. It is as if Friel could not complete his first adaptation, until he put to rest *Translations*, which focuses on the divide between the Irish and English languages, and by extension, cultures. Of course, the issues explored in *Translations* are complex, and they are far from resolved at the end of the play. However, I argue that Friel continues the dialogue about these issues in his adaptations.

Friel and Chekhov both share a love for language and the human condition. Tony Coult argues that Chekhov is "the writer who, of all great dramatists of the past (Synge excepted), offered the closest model for Friel" (92).

Friel's plays serve as more than literal translations, as he takes the pulse of each work and adapts it to his own. Richard Jones contends that "in the hands of a skilled playwright such as Friel, variations from a 'literal' translation may actually take the reader, and more especially the spectator or performer, closer to the real essence of Chekhov's work that could be achieved by a more literal/literary rendering into English" (31). Friel's adaptations reflect the full context of the work. Like Chekhov, Friel's original plays often center on the family and the individual's role within that family. The family unit is foregrounded, however, against a background of turmoil that occurs outside of the home, yet often penetrates it. This tension between the inside and outside of the home frames many of the plotlines in both Chekhov and Friel. A literal translation would be inadequate in capturing such multifaceted conflict.

Friel looked at his adaptations and translations of Chekhov as a matter of music. Coult explains that Friel's "method was to sit with six English translations [*Three Sisters*] in front of him and work line by line" (Coult 92). One cannot help but picture Owen and Lieutenant Yolland crouching over the Ordnance Survey maps in Friel's own *Translations* trying to translate the "music" of the Irish place names into English. Tuan argues that "[s]pace is historical if it has direction or a privileged perspective. Maps are ahistorical, landscape paintings are historical" (122). Friel's play clearly challenges Tuan's notion, as the maps are clear political acts. To the locals who have named the lands by their experience, the act of giving these lands English place names is akin to transforming place back into space. The English place names no longer reflect the people and their

experience; the lands have been made foreign. In this example, the music is clearly lost in Yolland's translations, but as a playwright, Friel consciously attempts to preserve the music.

It is fitting to draw an analogy here between the "music" of these pieces and the act of Friel's purposeful translation of these works from the Russian to the Irish stage. The change in location is connected to the change in music. Each location has its particular rhythm, and these locales and pulses are explored in these three works: *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *Afterplay*. It is clear that Friel felt the need to take Andrey and Sonya to the city in *Afterplay* to see if it would change their lives. However, the setting does not prove a fruitful locale for the fulfillment of their dreams. The realization of dreams is connected to music, as both characters yearn for a life built on their own rhythms.

I focus on Brian Friel's adaptations of the following works: Chekhov's *The Bear* and *Uncle Vanya* and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. Since I examine *Three Sisters* in a later chapter, I present Friel's *Uncle Vanya* here as an example of his treatment of Chekhov. I outline similarities between this play and Friel's original work in order to illustrate how he places these characters in an Irish framework. *Uncle Vanya* appeared in 1998, seventeen years after *Three Sisters*. At this point, Friel was more comfortable with his process of adaptation, and he was branching out to other authors and works. This exploration informs this adaptation of *Uncle Vanya*. Friel's adaptation of Chekhov's *The Bear* appeared in 2002; it was first produced with *Afterplay* at the Gate Theatre, Dublin. I also examine Friel's *Afterplay*, which is an original work that follows the lives of two of

Chekhov's characters, before turning to Friel's treatment of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*.

### ***The Bear***

Chekhov's *The Bear*, which premiered in 1888, is subtitled "A Joke in One Act" (4). It is a fast-paced farce comprised of twelve scenes. Elena Invanova Popova is a widow, still in mourning seven months after her husband's death. Smirnov is owed money from Popova's late husband, and he seeks her out to collect. However, Popova claims that she cannot pay him that day; it will have to wait until the foreman returns from town, the day after tomorrow. Smirnov becomes infuriated and refuses to leave. Popova eventually challenges him to a duel, and Smirnov, struck by her gumption, falls in love with the widow. He cannot take part in the duel, and he confesses his love for her. Although she fights his advances, the two ultimately kiss. The "bear" in the play refers to the slur that Popova hurls at the unrefined man, whom she sees as an intruder into her mourning period. In the second scene of the play, the audience learns that the widow's mourning is an elaborate ruse, as she addresses a photograph of her late husband:

You see, *Nicolas*, how I know how to love and forgive . . . My love will flicker out when I do, when my poor heart ceases to beat.

(*Laughs through tears.*) And aren't you ashamed? I'm a good girl, a faithful little wife, I've locked myself up in a fortress and will be true to you to the day I die, while you . . . aren't you ashamed, you



chubby thing? You cheated on me, made scenes, left me on my own for whole weeks at a time . . . (6)

The tension between Popova and Smirnov is somewhat mitigated by the servant Luka; however, when he fails to eject Smirnov from the estate, the couple becomes the sole focus of the drama. Chekhov repeated this type of triangular arrangement in 1916 in *The Proposal*. Lomov attempts to propose to Natalya, Chubukov's daughter, with Chubukov present. The plan unravels, and Chubukov is forced to intervene, although unsuccessfully.

Friel's adaptation of *The Bear* was first produced in 2002, along with *Afterplay*, which is an original work that follows some of Chekhov's characters. *The Bear* is subtitled "a vaudeville by Anton Chekhov" (Friel, *The Bear* 37). In Friel's "Author's Note" to his adaptation of *The Bear*, he states that "It [*The Bear*] is a young man's play, simultaneously pushy and tentative, fastidious and crude, technically derivative but already sending out early signals of that distinctive Chekhovian voice. . . . But *The Bear* engages for another important reason: it is an early trial piece by the man who reshaped twentieth-century theatre" (39). Friel's admiration for Chekhov is evident here. It is interesting the Friel's first adaptation of Chekhov is *Three Sisters*, which is seemingly a much more complicated play than *The Bear*. However, the idea of humor disguising isolation and fear runs throughout not only this play, but most of the original works of both Chekhov and Friel. However, Ibsen's plays lack this humor, as the atmosphere in his plays is much more solemn.

Friel's adaptation of *The Bear* is not separated into scenes, which allows the action to flow more easily as one coherent work, whereas Chekhov's original is almost a series of snapshots. In a fashion typical for him, Friel heavily uses stage directions to convey the tone of the work. He also includes extra characters offstage who serve to heighten the main action of the couple and servant. Elena (Popova) is a more calculating figure in Friel's play; the audience hears her speak to her dead husband's photograph: "I will show you how I can forgive and how resolutely I can love. Just you watch. You must be so ashamed of yourself. I shut myself off from every human contact, totally faithful only to you, and there you are still looking beyond me with your slithery eyes and your weak smile and your—" (46). Her tone is much more accusatory here than in Chekhov's original, and, overall, Elena here is a much more assertive woman. Indeed, Friel calls her by her forename, "Elena," instead of her family name, Popova. The idea of inequality between the sexes is apparent in Chekhov's original, but it is even more pronounced in Friel. In Chekhov's original, Popova's first slur at Smirnov is "You peasant! You unlicked bear! Upstart! Monster!" (13). Friel's version is more crude, for Elena says "Bear, pig, womanizer—" (55). The use of hyphens in Friel's text leaves the reader with sense of incompleteness; no character seems to be able to articulate himself fully in this play. Either the person is cut off by another character, or the train of thought abruptly ends for some other reason. Thus, there is a sense of uncertainty; words are clearly left unsaid. Such a convention is dangerous, as it allows the audience great license. The consistency of the impotence of language here, however, indicates that

language may be inadequate to convey the thoughts and ideas of the characters. Such a theme runs throughout Friel's original works as well. However, while language may be imprecise, place is not.

Place is evident in this play through the notion of inside and outside. Elena/Popova is trapped inside her house; it has become a mausoleum for the living. Her husband is buried outside, in the world that he inhabited, the world of his indiscretions. She is at home in the domestic realm, and it is here that she feels secure. Friel's adaptation emphasizes this idea. In Chekhov's original, Popova's line reads as follows: (*Malicious laugh.*) He likes me! He dares to say that he likes me! (*Points to the door.*) You may go." (15). In Friel's adaptation, Popova's response is much more elaborate:

He breaks into my house—intrudes on my sacred grief—demands a fortune from me—drinks my vodka—tries to seduce my maides—uses filthy barrack language in my presence—threatens to shoot my manservant—bellows, screams at me—and then says he likes me. How would he behave if he disliked me! (61)

Friel's adaptation clearly emphasizes the line between inside and outside. Popova views Smirnov, regardless of his character or intent, as an intrusion on her peace and home. He is a reminder of her husband's actions, not all of which were virtuous, on the outside.

The outside world is a contagion, as evidenced by Smirnov; he is unrefined, and he is dangerous. Thus, the duel is necessary in Popova's eyes;

Smirnov must be killed in order to preserve the domestic sphere. Allowing him to penetrate this sphere would prove detrimental.

From his adaptations of Chekhov that I have looked at thus far, Friel freely constructs his own versions of the work. For example, in *The Bear*, he speeds up Chekhov's ending by transforming Chekhov's mini-monologues into rapid dialogue. Friel utilizes this same approach in his adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*.

### ***Uncle Vanya***

Brian Friel's adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* premiered in 1998. It is his second adaptation of Chekhov, preceded by *Three Sisters* in 1981. It is important to note that, during this time, Friel adapted other works, two by Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons* (1987) and *A Month in the Country* (1992) and one by Charles Macklin, *The London Vertigo* (1992). It is interesting that Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* bears the subtitle *Scenes from Country Life*, which it shares in common with Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*. Frank McGuinness also adapted *Uncle Vanya*, but the play is not readily available in print, so I do not discuss it at length here. Like many of Friel's own plays and those of Chekhov, the plot of *Uncle Vanya* surrounds a family and its internal conflict, which is both directly and indirectly influenced by the surroundings. While the play is titled after a male character, much of the plot is driven by the female characters, Sonya (the professor's daughter /Uncle Vanya's niece) and Yelena (the professor's second wife/Sonya's step-mother).

In *Uncle Vanya*, Sonya plays the role of a devoted niece and daughter who is consumed with unrequited love for Dr. Astrov. In Friel's *Uncle Vanya*, Dr. Astrov succinctly describes himself at the very beginning of the play: "Doctor Atrophied, that's me. Absolutely" (6). Chekhov's version is much more subtle, as Astrov claims that "In ten years' time I've turned into another man" (197). In Chekhov's play, Astrov's passion for the environment is clear. Astrov argues: "A person has to be an unreasoning barbarian to destroy what cannot be re-created. Human beings are endowed with reason and creative faculties in order to enhance what is given to them but so far they have not created but destroyed" (205). Friel has Astrov succinctly say to Vanya, "You know yourself the forests of this country are being systematically raped" (15). Thus, the figure of Dr. Astrov plays a "Cassandra" role in both versions, as no other characters heed his pleas. It is not until Sonya's discussions with Andrey in *Afterplay* that the reader understands that she did hear Astrov's words. In her article "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," Ursula Heise explores the tenuous relationship between ecocriticism and science and the inherent conflict between the two (508-09). Thus, it is intriguing that Chekhov's Dr. Astrov is the most eco-friendly character here. Dr. Astrov plants trees; do these trees replace the lives that he has lost as a physician? Following on this logic, Dr. Astrov's involvement in nature may serve as a penance for his losses as a physician. He recounts the story of a man who died on his operating table; Astrov could not save him. In planting trees and breeding bees, he is not only giving new life, but he is providing a method by which to sustain the life that already exists. It is this humanitarian side of Dr.

Astrov that attracts Sonya, yet his alcoholism drives her away. In this vein, Astrov follows the model of physician-healer that we see in Oedipus; Astrov seeks to cure his country and countrymen of their ills, but his endeavor is ill-fated.

As with his adaptation of Chekhov's *The Bear*, Friel's adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* includes some shortened monologues in favor of a quicker banter between characters. However, compared to his other adaptations of Chekhov, the speed of this play is the closest to that of the original. In both the original and Friel's adaptation, the majority of monologues are spoken by Vanya, Astrov, and Sonya. In the original, when Astrov asks Vanya about his brother-in-law (Sonya's father), Vanya replies, "A retired professor, you know what that means, a pedantic old fossil, a guppy with a terminal degree" (200). Friel's adaptation is very similar: "An oaf who somehow acquired a degree and somehow got a university chair and for twenty-five years somehow, somehow tricked thousands of students into scribbling down the rubbish he lectured on art" (9). In this example, if the quotations were not labeled, one would easily believe that the first one could have been written by Friel.

It is clear that Friel has affection for Sonya, whom he follows in his own original work, *Afterplay*. Sonya is afforded the last monologue in both Chekhov's original and Friel's adaptation. In response to Vanya's comment about how hard life is, Sonya presents the following monologue—important enough to deserve quoting at length, allowing us to look more fully at Friel's adaptation of it:

What can be done? We have to go on living!

*(Pause.)*

Uncle Vanya, we will live. We will live through a long, long series of days, no end of evenings; we will patiently bear the ordeals that Fate sends us; we will labor for others both now and in our old age, knowing no rest; but when our times comes, we will die meekly, and beyond the grave we will tell how we suffered, how we wept, how bitter we felt, and God will take pity on us, and you and I, Uncle Vanya, dear Uncle, shall see a life bright, beautiful, exquisite; we shall rejoice and look upon our present unhappiness with forbearance, with a smile—and we shall be at rest. I believe, Uncle, I believe intensely, passionately . . . *(Kneels before him and lays her head on his hands; in a weary voice.)* We shall be at rest!

*(TELEGIN quietly plays the guitar.)*

We shall be at rest! We shall hear the angels, we shall see heaven all diamonds, we shall see how all earthly woes, all our suffering will be submerged in a compassion that will fill up the world, and our life will grow serene, tender, sweet as a caress. I believe, believe . . . *(Wipes his tears away with a handkerchief.)* Poor, poor, Uncle Vanya, you're crying . . . *(Through tears.)* You've known no joy in your life, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait . . . We shall be at rest . . . *(Embraces him.)* We shall be at rest!

*(THE WATCHMAN taps.)*

TELEGIN *quietly goes on playing*; MARIYA VASILYEVNA  
*writes in the margin of a pamphlet*; MARINA *knits a stocking*.)

We shall be at rest!

(*Curtain slowly falls.*) (238-39)

The repetition of “We shall be at rest” can be read in many ways here. From a cynical point of view, Sonya could be attempting to convince both herself and Uncle Vanya of the truth of her statements. She must look at the proverbial light at the end of this tunnel in order to endure of the torture of her everyday life.

Friel’s adaptation of the monologue, which is just as long as the original, reads as follows:

I do know. But we must endure, Vanya. We have got to go on living and working through long, long days and long, long nights until the very end; and when our times comes we will submit to that, too, without complaining. And we will tell God that we worked as hard as we could and that we suffered and we cried and that there were times when we could hardly hold on; and He will understand and have pity on us. And then, sweet Uncle Vanya, then we will be offered a new life that will be beautiful and full of peace and full of wonder. We will be so happy, Uncle Vanya, so happy that we will look back on this life and we will smile at all the unhappiness we endured here; because we will be peaceful then, Uncle Vanya, fully peaceful, finally peaceful. I know we will. I believe that with all my heart and with all my soul. (*She takes him in her arms as if he*



*were a child. Yefim, off, sings a haunting folksong.) And I believe, too, that the angels will sing for us and the sky will be festooned with stars as bright as diamonds and all the misery of this life, all the terrible things we've had to endure, they will be swept away in a great wave of mercy and understanding. And for the first time ever we will know what it is to be peaceful and at rest. (She wipes away his tears. She is on the verge of tears herself.) Poor Uncle Vanya; God help you; you're crying. You've had a very unhappy life—I do know that. But be patient. Endure. And peace will come to us. Listen to me, Uncle Vanya, Believe me. Peace will come to us. (She kisses the top of his head. Then they pick up their pens and begin writing. Silence—except for the scraping pens, the crickets. Yefim off.) (63-64)*

While in Chekhov's play, Sonya repeats "We will be at rest," Friel's adaptation has Sonya reiterate "Peace will come to us." While the variation in syntax is slight, it is telling. Friel's adaptation takes the power out of the hands of Sonya and Uncle Vanya; they will receive peace, as if it is divine intervention. The other clear difference here involves the occupants of the stage at the close of each play. Chekhov's play includes other characters, besides Sonya and Uncle Vanya, onstage at the end of the play.

Also, the curtain closes on Sonya and Uncle Vanya embracing each other. Friel's adaptation, on the other hand, highlights the relationship between Uncle Vanya and Sonya and the isolation that they have and will continue to endure by

having only these two characters onstage at the end of the play. Also, Sonya and Uncle Vanya are active here at the end: they are writing. Seamus Heaney's poem "Digging" from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) immediately comes to mind here. The end of this celebrated poem reads as follows: "Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it" (4). Like the speaker in Heaney's poem, Sonya and Uncle Vanya choose a course of action, and Friel's adaptation ends with this scene of action, not inertia, as in Chekhov's play. Friel is not finished with the character of Sonya; she will return in his original play, *Afterplay*.

Preserving the monologues preserves the voice of each character. In other words, it is clear that Friel agrees with Chekhov that these characters need to speak, undisturbed, most of the time. The audience must focus in on these characters as they speak; they need to be highlighted. The monologues emphasize the importance of the speaker versus the characters around him or her. Of course, the content of the monologues in the original and the adaptation are not exactly the same, and in general, Friel does tend to shorten the monologues. It is not that Friel does not employ monologues in his original work. He has several plays, such as *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*, that are told through a series of extended monologues. In these plays, the characters each inhabit their own stage space with minimal, if any, interaction between characters.

Clearly, Friel felt the need to preserve the monologues, although, at times, he does break out parts to emphasize lines. It is clear that Astrov is a

sympathetic character in both Chekhov's original and Friel's adaptation. The audience is expected to sympathize with him, although he is a conflicted character. He battles his internal demons throughout the play, yet he is essentially a flat character, as he does not really change from the beginning to end of this play. His circumstances change greatly, but the core of Astrov remains the same. The play does not leave the audience with a fairy tale ending of marriage for Astrov and Sonya, although she desperately wishes for such a resolution. Here is one example where a monologue is broken up a bit for effect. In Chekhov's original here, we have Astrov preaching to Vanya about the eradication of the environment that is happening all around them:

You can stoke your stoves with peat and build sheds of stone.  
Well, all right, chop down forests when it's absolutely necessary,  
but why destroy them? Russian forests are toppling beneath the  
axe, the habitats of birds and beasts are dwindling, tens of  
thousands of trees are perishing, rivers are running shallow and  
drying up, gorgeous natural scenery is disappearing irretrievably,  
and all because lazy human beings can't be bothered to bend down  
and pick up fuel from the earth. (204-05)

Vanya just listens to this speech, without interrupting Astrov. There are a few possible ways of viewing this scene. First, Vanya's silence could indicate that Astrov's words are truth; his ideas are valid, and must be heard. Therefore, Vanya does not interrupt. Alternatively, Vanya could be adept at tuning out Astrov and his preaching, which is a reoccurring scene throughout the play.

Finally, perhaps Vanya fears Astrov; he does not want to engage in an argument with the doctor; after all, Vanya is the lowly caretaker of the estate.

Friel's adaptation highlights the violence of the situation. It is not only that the environment is being eroded, but the actions are violent, deliberate, and permanent:

ASTROV. Burn turf in your stoves, Vanya. Build your outhouses with stone. You know yourself the forest of this country are being systematically raped.

VANYA. Good God, by me?

ASTROV. Every year thousands, millions of trees are cut down.

Does that matter? You know it does. Our climate is being tampered with in a way we don't understand at all. A magnificent landscape is mutilated forever. Our rivers grow shallower and ultimately will dry up. And the natural habitat of animals and birds is so disturbed that they may never be reinstated. We are supposed to be people of reason, creative people. But is it reasonable, is it creative to destroy what we can not create? (Friel

15)

The delivery of Astrov's first line here is critical. Friel depicts the abuse of the environment as rape. Again, the language here is much more violent than in the original. However, Friel's adaptation premiered ninety-nine years after the original. Friel's language here highlights that there have been great advances in scientific knowledge, yet people still choose to abuse the environment. Many of

Astrov's monologues sound like public service announcements, and this one is no different. This scene is even more powerful for Friel's audience, because they do have the knowledge. He challenges the audience to *not* be Vanya here; they cannot continue to be in denial for the ills that are happening around them. Action must be taken; lethargy will not be tolerated. Inertia is a theme that runs throughout this play. The estate has fallen into disrepair, precisely because the occupants have stood by and let it happen. In this respect, the estate is analogous to the world as a whole.

Astrov is adept at pointing out the ills around him, but he is powerless at resolving them. The irony here, of course, is that he is a sought-after male figure here. In many ways, Astrov represents a substitute father figure. Since her father's marriage to Yelena, he has been distant from Sonya. At the end of the play, the professor and Yelena embark on their new life, while Sonya is left, stuck in the house. Indeed, Friel's *Afterplay*, an original work, follows what happens to Sonya after this abandonment.

### **Friel's *Afterplay***

*Afterplay* appeared in 2002, four years after Friel's *Uncle Vanya* and over twenty years after *Three Sisters*. In the introduction to the work, Friel expresses a feeling of being a "godfather" to these characters: Andrey from *Three Sisters* and Sonya from *Uncle Vanya*. The play engages these two characters in a chance meeting twenty years after their own dramas end. Friel offers possible futures for these two young people. However, in the context of analyzing his adaptations, this play becomes a source from which to interrogate possible

regrets that Friel had about his treatment of these characters in his adaptations. Richard York claims that “there is, in both Chekhov and Friel, a dramaturgy of loss, of the wasted opportunity, of a confronting of inertia” (164). I argue that *Afterplay* represents Friel’s recognition of this inertia and his attempt to remedy it. In “Brian Friel’s Adaptations of Chekhov,” which was published in the *Irish Studies Review* in 2005, Zsuzsa Csikai asserts that Friel’s appropriations of Chekhov are not merely side projects; the works inform and are integrated into Friel’s overall oeuvre. *Afterplay* is evidence of this assertion, as Friel’s concern for these characters goes beyond his adaptations of the original works.

Friel took his adaptations of Chekhov one step further with the creation of his *Afterplay* that premiered in 2002. In this play, Friel “borrows” Andrey Prozorov (*Three Sisters*) and Sonya Serebriakova (*Uncle Vanya*) and explores the fates of these characters twenty years after their individual dramas end. In his “Author’s Note” for the play, Friel refers to himself as a “godfather” figure to these characters (69). This question then arises: Why does Friel feel compelled to follow these two specific characters? Both figures are young during the course of their dramas, and both, in traditional Chekhovian fashion, personify the notion of unfulfilled dreams. In *Afterplay*, Friel creates a dream-like atmosphere where Sonya and Andrey meet. As strangers, they first share with each other the lives that they wished they led; ultimately, however, the truth is revealed. In both the original and Friel’s adaptations, the idea of place, particularly urban versus rural environments, is paramount. In *Three Sisters*, the family longs for Moscow, as if the city possesses the ability to will their dreams into reality. In *Uncle Vanya*, Dr.

Astrov seeks to better the world by preserving nature, specifically trees. This notion of trees is carried over into Friel's *Afterplay*, where Sonya is encouraged to look to afforestation, establishing a forest where there previously was not one, as a means of financial survival. The planting of these trees represents an attempt at a future for Sonya, while Andrey's only means of financial survival is panhandling in the big city. There is no easy answer presented in *Afterplay*, as both environments have the potential for disappointment. Place is also a function of imagination in this work, as each character asserts his own "place" in the world. Again, as the meeting between the Sonya and Andrey continues and their dream worlds explode, the audience feels that there is no place, real or imagined, within which these two people can attain self-actualization.

Brian Friel's *Afterplay* is a continuation of *Uncle Vanya* and *Three Sisters* that focuses on the respective heroine and hero of each work. Sonya seeks music via nature, as her infatuation with Dr. Astrov extends to his own causes such as afforestation. When Sonya is reviewing her documents in the café with Andrey, she looks at the afforestation plan as a "complete break with the past—that would be such a release, wouldn't it?" (78). Sonya's personal struggle is one glimpse into the larger Russian afforestation projects of the time. However, one must question her motives here. Is she genuinely concerned for the environment, or is this scheme an opportunity to make money, to endear herself to Dr. Astrov, or both?

It is here that Friel chooses to posit Sonya in a long line of Irish heroines, when she says, "They've left me with only a few fields" (95). One cannot ignore

the reference here to Yeats and Lady Gregory's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. In this play, a young man chooses to sacrifice himself, in lieu of his upcoming marriage, for Cathleen ni Houlihan, who is a representation of Ireland, as I noted earlier. Cathleen ni Houlihan appears, at first, as an old woman, but the young man's pledge to fight for her and recover her four green fields transforms her into a beautiful young woman with "the walk of a queen" (Yeats 11). Yeats would later lament the political message of this play in his poem "Man and the Echo" in 1938, where he questions the power and consequences of his words. Whether or not Yeats's words led men to sacrifice themselves to save Ireland, the connection between politics and literature in Ireland was, and continues to be, strong.

Unlike Cathleen, however, Sonya is unable to hypnotize Astrov into following her. In *Afterplay*, Sonya later describes Astrov:

He believes that, if we were all to pay just a little attention to our environment, it would respond so warmly to that attention and would blossom under it; and we in turn would become better and more generous people ourselves. And he's so right. Just a little attention is all that is needed. I don't think he believes in God but he believes in human perfectibility. He sometimes uses the word holy. I think may be is a holy man himself. (95)

Shortly thereafter, the reader is shocked to hear that Dr. Astrov married Sonya's stepmother after her father passed away; the two are still married, but living apart, because he is too busy "rescuing the damned world" (98). Thus, Friel



extends Chekhov's characterization of Astrov here; the reader is presented with two contradictory personalities. First, Astrov is an upstanding physician who is deeply devoted to environmental issues. On the other hand, Astrov is a manipulator who used Sonya to get to her stepmother and who "medicates" himself with alcohol to reconcile his own Jekyll and Hyde personas. In Friel's *Afterplay*, he places Sonya and Andrey in the vastness of big city of Moscow, yet the two are unable to escape their small lives. Their fears and insecurities plague them, despite the fact that the city offers a chance at anonymity for both.

Space, the concept of a place without meaning for a person, assumes a critical importance in the work of both Friel and Chekhov. As Boris Zingerman argues, "The place of action in Chekhov's plays is a space doomed to disappear" (491). He goes on to outline the struggle between the narrow stages of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* and the wide open spaces that are the subject of fantasies in the dramas (Zingerman 493-95). In *Afterplay*, Andrey speaks about his sisters' conflict of space in *Three Sisters*:

They believe that the life they lead in Taganrog isn't their real life at all, not their authentic life. Isn't that silly? Their life in Taganrog is a sort of protracted waiting time for the real life that has still to happen. And they are convinced that that authentic life is available here, in the Moscow of their childhood, a Moscow they haven't seen for over forty years! Isn't that peculiar? (83)

The reader is introduced here to the notion of the present life as a “waiting room” or stopping-off point along a greater journey. Andrey’s sister Irina’s breakdown is much more frenzied in Friel’s version of *Three Sisters*. She cries:

What’s become of everything? Where has it all gone to? Oh my God, I’ve forgotten everything. Everything’s chaotic in my head. What’s the Italian word for window—or ceiling? I don’t know. It’s gone. Every day I forget something more . . . My life, too—hemorrhaging away on me—never to be recovered. And we’ll never to go to Moscow—never, never, never—I know that now. (63)

The medical analogy of the “waiting room” that starts in his version of *Three Sisters* continues in *Afterplay* with the “hemorrhaging” of life. Of course, the reader understands from the beginning that these women will not go back to Moscow, as it is impossible. They long for the Moscow of their youth, not that of the present day. When the visiting soldiers try to talk about Moscow as it is in the present time, the sisters quickly turn the conversation to a reminiscence of the good old days.

Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* has a setting similar to *Uncle Vanya*, as they both take place on a rural estate. Thus, the setting itself does not present an issue for the Irish stage. Friel, like Chekhov, is fond of highlighting personal struggles in locations that serve as microcosms of the larger culture identity. To continue with the notions of music, the Prozorov household was filled with music, until the arrival of Natasha. Similarly, Andrey’s marriage to Natasha signals the end of his dreams in many ways; it also signals the downward spiral that is

revealed in *Afterplay*. Thus, Chekhov's own *Three Sisters* certainly provides the groundwork for *Afterplay*. Andrey engages in a discussion of rural versus city life in Chekhov's play: "You sit in Moscow in the cast main dining room of a restaurant, you don't know anyone and no one knows you, and at the same time you don't feel like a stranger. Whereas here you know everyone and everyone knows you, but you're a stranger, a stranger. . . A stranger and alone" (267).

The ultimate irony here, of course, is that Andrey will meet Sonya in a small Moscow café decades later and find an intimacy with her that is absent in his relationship with his wife. Andrey speaks plainly about his wife in Chekhov's

*Three Sisters*:

A wife is a wife. She's honest, decent, oh and kind, but for all that there's something in her that reduces her to a petty, blind sort of bristly animal. In any case, she's not human. I'm talking to you [Chebutykin] as a friend, the only person I can open my heart to. I love Natasha, I do, but sometimes she seems to me incredibly vulgar, and then I get mixed up; I don't understand how and why I love her so, or, at least, loved her. . . (297)

In Friel's version of *Three Sisters*, Natasha clearly states "I'm just not used to mixing with posh people like—" (28). However, it does not take long for her to settle in with the Prozorovs on their estate, once she and Andrey are married. One wonders what the continuation of her sentence would be. Is Andrey attracted to Natasha precisely because she is of a lower standing? He chooses a woman whom he feels that he can dominate, which is almost

expected, since he has spent his entire life in the shadow of his sisters. The only parts of life that Andrey can call his own and control, like Astrov, are his vices such as gambling and drinking. In *Afterplay*, Andrey creates a fantasy world for Sonya, where he is a successful musician; however, this attempt to reignite the music is smothered by reality.

Thus, *Afterplay* provides Friel with an opportunity to merge his ideas about music, place, and dreams. He places these characters in Moscow in 1920, yet Friel focuses his play on the interior—the coffee shop—as opposed the turbulent exterior that would have been Moscow during this time. The country is poised between the Russian Revolution and Stalin’s rise to power; however, no hint of such upheaval is given. Therefore, Andrey and Sonya are at the center of this play, as the audience can imagine a coffee shop in their own hometown. Thus, the actual city is less important than the fact that both characters are out of their element. Friel purposely sought to translate Chekhov for an Irish audience. Here in his own creative work, he continues this idea, as the reader can easily picture these two sitting in a Dublin café, although the historical backdrop of the time would be much livelier. Friel separates place from culture, in order to translate these works for the Irish stage. The reader sympathizes with these characters, as they live out their fantasy lives. Andrey imagines a professional career in music, but such a possibility was cut short with his marriage to Natasha. His marriage to Natasha ceased any music—read dreams—as she immediately set to redecorating and reorganizing the house. It is only through his separation from her that he can even pursue a career as a panhandler. Friel illustrates here

that, to some degree, place is inescapable. Once a place has made an impression on us, then there is nothing that we can do to change the situation. For both Andrey and Sonya, their hometowns and their circumstances nurtured a suppression of their dreams. Friel's commentary in *Afterplay* is bleak, as we see two people who were in the prime of their lives in their respective plays, yet here, they wallow in the hypothetical. Although the plays ended bleakly for these characters, Chekhov inserted a subtle glimmer of hope. However, Friel presents the reader of *Afterplay* with no rainbow. Whatever futures the Chekhovian reader envisioned for Andrey and Sonya are deflated in Friel's play. There is only a small Moscow café in 1920 with an angry waitress and two people whose lives have passed them by. *Afterplay* is the only example in Friel's oeuvre of the playwright plotting out alternative endings for characters from his adaptations.

### ***Hedda Gabler***

The only work of Ibsen that Friel adapted is *Hedda Gabler*. This play premiered in 2008, much farther along in his career than his adaptations of Chekhov. In 2012, Friel's *Hedda Gabler* was directed by Anna Mackmin at the Old Vic in London. In her review of the play, Susannah Clapp applauds the performance and even connects Friel back to Chekhov:

Brian Friel's extraordinary new version, which hauls in a shoal of anachronisms but makes the dialogue and action skip and dangerously swerve, Mackmin does for Ibsen what many writers (including Friel) and directors have done for Chekhov: she lifts a

pall of piety and shows that a swift comic touch can be as disturbing as a heavy tread.

There is a dark humor present throughout *Hedda Gabler*. However, at times, the comedy is much closer to the surface. The invocation of Circe that I explore adds a comedic dimension to the play to which an Irish audience will favorably respond. The confusion in terms of naming and place—who belongs where—does provide comic relief to the serious events that punctuate this play. The notion of tragicomedy is pervasive throughout Irish literature and drama, so this type of play is conducive to an Irish audience's sensibility.

Why was *Hedda Gabler* Friel's first adaptation, and only one to date, of a play by Ibsen? Friel's original plays are often dominated by impotent men and commanding women, which can clearly be seen in this Ibsen play. However, such a "masculine" female lead appears outside of Friel's comfort zone. Thus, viewing this play in terms of the dynamics of place, instead of gender roles, yields intriguing conclusions. In this analysis, Hedda is an outsider; however, instead of attempting to learn the ways of the Tesman tribe, she seems determined to retain her autonomy, as even evidenced in her preferred choice of names, Hedda Gabler.

This notion of "tribe" and the demarcation line between those who exist inside and outside the tribe harkens back to *Translations*. The resident Greek philosopher, Jimmy Jack, at the very end of *Translations*, attempts to explain the differences between people:

Do you know the Greek word *endogamein*? It means to marry within the tribe. And the word *exogamein* means to marry outside the tribe. And you don't cross those borders casually—both sides get very angry. Now, the problem is this: Is Athene sufficiently mortal or am I sufficiently godlike for the marriage to be acceptable to her people and to my people? You think about that. (82)

Throughout the play, Jimmy Jack appears as a remnant of a bygone era, yet his words are always powerful. In a literal sense here, Jimmy Jack is referencing the ill-fated love affair between the Irishwoman Maire and the English soldier Yolland. However, the clear demarcations here also imply the division between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, both religiously and politically. Friel himself crossed borders, as he was born in Northern Ireland but then lived in the Republic of Ireland for much of his life. This notion of boundaries and how these boundaries define the people within them clearly influences Friel's adaptation of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, as seen in this scene.

Tesman's aunts are clearly offended by Hedda's behavior towards them, yet their love for their nephew prevents them from addressing the issue:

BERTHA Why does she [Hedda] call me Berna then?

JULIANA She just misheard your name. (11)

Hedda's inability to address these women by their proper names is dismissed here by Juliana, yet it unnerves her, as evidenced a little later in the play, when Hedda fails to address Juliana properly: "Juliana—Julia—even Juju, I'm afraid" (20). Everyone knows of the "great" Hedda Gabler by name. Hedda looks down

on his husband's aunts, as if they are merely her servants, unworthy of names. Brian Friel's adaptation of the play captures this tension and the hatred that Hedda holds for these women. Ibsen's play reads: "HEDDA (*Half audibly getting up.*) Oh, these eternal aunts" (316). The same line in Friel's adaptation reads: "HEDDA (*Softly*) Interfering bitch" (46). This contrast in lines illustrates a difference between Ibsen's Hedda and that of Friel. Hedda is an outsider in both depictions, and she has her moments in each version. However, Friel's Hedda is more deliberate, more cunning. She is keenly aware of her actions and their consequences; there is no remorse.

Although Hedda is still the main female character, Friel's adaptation prominently highlights Thea as well. While Friel usually broke up Chekhov's monologues in favor of rapid dialogue, in this play, he does the opposite. When Thea and Hedda become reacquainted, Hedda is naturally eager to hear the background to Thea and Eilert's relationship. In Ibsen's play, this information is exchanged via a dialogue between Hedda and Mrs. Elvsted (Thea):

HEDDA (*Moves a chair closer from the table, sits beside her [Mrs. Elvsted] and strokes her hands.*) Thea, my dear, how did it come about, this—bond between you and Eilert Løvborg?

MRS. ELVSTED Oh, it just happened, little by little. I started to have a kind of power of him.

HEDDA Really?



MRS. ELVSTED He gave up his old ways—and not because I begged him to. I never dared do that. But he started to notice that those kinds of things upset me, so he gave them up.

HEDDA (*Concealing an involuntary, derisive smile.*) So you rehabilitated him, as they say. You, little Thea.

MRS. ELVSTED That's what he said, anyway. And for his part he's made a real human being out of me. Taught me to think, to understand all sorts of things. (306)

This dialogue goes on for another page and a half. The exchange draws attention to both women, while Friel chooses to transform Thea (Mrs. Elvsted)'s words into a monologue. Thus, Thea is foregrounded in this scene, taking the limelight away from Hedda.

The section in Friel's adaptation is approximately the same length as that of Ibsen, but it is a monologue by Thea:

Thea and Eilert . . . yes . . .

I used to watch him through a crack in the parlour door; teaching the children at the big, mahogany table. The stooped shoulders. The patient hands. The lank hair. But especially the face; and the cornflower-blue eyes, those hesitant, irresolute eyes that hinted at weakness. And always, always that wan, apologetic smile that confirmed that weakness. Flinching before the sly bullying of the children and my husband's crude discourtesies. I could see how damaged he was and how

incapable of protecting himself: that every lesson with the children and every encounter with my husband was an occasion for humiliation. And watching him throughout a crack in the parlous door I suddenly knew that I loved that weak, talented, damaged Eilert Loevburg . . . yes. Loved him suddenly and fiercely and altogether without caution. (32)

This monologue continues for another page and a half. Although Hedda is still physically onstage during Thea's monologue, the center of attention here is undoubtedly Thea. Her words here betray how she fell in love with Eilert, her children's tutor, right before her husband's eyes. The idea that she looked at him through a keyhole brings a voyeuristic dimension to the situation. The door represents a line of demarcation, a separation of place. However, the keyhole allows Thea to view Eilert in his own world, tutoring the children. Thea does so from her own comfortable place in the kitchen. Thea and Hedda are two very different women, yet they both seek escape. Friel's decision to transform Thea's speech into a monologue positions her as a foil, of sorts, to Hedda Gabler. Since this passage comes so early in the play, it has a lasting effect on the rest of the play.

The depiction of women in this play is not limited to mortal women, and the invocation of a goddess reveals a striking feature of Friel's adaptation, one that clearly has an Irish audience in mind. A conversation between Brack and Hedda about the men's visit to the local brothel the night before includes a reference to the madam, known as Diana in Ibsen's play and Circe in Friel's

adaptation. Ibsen's play includes the following dialogue between Judge Brack and Hedda:

BRACK Short and sweet—He [Løvborg] ended up at the salon of a certain Miss Diana.

HEDDA Miss Diana?

BRACK Yes, it was Miss Diana's soirée for a select circle of ladies and their admirers.

HEDDA Is she a redhead?

BRACK Exactly.

HEDDA A sort of a-singer?

BRACK Oh, yes—She's also that. And a mighty huntress—of mean, Mrs. Hedda. You must have heard of her. Eilert Løvborg was one of her most strenuous admirers—in his better days. (338)

Clearly, Diana is the “madam” of this establishment, and given her depiction as a goddess of fertility, the use of this goddess seems appropriate for the situation. The equivalent for Diana in Greek mythology would be Artemis, but instead of using Artemis, Friel employs Circe here. The section in Friel's adaptation reads as follows:

BRACK Please! So he resisted the invited with valiance until alcohol undermined him, and himself and the others ended up in the establishment of a Mademoiselle Circe.

HEDDA Circe?

BRACK A pseudonym. Yes, a little flamboyant. But then she is a lady with classical inclinations as well.

HEDDA A sort of singer-dancer?

BRACK Among other accomplishments.

HEDDA Red haired?

BRACK You've heard of her then?

HEDDA She carries a revolver in her handbag.

BRACK That I didn't know. So you and she share a passion for artillery? Yes, some years ago Mademoiselle Circe was up before me on some charge or other. In those days her more decorous name was Mary Bridget O'Donnell. Eilert Loevborg was a client of hers back then, too. (*Trying to remember*) What was the charge? Yes, cruelty to animals. Surely there's no connection between that and her profession? (74-75)

In Greek mythology, Circe was a witch who occupied an island on which Odysseus and his men were trapped for a year, as she turned his men into swine. Thus, there is a sense in Friel's adaptation that the men were trapped in the brothel by this enchantress.

However, for an Irish audience, Circe carries another allusion, as a chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. This chapter's analog in Homer's *Odyssey* would be the Sirens episode. Joyce penned one play, *Exiles*, which was panned by critics. However, this Circe episode is essentially a play within a novel, complete with dialogue labeled by character and with stage directions. Instead of

weaving through treacherous waters avoiding the deadly, but sweet, call of the sirens, the reader sees Leopold Bloom wandering through Nighttown, Dublin's red-light district, in an attempt to catch up to Stephen Dedalus. The chapter is a series of episodes shifting between reality and hallucination, as Bloom attempts to navigate through this circus of reality and hallucination. The allusion here is deliberate, and it makes sense in an Irish context. Using Diana does not have the impact of using Circe. Joyce's Circe is perhaps as famous and recognizable as that of Homer, so the allusion works not only for an Irish audience, but also for a global one.

There is also a deeper connection here between name and place that Friel has already made clear in *Translations*. Calling people by their correct names would mean making connections, establishing roots. Indeed, when George shows Hedda the sock that his aunt made him and added to each year, she replies: "Not my emotions, not my memories, are they?"(21). Hedda is suffocated by her location. Their extravagant honeymoon was tolerable, since they traveled. However, she is now stuck in her present location. She is living in a house that is not hers, assuming the role in her husband's life previously attended to by his aunts. Hedda has two choices—assimilation or escape—and she chooses the latter. Hedda shares no past with these people, and she cannot foresee a future. Thus, she lives in a state of the perpetual present, until she finds the strength to make her final exit.

Physical location can be a unifying factor for people. Language and customs are products of people who share a common place. Yes, diasporas

share such language and customs, but diasporas ultimately share one common location, no matter how removed they may be at the current point. Diasporic communities congregate, forming their own places in new spaces. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha theorizes,

The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic. That iteration negates our sense of the origins of the struggle. It undermines our sense of the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols and icons, by questioning our sense of the authority of cultural synthesis in general. (35)

Bhabha highlights how distance, both in terms of place and time, distorts culture. Mere repetition and transmission of culture is mimicry; it is without context. Culture must be contextualized in order to survive. Looking to the past, while informative, is not the complete answer. Friel's adaptations reflect this notion. He attempted to address Ireland's past in *Translations*, and in many of his previous plays, but the shift into adapting Chekhov, and particularly Ibsen, is a way of looking forward. As Bhabha points out, embracing diversity stands in stark contrast to the idealized notion of a proto-culture that unites everyone.

Thus, it is fascinating that in his first adaptation of Ibsen, Friel resurrects the idea of tribe, while highlighting America, which is, like Ireland, a postcolonial nation. The postcolonial country must essentially begin anew and divorce the past in order to move forward. To paraphrase Bhabha, authority must be redefined and re-presented in the form of the new identity (35). However, this redefinition is complicated, as some traditions and customs will be preserved, and some will not. Thus, there is a conflict: How does a postcolonial country stay connected to a past—a past essentially controlled by another country, England in this case—while forging ahead?

F. C. McGrath explores such questions in his book *Brian Friel's (Post) Colonial Drama: Language, Illusion, and Politics* (1999). McGrath argues that Friel's early work did not belie his nationality: "Like many Northern nationalists in the first several decades after partition, Friel cocooned himself in his own community, and in his early writing he largely ignored the political and social realities of his divided state. There is very little in his early published work that suggests that Friel is from Northern Ireland" (1). Indeed, *Translations* is a critical turning point in Friel's career; of course, he tackled Irish history in previous works. However, *Translations*, particularly since it was the opening piece for the Field Day Theatre Company, foregrounds Irish politics and history. Also, as I have noted, Friel was working on *Translations* and his first adaptation, of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, concurrently.

Friel refuses to allow a bilingual production of *Translations* for a Gaelic audience, but an all-Gaelic production would have been acceptable to him. The

bilingual production “would violate the metaphorical integrity of the linguistic device” (McGrath 181). A bilingual production would highlight the difference in the languages; one language, presumably Irish, would become “other” here. However, in an all-Irish production, the Irish-speaking audience would enjoy the same effect as an English-speaking audience does with the original script. Friel attempts to point out the differences in the same language—Irish English and British English—here as well as the differences between disparate languages such as Irish and English. *Translations* deals primarily with mistranslation or misinformation; the act of renaming the land removes people’s experiences with the land, making them foreigners. McGrath applies Bhabha’s theories to the situation described in the play:

For Bhabha misunderstanding or mistranslation is endemic to colonial situations. The Word of the imperial power is never interpreted ‘transparently’ but in terms of the context of another culture. This fundamental miscognition interrogates its source and the source of its power. This reception of the word—transformed, displaced, misinterpreted, partial—constitutes colonial hybridity, the challenge to power in the very exercise of that power. (188)

The recitations of the Irish place names in this play function essentially as eulogies, naming places that no longer exist in name; they exist now only in the memory of the inhabitants. The colonial situation involves a unidirectional exchange of knowledge, from the colonial power to the colonized nation. The break in this connection happens when the colonized nation separates from the



colonial power. It then has to define its own identity in its own terms. However, this shift is not immediate or complete, as Bhabha highlights in his use of the term “colonial hybridity” in the above quotation. With no mistranslation, the postcolonial nation must forge ahead as its own source of power.

While adapting *Hedda Gabler* for an Irish audience, Friel chose to include numerous references to America. Friel is a wordsmith, and in *The Communication Cord*, he uses words to create humor, yet they also always signify difference. Of course, Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* comes to mind here: it is a tundish, not a funnel, after all. I refer here to the discussion between Stephen Dedalus and his teacher regarding the word “tundish,” an archaic English word with which the teacher is unfamiliar, despite that, as an Englishman, English is *his* language. I return to this episode in Chapter 3. Language is contested. However, here Friel illustrates how Americanisms have invaded Hiberno-English. Judge Brack is speaking to George about Lovberg, when he says: “He has relatives in the town who still have a lot of clout. (*To himself*) ‘Clout’? —sounds like an Americanism, too, doesn’t it?” (Friel, *Hedda Gabler* 37). It is clear that the etymology of this word preoccupies Brack throughout his discussion with George. At the end of their discussion, Brack has a breakthrough: “Au revoir. I’m wrong—it’s not an Americanism, ‘clout.’ An archery term—the mark shot at—a fair clout. Glad I got that. Until this evening” (Friel, *Hedda Gabler* 38). The issue seems resolved, but Judge Brack continues with such references. After George returns with Lovberg’s new book, Brack says: “Gee whiz—as the Americans have it” (46). Of

course, such references are not in Ibsen's original, so they are uniquely Friel's constructions. Adopting American words and turns of phrase into his adaptation could be viewed as Friel's way of connecting these two locales. However, he has Brack use an archaic phrase such as "Gee whiz," which does not jive with contemporary American slang. Is Friel saying that, for the Irish, this bygone era vision of America is unshakable? The notion of the American cowboy and the accent that accompanies the stereotype comes to mind here. The term "Americanism" in this play is can be viewed pejoratively. Often, in Irish literature, the line between English and Hiberno-English is emphasized. However, here, we have characters distinguishing between Hiberno-English and American English. Instead of looking on a map to the right (England), we are now looking to the left (America).

Friel's plays often include characters who explore the etymology of words or phrases. It is almost as if there is a preoccupation here with identifying the source of everything. There has to be an origin, and it must be identified. However, as this play illustrates, the origins of words and idioms are often confused. This confusion can indicate a global connectedness. The more commonplace these words and idioms become, the more connected people are. For Tuan, place and experience are connected, but what if a person experiences a place precisely through language? For example, I started studying Irish in Philadelphia, and I am from an Irish-American background. For me, learning Irish led to a greater appreciation of and a desire to learn more about Ireland and its culture, which eventually led me to travel there. However, if I had not

physically gone to Ireland, would my appreciation of the culture be any less? In an era of ever-advancing technology, the idea of an actual space does seem less relevant. Tuan argues that “[p]lace is an organized world of meaning. It is essentially a static concept. If we see the world as process, constantly changing, we should not be able to develop any sense of place” (179). I would argue that place is not static. Change necessitates reorganization and revisioning. Place is a space infused with emotion and meaning, but clearly, these emotions and meanings change over time. However, these adjustments do not negate the original place; instead, they enhance it. Space is static, because it is not dependent on any outside influences that are kinetic. Place is not static, precisely because it is dependent upon dynamic variables. Place cannot be divorced from feelings and emotions; it can be only redefined.

Friel was clearly fond of adapting works by Chekhov, as illustrated by the number of adaptations he has completed of Chekhov’s writings. Similarly, Frank McGuinness, whose adaptation repertoire is much larger and more diverse than that of Friel, has methodically adapted Ibsen’s catalog. One work that both men have adapted is Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*. While this is not the only adaptation that they share in common, it is the only one readily available in print. While Friel’s adaptations posit the individual in the frame of the family, McGuinness’s adaptations often focus on the role of the individual in isolation.

Sadly, Brian Friel passed away on October 2, 2015. We are clearly left with many “what if” questions here, but his repertoire is formidable. His work

transcends many genres and styles, yet the undeniable power of language unites his writing.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONTAGION AND HOME:

#### FRANK MCGUINNESS'S ADAPTATIONS OF HENRIK IBSEN

Frank McGuinness has widely adapted the work of other playwrights, such as the relatively modern Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, Federico García Lorca, Bertolt Brecht, and Alexander Ostrovsky, as well as the ancient Sophocles, Euripedes, and Seneca. Thus, his repertoire of adaptations is certainly larger and more wide-ranging than that of Friel, and it is important to note that McGuinness—a lecturer at University College, Dublin—has concentrated largely on the adaptation of drama, whereas Friel has adapted short fiction as well as drama. From his number of adaptations, McGuinness seems to be most interested in Ibsen's drama.

In this chapter, I explore McGuinness's adaptations of Ibsen's dramas *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *The Lady from the Sea*, and *Peer Gynt*. Over a period of just under twenty-five years, McGuinness has adapted nine of Ibsen's plays. He has adapted both the Norwegian playwrights' better known and lesser known works, which suggests a deeper agenda. I argue that McGuinness is revisioning Ibsen for an Irish audience, which can be viewed as a goal originating with the Field Day Theatre Company. Such a project depends on a strong connection, which I argue is the relevance of Ibsen to contemporary Irish audiences. In this light, I explore why and how these works relate to an Irish

audience, by examining the works themselves, including their production histories and critical receptions.

Unlike Friel's plays, which have been widely published, even adaptations, many of McGuinness's adaptations, regardless of their original authors, remain unpublished. In the next chapter, I examine McGuinness's *The Three Sisters*; here, I introduce his adaptations of Chekhov, in this chapter, and examine how they fit into the overall timeline and tone of his work. McGuinness has adapted two plays by Chekhov, *Three Sisters* (1990) and *Uncle Vanya* (1995). I do not examine his adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* in depth, since it has not been published. In fact, many of McGuinness's adaptations, at least when compared to those of Friel, remain unpublished. While this fact is unfortunate for my purposes here, the situation presents an exciting opportunity for future scholarship.

McGuinness's method of adaptation is similar to that of Friel, since McGuinness works with current translations in order to formulate his own adaptation. Helen Lojek is an expert on Frank McGuinness's drama, and in *Contexts for Frank McGuinness's Drama*, she explains:

McGuinness has produced 'versions' of plays written in languages other than English. His adaptations . . . are not translations, since he is not fluent in the texts' original languages. The adaptations generate income, of course, and they provide advanced school in the art of drama structure. . . . They also represent his insistence on the value of Irish English, his belief that translations speaking in

English or American accents are not necessarily either superior or sufficient. (41)

Thus, both Friel and McGuinness are interested in how English is spoken in Ireland (in Irish English or “Hiberno English”). It is not merely an accent that defines this English; rather, it is the music and arrangement of the language itself.

I argue that McGuinness’s focus on Ibsen represents a shift in ideology, towards viewing Ireland as a modern society, one that exemplifies Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity. Ibsen’s work often highlights the clash between individual and society, revealing the effects of modernization. Just as *Translations* marks a shift for Friel into the field of adaptation, McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) serves as a starting point in this examination. Two years later, McGuinness adapted his first play by Ibsen: *Rosmersholm*. War serves as a backdrop in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, but the focus is on individuals. His treatment of place in this play—four pairs of characters inhabiting four different places concurrently—reflects his inclination to travel beyond Ireland with ease in his work. In Ibsen’s work, the outside world continuously looms in the background, and the same can be said of McGuinness’s plays. His treatment of Ibsen is thus an extension of his own creative work; as with Friel’s, McGuinness’s adaptations form a vital part of his repertoire.

This notion of the individual is inextricably tied to his home. In many ways, the conflict of these plays highlights how the individual battles with this home:

the reality of it, the perceived notion of it, and the inescapability of it. Home functions in both a literal and figurative sense in these works. In this light, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* serves as the perfect jumping-off point from which to approach McGuinness's adaptations of Ibsen. In this play, each character is out of his element. Home is an illusion here; it is a subjective notion perpetrated by each character in order to locate himself on some grander scale. It is through home that the characters relate to each other; often, they judge each other based on home. However, the ultimate irony here is that no one is at home on the battlefield. The setting here places everyone out of sorts; war creates empty space, not meaningful place. It is only after the war that the battlefields are infused with feeling and transformed into places that will be honored. Without a communal sense of home, the soldiers turn to the home that they will all ultimately share, perhaps sooner rather than later as a result of war:

**All** (*sing*)

I'm but a stranger here,

Heaven is my home.

Earth is but a desert drear,

Heaven is my home.

Danger and sorrow strand

Round me on every hand.

Heaven is my fatherland,

Heaven is my home. (*Observe* 194)



Thus, the focus here is on the ultimate home, Heaven. Earth, in this prayer, is but a transitory space. These broader notions of Earth and Heaven serve to unify the men. The men are in a foreign space fighting for their own place. Despite the clear differences between the men, they identify as men of Ulster, and they fight for Ulster. The Battle of the Somme took place in July 1916 at a critical time in Ireland's history, after the Easter 1916 Rising, yet still a few years before the Irish War of Independence. There is also a sense that these men are "out of place" just by being there and fighting for the crown.

Throughout the play, references are made back to the Battle of Boyne in July 1690, setting up a parallel between the Somme and the Boyne rivers. The play is told through the eyes of Kenneth Pyper, the protagonist, looking back on these events from old age; in total, there are eight men in the play, including the only survivor, Pyper. Pyper is from an aristocratic family, yet shuns this lifestyle; he is also a homosexual, and this theme provides conflict throughout the play, particularly in the storyline of the relationship between Pyper and Craig.

Throughout the play, the notion of place is contested, as these men come—Pyper, Craig, Roulston, Crawford, Millen, Moore, McIlwaine and Anderson—from various parts of Ireland. Anderson states, "All rivers smell the same," to which Pyper responds "Not your own river" (*Observe* 187). Pyper is perhaps the most conflicted character in this play, as he fights against family, society, religion and himself. However, this conflict produces insight into place and space, as he is constantly searching for a place to which he can belong without surrendering his own identity. Rivers naturally divide land; Ireland is no exception. The rivers

connect to the oceans, which connect to the greater world. Thus, the rivers are conduits to different spaces and places, and so they represent opportunity.

Part Three of this play, entitled “Pairing,” splits these men into four different locations, as they go home on leave: “*Ulster: Boa Island, Lough Erne, carvings [Craig and Pyper]; a Protestant church [Roulston and Crawford]; a suspended ropebridge [Millen and Moore], the Field, a lambeg drum [McIlwaine and Anderson]*” (138). It is important here to note that the physical stage is separated into four distinct areas for this production. Helen Lojek explains how this feat worked at the Peacock stage for the premiere in 1935: “Dividing the tiny Peacock stage on which the play was first produced into four distinct areas, however, was no easy task, particularly since all eight characters are on stage at all times. Awareness of the separate environments is crucial to the scene’s impact” (226). The Peacock stage is located in the basement of the building that houses the Abbey Theatre. The Peacock traditionally houses more experimental pieces of drama. Clearly, a reference to “four fields,” particularly at the place that houses Ireland’s national theatre, cannot go unnoticed. At the end of W. B. Yeats’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, as I indicated earlier, the poor old woman is transformed into a beautiful young woman by the blood sacrifice of a young man, who falls under the old woman’s spell, promising to help her recover the “four green fields” that have been taken away from her. In this play, McGuinness provides a unique retelling of this conflict.

Helen Lojek carefully outlines how place is problematized in this scene:

The play is intensely aware of place in this section, but how place is to be represented on stage is not specified. . . . The question is whose imagination should dominate here—the set designer’s or the audience’s? . . . Dialogue tells us the sculptures are inscrutable, the bridge is frightening, the field lacks meaning without the Orange Order paraders, and the church is both prison and freedom. The rest of the meaning is invested in the places by those who know them, and actors can convey it with minimal help from props and set. These both are and are not actual places. They exist, with greater or lesser specificity, in various parts of Ulster. They exist more powerfully in the memories and imaginations of the soldiers whom they have shaped and who return to them physically in this scene and emotionally in other parts of the play. They will exist imaginatively for audiences as well. (228)

Repeatedly, here, Lojek emphasizes the importance of audience and the audience’s perspective. Tuan’s third theme immediately comes to mind here:

“The range of experience or knowledge. Experience can be direct and intimate, or it can be indirect and conceptual, mediate by symbols. We know our home intimately; we can only know *about* our country if it is very large” (6).

McGuinness is keenly aware of the limits of the Peacock stage. He is counting on the audience to make these connections in their minds. He assumes that they will relate to these places and people. Thus, this play is at home in Ireland,

but a foreign audience would not be able to make these connections. To some degree, producing this play, about the struggles of Unionist Northern Irishmen, at the seat of Ireland's national theatre in the Republic of Ireland was brave, as the audience might not necessarily have made the connections that McGuinness demands.

Indeed, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* is not as widely produced as, say, Brian Friel's *Translations*. While both plays are rooted in place, Friel's plays deals with conflicts—love and family—that seem to be more common. The question that Lojek poses about whose imagination should dominate is one that must be further explored. The more detailed the stage directions are, the more constrained the director, set designer, and other theatre practitioners are in the production of a play. At the extreme here, one thinks of Samuel Beckett, who demanded complete control over the productions of his works. While certainly involved in productions, Frank McGuinness is clearly not as obsessive as Beckett. If one considers a continuum of drama, from literal (left) to avante-garde (right), Friel would probably tend to be towards the left, while Beckett would be near the far right. However, McGuinness would fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. His works are certainly understandable from a literal reading, but as one begins to read more deeply, there are numerous layers in each play by McGuinness. Of course, the same is true for Friel, but Friel directs his audience more closely than McGuinness. There is more left up to the reader's, and by extension, the audience member's imagination in a play by McGuinness, compared to a play by Friel.

### ***A Doll's House***

Frank McGuinness's adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* premiered at the Playhouse Theatre in London in 1996. The play's setting is the Helmer household, and so home is prominent here. However, for some of the characters, the Helmer household is a place, while for others it is a space. In this respect, home becomes both a haven and a prison. The peripheral characters, whose homes we do not see, are inherently flawed. For some it is a psychological ailment, while for others, it is physical. Regardless of the manifestation, these issues can be traced back to each character's home.

The idea that the sins of the father are visited upon the son is evident throughout many of Ibsen's plays. This concept, of course, is far from foreign to Ireland. The generations now, including Frank McGuinness himself, are dealing with the effects of the Treaty of Partition. This separation is both physical and psychological. The physical division of the island has psychological ramifications for the inhabitants. Thus, it is not just physical illnesses, in terms of contagion that can be passed down from father to son but it is also the decisions of the fathers that impact the sons. This notion of contagion is eloquently expressed by Torvald Helmer in Ibsen's play and McGuinness's adaptation. It is interesting to note how similar these two passages are to one another. In Ibsen's play, the conversation between Torvald and Nora about Krogstad's evil and immoral ways is as follows:

HELMER Ah, my dear, I'm a lawyer—I've seen it often enough.

Almost everyone who turns bad as a youth has had a compulsive liar for a mother.

NORA Why just—a mother?

HELMER Usually you can trace it to the mother, but fathers have the same effect; it's something every lawyer knows. And yet this Krogstad has been living at home, poisoning his children with lies and deceit; that's why I call him morally corrupt. And that's why my sweet little Nora must promise me not to plead his case. Your hand on that. Now, now, what's this? Give me your hand. There.

That's settled. And let me tell you, it would be impossible for me to work with him; I literally feel sick when I'm around someone like that. (169)

After this exchange, Nora quickly separates herself from Torvald, exclaiming all the work to which she must attend. In McGuinness's adaptation, the exchange is strikingly similar:

**Helmer** I've seen it, my darling, as a lawyer. Nearly all young criminals had lying mothers.

**Nora** Just their mothers—why?

**Helmer** The mother is nearly always the root of it. Every lawyer knows that only too well. Fathers do their bit as well. This Krogstad has gone home for years and poisoned his children with lies and deceit. That's why I call him an immoral man. So my

sweet little Nora must promise me not to plead his case. Give me your hand. Now, now what's this? Give me your hand. Now. It's settled then. I assure you, it would have been impossible to work with him. I honestly feel sick, sick to my stomach, in the presence of such people. (40)

The irony here, of course, is that Nora is such a person. She forged her father's signature, but Torvald is not yet aware of this fact. The dialogue between these two people in this scene reveals the precise reaction from Torvald that Nora had been dreading. Indeed, in Ibsen's original, Helmer states to Nora, "He forged people's names. Do you know that that means?" (169). In McGuinness's adaptation, the same line reads, "Forged signatures. Have you any idea what that means?" (39).

Thus, in both plays, the family line is presented as a source, or root, of the evil committed by the individual. What, then, are we to make of Nora's forgery of her father's signature? If Helmer's perspective is valid, Nora must confront the idea that she committed that act, because of her predisposition to it, not necessarily out of love for Helmer. Indeed, the act of forging her father's signature was self-serving. When Nora is confronted with reality, her instinct is to escape. Torvald's illness is a prime example. However, Torvald's theory not only points backwards but forwards as well. Thus, Nora and Torvald's children will suffer, due to the immoral nature of their mother; whether she is physically there with them or not, they are poisoned by her.

The notion of contagion runs throughout Ibsen's work. In many of his plays, the walls of the home represent the borders of this contagion. For example, in *A Doll's House*, the characters often retreat within their own living quarters to maintain secrecy. There is a clear line drawn here between the outside and inside worlds, and each character has a relevant domain. For example, Nora is relegated to the home, and ironically, it is this role that paralyzes her. When she was in Italy, away from her "home," nursing Torvald back to health, she was free. Nora often speaks of how she went directly from her father's house to her husband's house, from one oppressive atmosphere to the next one. Italy, however, represents a liminal space here, where Nora is in control; it is a matriarchy that stands in stark contrast to the patriarchy of the actual play. Nora is outside of her element; she is free to create an identity for herself here that is outside what is expected at home, by both her family and society.

Throughout the play, Nora most often occupies the communal living space. The realm of the kitchen is for the nanny and other help. In this respect, she is literally a "go between" for Torvald, who most often is seen in his study, and the unseen parts of the house. In Irish drama during Ibsen's time, the kitchen was the main part of the house; thus, it was center of the stage in Irish drama. The houses were much smaller and less segmented than what we seen in Ibsen, so the perimeters of conflict in Irish drama are set outside the home, while those in Ibsen's work often occur inside the home. Torvald occupies the stereotypical masculine space of the study. Although his days are consumed by



work, we do not see him at his physical office. Instead, he himself is “in between” jobs; thus, he regards his study as his office for now. We are presented with a false reality here, as Torvald is not technically providing for his family at this point; it is just another illusion present in this home.

When the characters move outside of their homes and attempt to occupy other spaces, the results are extraordinary. Whenever Krogstad attempts to penetrate the Helmer abode, he is met with disdain, although there is an outward display of civility in order to maintain decorum. Krogstad’s threat to the household comes via the letter box, which, outside of the physical door to the home, serves as the main method for the outside to penetrate the inside in this play. Mrs. Linde chose to leave her home and come to that of Nora. It must be emphasized here that neither Ibsen’s original nor McGuinness’s adaptation includes specific place names. In his essay “*A Doll’s House* by Frank McGuinness: An Expression of Irish Cosmopolitanism?”, Matthieu Kolb explores the representation of place in this adaptation. Kolb comments on the off-stage space:

This understated, analytical mode of representation of the unlocalised off curtails the possibility of situation and orientation of the fictional space induced by the realist framing. It decosmicises the life of the Helmers’ capitalist town by making it appear mainly determined by financial, trade or information flux as well as people’s journeys. The combine motifs of horizontality and flux thus appear to decenter the fictional space. (122)

Kolb uses the term “decosmicises” here to argue that the Helmers’ town is not a representation of the larger world around it. In other words, it is a stop, rather than a destination. The dynamic characters in this play are either entering or leaving the town. The Helmers’ home is the supposed center of the play, yet it also serves as a hub of sorts, as people continue to go and come through the house during the entire play. The fact that the place is unnamed lends itself to adaptation and reinterpretation, as the space of the stage becomes a place, depending on the audience’s own experiences and culture. The characters onstage then become relatable figures to the audience.

The intersection of contagion and home is most apparent in the character of Dr. Rank. The truth of Dr. Rank’s condition is relayed via a conversation between Nora and Mrs. Linde.

NORA No, yesterday he [Doctor Rank] was particularly low. But he’s got a very serious illness—tuberculosis of the spine, poor man. You know his father was a disgusting creature who kept mistresses and things like that—that’s how poor Doctor Rank got to be so sickly.

MRS. LINDE (Dropping her sewing to her lap.) Nora, my dear, how do you know about these things?

NORA (Walking around.) Fuff. When you’ve had three children you end up meeting some women who know a little about medicine, and they tell you a few things. (Ibsen 172)

Dr. Rank's syphilis is more explicitly detailed in McGuinness's adaptation, via a conversation between Mrs. Linde and Nora.

**Mrs. Linde** Tell me, is Dr. Rank usually as depressed as he was yesterday?

**Nora** No. Yesterday it was very noticeable. You see, he suffers from a very serious illness. Poor man, his spine is wasting away; his father was a brute of a man. He had mistresses – things of that nature. So the son was infected from Boyhood, inherited – if you follow me.

*Mrs. Linde lets the sewing drop.*

**Mrs. Linde** My darling Nora, how did you come to know such things?

*Nora strolls.*

**Nora** When you have given birth to three children, you get visits from. . .from ladies who possess some medical knowledge. They can tell you a thing or two. (45).

Again, the outside world brings the knowledge to Nora, in her home. However, we must be careful not to characterize the Helmer home as “good” and the outside world as “bad.” Instead, the home is literally a doll's house; until the final scene, it is a land of illusion and naiveté. In reality, Nora's forgery of her father's signature is no less shocking than Dr. Rank's father's indiscretions or resulting syphilis. Of course, the shock value of this situation, at least to original audiences, was greatly overshadowed by the ending of this play.

Perhaps the most fascinating contrast between Ibsen's original and McGuinness's adaptation relates to the ending of the play. Nora's last line in the original reads, "That our living together could become a marriage. Good-bye" (206). The same line in McGuinness's adaptation reads, "That our marriage could become a life together. Goodbye" (106). These two concepts—living together and marriage—are related in much the same way as space and place. Living together does not necessarily demand an emotional connection, while a marriage, at least to some degree, does require an emotional connection in order to survive. Torvald's idea that he and Nora can live together as brother and sister clearly demonstrates this notion. Certainly, such, in terms of romantic love, loveless marriages during this time were not foreign in either Norway or Ireland. The line from McGuinness's adaptation hints at the inability of two people to become one, something critical to a successful marriage. To delve deeper here, the two people are either unwilling or incapable of giving up their individual identities. It is true that Nora's identity has constantly been shaped by men; her peak was when her father was dead, and she was Torvald's caregiver. However, that situation was short-lived, and she is now unwilling to succumb to societal norms.

The ending of this play is similar to that of Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*. In *Juno and the Paycock*, Mary Boyle, pregnant out of wedlock, learns that the father of her child has been killed in the violence, but Mrs. Boyle presents hope:

*Mary.* My poor little child that'll have no father!

*Mrs. Boyle.* It'll have what's far better—it'll have two mothers. (71)

As in *A Doll's House*, the optimist reads these endings as feminist victories, while the pessimist realizes that the reality of the situation will probably suffocate these women's hopes. Mary and her mother may be better equipped to love the child, but the harsh economic reality of their situation is sure to put a damper on any sense of hope. Also, O'Casey's use of irony here is clear: can Mrs. Boyle be trusted to raise her grandchild, when her own family is in such shambles? She has a daughter who is pregnant out of wedlock, a husband who drinks all day with his friend in lieu of work, and a son who became disabled fighting for his country and who fights a war against the world around him still every day.

O'Casey ends his play with a pieta image; instead of Mary holding her dead son Jesus, O'Casey leaves us with the scene of the two main male protagonists, Joxer and Boyle. However, Ibsen ends his play with Nora's slamming of the door. Likewise, when Nora leaves her family, what hope is there for her? Yes, she was clever enough to forge her father's signature and keep the secret for a good while, but it eventually surfaced. The reality of both situations provides little hope for the futures of these women. However, regardless of the reading, Nora escapes home, a feat which many of Ibsen's characters cannot accomplish.

### ***Ghosts***

Frank McGuinness's adaptation of Ibsen's *Ghosts* premiered at the Bristol Old Vic in 2007. This play revolves around identity revelation, which in turn, affects who is actually home. Regina is the product of Mrs. Alving's late husband's affair with the housemaid, although this secret is not revealed until

later in the play. She believes Engstrand is her father; he married her mother, before she was born. However, the discussions between Engstrand and Regina illustrate a clear distance between these two people. The exchange in Ibsen's original reads:

REGINA (*turns away; half aloud*). Ugh! and that leg, too!

ENGSTRAND. What do you say, girl?

REGINA. *Pied de mouton*.

ENGSTRAND. Is that English, eh?

REGINA. Yes.

ENGSTRAND. Oh, ah; you've picked up some learning out here; and that may come in useful now, Regina. (5-6)

Here is the same conversation in McGuinness's adaptation; he includes her name as "Regine":

**Regine** Dirty peg-leg.

**Engstrand** What did you say, daughter?

**Regine** *Pied de mouton*.

**Engstrand** Are you speaking in English?

**Regine** I am.

**Engstrand** Good, you've studied well out here. That will be useful now, Regine. (McGuinness 7)

This exchange highlights how Regina does believe herself to be above her father in many respects. He acknowledges as much with his final comment about her education. Knowledge is often has a negative connotation in Ibsen's plays,

probably because education widens one's perspective. It is inclusive, rather than exclusive; it transports minds, even in situations where physical location cannot be changed.

On the other hand, education can adulterate; the above exchange recalls the "tundish" episode in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Stephen Daedalus rebukes his teacher, in private, for his lack of command of the English language. Here is the exchange between the two men over the use of the term:

—What funnel? asked Stephen.

—funnel through which you pour the oil into your lamp.

—That? said Stephen. Is that called a funnel? Is it not a tundish?

—What is a tundish?

—That. The . . . the funnel.

—Is that called a tundish in Ireland? asked the dean. I never heard the word in my life.

—It is called a tundish in Lower Drumcondra, said Stephen laughing, where they speak the best English.

—A tundish, said the dean reflectively. That is a most interesting word. I must look that word up. Upon my word I must. (*Portrait* 452)

Such an exchange would fit seamlessly into a play by Brian Friel. Thus, there is a tension not only between the Irish and English languages, but also between the

way that English itself is spoken by an Irishman and an Englishman. Stephen's thoughts to himself after this episode reveal the real struggle:

—The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine.  
 How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips  
 and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of  
 spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for  
 me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words.  
 My Voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his  
 language. (*Portrait* 453)

Stephen is powerless and vulnerable, since he lacks the linguistic ability to process the world around him. The same attempt at humiliation is present here in McGuinness's adaptation of Ibsen's *Ghosts*; Engstrand does not realize which language his daughter is speaking and that she is using that language to mock him. Words assume great power here.

The title of this play points to the history of the home that haunts it. It hints at the inescapability of our parentage; we are all products of our homes. The original play reads:

MANDERS. What do you say haunts you?

MRS. ALVING. Ghosts! When I heard Regina and Oswald in there, it was as though I saw Ghosts before me. But I almost think we are all of us Ghosts, Pastor Manders. It is not only what we have inherited from our father and mother that "walks" in us. It is all sorts of dead ideas, and lifeless old beliefs, and so forth. They



have no vitality, but they cling to us all the same, and we can't get rid of them. Whenever I take up a newspaper I seem to see Ghosts gliding between the lines. There must be Ghosts all the country over, as thick as the sand of the sea. And then we are, one and all, so pitifully afraid of the light.

MANDERS. Ah! here we have the fruits of your reading! And pretty fruits they are, upon my word! Oh! those horrible, revolutionary, free-thinking books! (Ibsen 45-46).

Again, this notion of the dangers of reading comes to the foreground. However, in this instance, it is aligned with the programmed learning from our parents and environment. McGuinness's adaptation is more ominous in nature:

**Manders** What did you call them?

**Mrs Alving** Ghosts. I thought I saw ghosts when I heard Regine and Oswald in there. I'm ready to believe we are all ghosts, Pastor Manders. There's more haunting us than what our father and mother leave behind. Dead thoughts – all kinds – dead beliefs – not alive in us, but still sitting anyways, and we cannot be free. I read a newspaper and I see ghosts creeping between the lines. The whole country must be crawling with ghosts. There must be as many as there are grains of sand. That's why we are frightened – all of us, frightened.

**Manders** So this is how your reading rewards you – a fine harvest of fear. Those filthy, freethinking, disobedient writings.

(McGuinness 47)

The passage highlights how miniscule the individual is in the larger scheme of the universe. It also illustrates how frightening the situation is for the individual, who is bombarded by not only physical people but also latent ideas. Education seems to have the ability to rekindle such dormant thoughts.

These lines directly relate to Lennox Robinson's play, *Drama at Inish*, performed abroad as *Is Life Worth Living?* Although obviously lesser known than W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, Robinson dedicated much of his life to Irish drama, as a playwright, player, and producer, as well as other roles. He was instrumental in founding the Dublin Drama League (1918-1941), which produced non-Irish drama, at a time when the Abbey Theatre would perform only Irish drama. In this play, a traveling group of actors visits a small seaside town performing plays by Ibsen and others. The behavior of the townspeople begins to mimic that of the characters in these plays; thus, these plays have contaminated the locals by introducing these foreign ideas. Such plays by foreign writers were banned from the early years of the Abbey in an attempt to promote native Irish work. However, in this light, this shunning of foreign plays produced an isolated theatrical atmosphere; these Irish plays, and their audiences, existed in a bubble. In his realist plays, Ibsen often localized the action in order to focus in on the family and individual.

The concept of marriage versus living together that ends *A Doll's House* (1879) continues in *Ghosts* (1881). Oswald, the prodigal son, has returned from abroad, and he is unsettled in his family home. The original play reads:

MANDERS. Then it is illicit relations you are talking of. Irregular marriages, as people call them!

OSWALD. I have never noticed anything particularly irregular about the life these people lead.

MANDERS. But how is it possible that a—a young man or young woman with any decent principles can endure to live in that way—in the eyes of all the world! (27)

This discussion between Manders and Oswald highlights the generation gap here, but it is also extremely ahead of its time. McGuinness's adaptation, again, is more severe:

**Manders** That is not legal, not marriage, that is filth.

**Oswald** I have found nothing filthy in their way of living.

**Manders** How can a man – or young woman – reared decently – how can they behave that way – before all – in the eyes of the world? (28)

This exchange is also fascinating, because it questions the reaction of the entire world. It is not just what the immediate family and society of the individual will think that matters; rather, one must consider the thoughts of the world. Of course, such hyperbole only further illustrates the heterogeneity of this family unit.

The relationship between Oswald and his father in this play is reminiscent to that between Dr. Rank and his father in *A Doll's House*. In each case, the younger man physically suffers for the physical excesses of his father. In Ibsen's play, Oswald says, "Everything will burn. There won't remain a single thing in memory of father. Here am I, too, burning down" (76). In McGuinness's adaptation, the equivalent lines read as follows: "Everything will burn – nothing left of my father – nothing to remember. I'm burning, burning –" (81). Oswald and Dr. Rank are both syphilitic men who seek pity from others by blaming the sins of their fathers. In reality, the disease allows these men free reign to act out precisely as their fathers had and to do so with impunity. The only way to end this cycle is complete destruction, burning. Ironically, the orphanage created as homage to the late Mr. Alving burns to the ground; the widow used her late husband's money to build the enterprise, as a means of disposing of it. She did not want her son to be infected by what his father left behind. However, her efforts were in vain. While she encouraged the portrayal of her husband as "reformed," the truth is inescapable.

### ***The Lady from the Sea***

Frank McGuinness's version of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* premiered at the Arcola Theatre in 2008. Place is explicitly discussed in this play, as people return to places and history catches up to the character. The play also presents the idea that people can adopt new homelands. In Ibsen's play, Ballestad answers Lynstrand's question about whether he was born in the town by saying, "Well – not exactly ... but I've acclimated – acclimatized myself; after all this time I

really feel I'm almost a part of the place" (237). McGuinness's version, while more definitive, includes the character's stuttering over the key word: "No. But I've grown accala—acclimatised. I'm tied to the place, so long living here" (10). Of course, the implication of such words in an Irish context is enormous. One is reminded of transplanted people, such as medieval Scandinavians and subsequent Spaniards, who became "more Irish than the Irish themselves." In a contemporary context, the influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Africa has forced Ireland to refine its citizenship guidelines, particularly in light of those of the European Union. This line forces the audience to question what exactly it means to be "from" somewhere. Does the mere fact of living in the location mean that it is home? Clearly, the answer is much more multifaceted, but it is certainly predicated on the existence in the region. Ballested's words hint at the fact that the connection to people made him feel at home in the locale.

The title of the play refers to Ellida, Dr. Wangel's second wife. His first wife, and the mother of his two daughters, died young, and after Ellida and Wangel married, they moved to the remote location that they occupy now. She eventually confides in him about the love that she had for another man, who went to sea and was presumed dead. Ellida frequently swims, which has earned her the nickname of "the lady of the sea" among the townspeople. She equates the sea to freedom; it is an escape for her, and swimming provides her the opportunity to connect with the wider world via the sea. Wangel eventually realizes the great mistake that he made in relocating his wife, and his monologue

is startling, particularly when one looks at it from an Irish perspective. In the original play, Wangel states:

Haven't you ever noticed that the people who live by the open sea are like a race apart? It's almost as if the sea were a part of their lives; there are surges – yes, and ebbs and flows too – in all their thoughts and feelings. They can never bear to be separated from it – oh, I should have thought about that before. It was really a crime against Ellida to take her from out there and bring her here. (298)

Again, McGuinness's version is more deliberate, and it speaks to the larger issues of emigration and diaspora:

**Wangel** You've not noticed? People who live by the open sea, they're a breed apart. It's as if they live the sea's life. There are waves and tides in their ways of thinking and of feeling. This is where their roots are always. I should have thought of that sooner. It was a sin against Ellida to remove her from there and take her here. (84)

The sea is inextricably linked to Irish life, and this statement was even more true during the time of Ibsen's plays in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Consider John Millington Synge's plays, which clearly illustrate the link between Irish society and the sea, particularly in the West of Ireland. Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* was first performed in 1888, while Synge's *Riders to the Sea* was premiered in 1904. Ibsen's play is far less tragic than Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, as it does end on a surprisingly positive note. However, the artist Ballested is

painting a scene with a dying mermaid; she is dying, because she is out of her element, which clearly alludes to Ellida's situation. In the end, she remains where she is, but only after Wangel gives her the opportunity to decide her own fate.

In his book *Yeats and European Drama*, Michael McAteer explains a further connection between Synge and Ibsen: "Yeats's willingness to champion Synge as the Irish Ibsen, while presenting his own drama of estrangement in the 1900s as consonant with Ibsen's later drama of protest, testifies the fruition of that conviction evident in his drama of the revolutionary element in Naturalist drama" (44). A national identity based, at least in part, on the sea connects Ireland and Norway, but Yeats also looked to the burgeoning theatre movement in Norway as a model for his own movement in Ireland. Yeats purposefully sought to connect to dramatists such as Ibsen in order to argue that Irish dramatists were working within a framework of a global movement in drama. Such a lofty goal was not realized in Yeats's time; in fact, quite the opposite occurred, as audiences began to riot over plays. For example, audiences rioted over Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, due to the mention of women standing in their slips in public. Christy Mahon, the "playboy," states "It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the Eastern World?" (75). Indeed, the fact that Christy claimed to be a murderer (even though it turns out that he was not) was secondary to the notion of defaming the Irish female. Such comments were contrary to the repressed Irish Catholic sensibility of the time.

What is perhaps even more astonishing is that these riots followed the Abbey Theatre on tour to the United States, as if to display the loyalty of the Irish emigrant population.

Ellida vocalizes her feelings of being a foreigner in this town, in her husband's home. She exists there, yet she does not feel welcome. She is living in another woman's house with another woman's husband and daughters. In Ibsen's play, Ellida's monologue allows her to voice the feelings that have been suffocating her:

And I have nothing whatever to hinder me; here at home there's nothing in the world to hold me. Oh, Wangel, I have no roots whatever in your house. The children don't belong to me – not in their hearts, I mean – they never have done. When I go away – if I do go – whether it's with him tonight, or out to Skjoldvik tomorrow – I'll not have a single key to hand over, no orders to give about anything at all. I'm so utterly without roots in your house. Even from the very beginning I've been like a complete outsider here.

(314)

Ellida's words here evoke sympathy; they illustrate a conflicted soul. In her eyes, she is homeless; she has left her original home, yet she has failed to put down roots in her new home. She is floating along the sea. Harkening back to *A Doll's House*, Ellida and Wangel have lived together, yet they have failed at marriage. McGuinness's version is again more definitive:



I have nothing to give me strength against that. Nothing in this house to hold me to it. Neither root nor branch, Wangel. I don't own the children. Don't own their minds. Never have. When I go – if I go – either with him tonight or out to Skjoldviken tomorrow, I have no key to hand back, no notes about running the house – nothing. From first stepping inside your house, I have been outside it. (101)

Ellida's words are more carefully chosen in McGuinness's monologue. Her speech is more deliberate and concise. She is relaying facts, not decrying her situation as in Ibsen's monologue. Overall, McGuinness's adaptations of Ibsen are more direct and concise. This brevity highlights the fact that the state of the individual is even more precarious in today's society.

While Ella curses Borkman in *John Gabriel Borkman*, Wangel's love for Ellida allows her to see things clearly for once. In Ibsen's play, Wangel states, "It should not come to that. There's no other possible salvation for you – at least, none that I can see. . . . So – so I cancel our bargain here and now. You are free to choose your own path. Completely free. . . ." (327). This is the turning point. He sets her free, and she comes back to him. In many ways, Wangel gives Ellida what Torvald did not, or could not, give Nora: a choice. However, one must question whether these words would have been enough to keep Nora in her home. Wangel is unwilling to continue in a loveless marriage with Ellida, which is the key difference between him and Torvald.

### ***John Gabriel Borkman***

Frank McGuinness's version of Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* premiered at the Abbey Theatre in 2010. More so than the other plays discussed here, *John Gabriel Borkman* has explicitly misogynistic passages, and these ideas are featured in McGuinness's adaptation of the play as well. McGuinness's repertoire cannot be considered misogynistic; these passages come from the original play by Ibsen. In fact, one of McGuinness's first plays, *The Factory Girls* (1982), focused on the plight of working women and was based on the experiences of his own female family members. *John Gabriel Borkman* centers on a loveless marriage, a couple living together, who are nonetheless both essentially prisoners in the home. The relationship between Erhart Borkman and Mrs. Fanny Wilton is precisely the type of "irregular marriage" to which Pastor Manders refers in *Ghosts*. In Ibsen's play, Borkman tells Foldal, "Oh these women! They wreck and ruin life for us! Play the devil with our whole destiny—our triumphal progress" (89). McGuinness's version hints at the deliberate nature of these actions, "Damned women. They ruin our lives and leave us to rot. They want us to fail and curse our success" (58). Borkman feels betrayed by his wife, who was appalled at his embezzlement, which eventually landed him in jail and left them penniless. For protection, everything they have is in her twin sister's name, Ella Rentheim, who still harbors romantic feelings for Borkman. Borkman returned from jail to occupy the second floor of the family home, which he rarely leaves. The home is a dysfunctional place, yet it is one to which all of these characters flock.

In contrast to the above conversation between Borkman and Foldal regarding females, Ella Rentheim stands as an exceptional woman. In Ibsen's play, she states, "Trust me, I should have borne it all so gladly along with you. The shame, the ruin—I would have helped you to bear it all—all!" (109). McGuinness's version is slightly slanted, as it highlights the fact that Ella will do her duty *alongside* Borkman; they will suffer as a pair:

**Ella** I would have stood strongly beside you – borne it all – the shame, the ruin – everything – I would have helped you shoulder everything –

**Borkman** Would you have wanted that – been able – (68)

What seems impossible for an individual to shoulder becomes possible for a couple to bear as a unit. The irony here, of course, is that these two people are not married. At the end of the play, Ella confronts Borkman for taking away her ability to love. In Ibsen's play, Ella states:

Yes, that's what I mean. I have said it once before to-night: you have murdered the love-life in the woman who loved you. And whom you loved in return, so far as you could love any one. [*With uplifted arm.*] And therefore I prophesy to you, John Gabriel Borkman—you will never touch the price you demanded for the murder. You will never enter in triumph into your cold, dark kingdom! (197)

Ella's statement in McGuinness's version is startlingly similar:

Yes. I've told you once this evening. You killed the love in a woman who loved you. And you loved back. As much as you were able to love another being.

*She raises her arm.*

I prophesy this, John Gabriel Borkman. You'll never get what you wanted when you committed that murder. You will not be crowned in the cold pit of your kingdom and parade yourself through its darkness. (118)

Ella's monologue is reminiscent of the soldiers' prayer in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* in that death is an equalizer. Borkman will be punished after death for his abandonment of Ella. The laws of man could punish only those transgressions that could be quantified. Ella contends that Borkman murdered her inability to love another in a romantic sense. However, she can still love family, which is evidenced by the way that she took in and cared for Borkman's son, Erhart, when his father went to prison and his mother was unable to care for her son. In many respects, the outside world does not exist for this family, as they lead relatively isolated lives.

Borkman rarely ventures outside, but when he does during the play, his comments are striking, as he sees the outside as a prisoner would. He is drawn to the freedom, and he asks Ella "Do you see how free and open the country lies before us—away to the far horizon?" (Ibsen 193). McGuinness's version of this line emphasizes the emotional nature of this line: "Look at the land – how open it is – how free – the whole stretch of it – for us – " (116). This is the statement of a

man who is about to die; he will never know how free and open the country is. However, there is hope, as his son, Erhart, escapes the family home, which he finds stifling. The circumstances of his journey are somewhat suspect—he is a tutor for a young girl and the assumed lover of the girl's patron—but there is hope in the fact that he is away from the prison that is his family home.

Erhart seeks to escape the legacy of his father. Although the family home is a gathering place for these characters, it is toxic. Torvald Helmer's theory (in *A Doll's House*) about how the actions of the children are dictated by those of the parents applies here as well. The family, and by extension the family home, is the contagion here. There is a sharp contrast between the physical confines of the home and the wide open space around the home. As with *A Doll's House*, the audience is left to question Erhart's future. Will he find success in another place and its experiences? Again, the outlook is tarnished by the conditions surrounding his departure, but the ending can be read in different lights. From a pessimistic perspective, Erhart is doomed to bring shame to his family, just as his father did. In other words, the experience of place, home, will continue to haunt him and affect him, even at a distance from home. An optimistic outlook would consider Erhart's departure as a new beginning, filled with new experiences which can positively shape the place in which he now exists.

This type of realist drama is precisely in line with the early plays of the Abbey Theatre that centered on the familial hearth as a shelter from the outside world. In reality, the outside world was reflected in these sitting rooms, as we saw individuals struggle with issues that mirrored those in the larger world

outside the home. Thus, these sitting rooms were microcosms; they were places of contention, not safe haven. A prime example of this conflict is J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904), considered to be one of the finest tragedies in the English language and arguably the best tragedy in one act. The play is set on an island off the west coast of Ireland in a community dependent upon fishing for their livelihood. In the play Maurya finds out that her son Michael has indeed died at sea, and she then loses her youngest son, Bartley, to the sea; she is now left with only her two daughters. Maurya laments what the sea has taken from her:

There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh that turned over. I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby, lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it—it was a dry day, Nora—and leaving a track to the door. (94)

The sea is a means of survival, yet it is also deadly. It is, in this respect, a necessary evil, and these seaside communities live in what can be considered a version of Bhabha's "in-between spaces." There is a clear need to fish the sea in order to survive, yet doing so is dangerous and perhaps deadly. These families

live on the border of death, and the door between life and death is essentially a turnstile.

Tuan's notion of topophilia comes to mind here, as these characters express the struggle between life and death, land and sea, throughout this play. Indeed, there is a sense that the real world and other realms are intimately connected. Maurya concerns herself only with the home and the family for the majority of the play; Bartley is desperate to prove himself, just as the men before him did, yet she selfishly wants to keep him for herself. It is not until the end of the play that Maurya is at peace with her fate: "Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by thee grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied" (97). Death is inevitable, and Maurya, left with no more men to die for her, is at peace. In this light, she is similar to Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan figure, who herself occupies a place somewhere between reality and mythology. It is important to note that McGuinness has adapted not only realist drama by Ibsen, but also the fantasy work, *Peer Gynt*.

### ***Peer Gynt***

McGuinness's adaptation of *Peer Gynt* (1988) premiered at the Gate Theatre as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival (viii). This play is not part of Ibsen's realist cycle; the original is in verse form, although McGuinness's adaptation is not. Because of the frequent shifts in place and reality throughout the play, it is difficult to compare the original and the adaptation purely as

dramatic texts. However, the notion of place is paramount here, as the play shifts from Norway to Morocco to Cairo and then back to Norway. Place and reality are fluid in this play; in many ways, *Peer Gynt*, in general, resembles McGuinness's original work, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. In many ways, Pyper is akin to *Peer Gynt*, as both men shift between realities of their own creation. However, Pyper's world is more clearly defined than that of *Peer Gynt*, as Pyper is accompanied by only seven other men, whereas the *Peer Gynt* cast includes over fifty different actors, most playing multiple parts.

McGuinness's introduction to *Peer Gynt* establishes a direct connection between Ireland and Norway. McGuinness was commissioned by the Gate Theatre, specifically Michael Colgan, to do the adaptation. He relates the exchange in his introduction:

MICHAEL: I was just thinking of you, McGuinness.

FRANK: You're looking for something, Colgan.

MICHAEL: *Peer Gynt*, in its entirety, for next year.

FRANK: Michael, you're mad.

MICHAEL: Frank, so are you. (v)

Earlier in the introduction, McGuinness points out that the Gate Theatre opened with Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (v). Thus, his adaptation brings the Gate full circle, just sixty years after the theatre's opening. Even in his original work, McGuinness often explores the individual and the torment that belies the mind of that individual. In this introduction, McGuinness makes a clear



connection between Ibsen's mindset and that of an Irish writer: "Ibsen is a northern writer. His is a Protestant mind, doubting itself profoundly" (vi). Such doubt is evident in many of Ibsen's protagonists. However, McGuinness takes this connection between Ibsen and Ireland one step further:

From working on *Peer Gynt* I know now what a cry is there, for joy in its manifestations and perversions inform every episode of *Peer Gynt*. Rest assured, liberties have been taken. Rest even more assured, such liberties will be highlighted as evidence of ignorance or laziness. So be it, I'll argue for a sense of ironic parallels between Ibsen and Ireland's cultural dilemmas. (vii)

The character of Peer Gynt can be viewed as a metaphor for the Irish person, as Peer Gynt moves across lines throughout the play. The lines crossed are not just physical; they are intangible divisions of the mind and belief systems as well. Indeed, the question of what does it mean to be Irish may, at first, appear obvious to people. However, upon closer examination, it is quite difficult to delineate, as it is a country that has experienced many invasions and transplantations. A comparison can be drawn here to America, whose initial identity was also based on *not* being British.

Frank McGuinness continues to expand his repertoire. In addition to his dramatic work, he has published fiction and poetry. In perhaps his most exciting venture to date, he wrote the libretto for the opera, *Thebans*, based on Sophocles' trilogy: *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*. In 2008, McGuinness had adapted *Oedipus the King*, and he was eager to engage

the other two works as well. In an article for *The Guardian* entitled “How I turned Oedipus into an opera,” McGuinness explains his connection to Sophocles’ plays:

These are works that speak directly to me. I can only do plays when they touch me to the core, and at the very heart of these three is an awesome and brutal truth. Our fathers fail us, and then we fail our fathers. I know who Oedipus is because there's a very large chunk of my father in him, and I know who Antigone is because there's a very large chunk of me in her. I understand her: I completely accept that if my brother were left without a burial, I would also seek to kill the man who stopped me from doing it myself. I understand the intimacy of Antigone's defiance: that is my background, that is my politics, too. And so I wanted to do justice to her.

His comment about needing to feel a connection to the works that he engages is fascinating, considering the breadth of plays that he has adapted over the years. McGuinness’s feelings towards Antigone are particularly striking as well. His comment here about identifying with the “intimacy of Antigone’s defiance” because “that is my background, that is my politics, too” clearly reveals his motivation. Family is paramount, as McGuinness’s words reveal. Indeed, in the play, *Antigone*, we see a shift from men looking to the all mighty Olympian gods for justice to men believing in man, Creon in this case, and his ability to rule other men in a just fashion. Antigone’s situation is akin to David and Goliath; she is

one woman against the machine that is Creon and his government. She would rather die, standing by her beliefs than live as a hypocrite.

In his book *Two Faces of Oedipus*, Frederick Ahl compares Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Seneca's *Oedipus*, providing a translation of each work. Ahl compares the two plays on a linguistic level, as he presents his own translations of each work. While there are many similarities in the retellings of the Oedipus myth by Sophocles and Seneca, Ahl points out key differences. Ahl states that "[i]n Seneca's *Oedipus* the focus is more tightly on Oedipus' self-examination from beginning to end" (20); also, "[t]he city has no ruler at all at the end of the Senecan tragedy" (20), as Oedipus throws Creon into a dungeon. Of course, all of these plays are retellings of the classical myth. However, these retellings are critical, because they point to the ideology of the time periods. The multiple plot lines in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which led Aristotle to model it as the perfect tragedy, entertain the audience in way that Seneca's *Oedipus* does not. The issue here is then not which version is superior, but rather how they function as products of the cultures that produced them. Ahl presents an interesting connection here: "What most distinguishes poetic myth from prose history is that tragic poets are usually presenting stories already familiar to audiences in unfamiliar ways. They are deconstructing and re-fashioning their audiences' sense of what they know" (17). Indeed, Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness attempt the same feat in their adaptations. They are putting these works by Chekhov and Ibsen into an Irish context that demands a global perspective on these works.

Frank McGuinness's dramatic repertoire is vast, encompassing both original works and a variety of adaptations. Perhaps more so than Friel, McGuinness engages directly in the contemporary world. This is not to say that Friel's plays are not relevant in today's world; on the contrary, they provide valuable insight into the environment around us. However, whereas Friel sets his plays in the past or in the fictional town of Ballybeg, McGuinness's settings are more immediate for the audience. For example, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992) is set in a cell in Lebanon; the cell itself is generic enough, but the subject matter is timely for a contemporary audience. McGuinness's settings are thus contested; they are transitional. There is often the sense that the characters will eventually return home. In his book *Frank McGuinness's Dramaturgy of Difference and the Irish Theatre*, David Cregan argues that the idea of home, as it relates to individual identity, runs throughout many of McGuinness's plays:

His plays . . . exemplify a driving force in all of McGuinness's plays: the search for a queer type of 'home.' In the complex and changing world of modern identities where old notions of stability are being dismantled both institutionally and domestically, these plays provide insight into unique versions of home and family which can find their models in the queer social and interpersonal structures which begun to take shape in contemporary times. (168)

The instability in these plays represents opportunities for change. Often, it is not until we are removed from the home that we can reflect on it and process the concept. James Joyce's ability, while in exile, to recreate the city of Dublin in

*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is an excellent example. At the end of the novel, Stephen Dedalus famously writes in his journal, “I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” (526). Irish writers like Joyce, Beckett, and O’Casey felt compelled to leave Ireland in order to gain a broader perspective. However, this trend no longer persists, as a necessity, although there are certainly writers who choose to leave Ireland, if only temporarily. However, many Irish writers such as Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness are able to experience the larger world, while still within Ireland. Thus, instead of looking outward, writers now are more often looking inward, within Ireland, to the units of home, family, and individual. This internal reflection echoes what is happening in the larger, global community. Frank McGuinness’s plays attempt to engage the audience directly in this dialogue of how the idea of home must evolve in the ever-changing world around it.

Frank McGuinness’s dramatic adaptations of Ibsen’s plays clearly highlight the notion of contagion as it relates to place, particularly the home versus the outside world. As compared to those of Chekhov, Ibsen’s plays focus in more on the plight of the individual. The family unit is there, but the plays dramatize how the individual functions as a result of, and response to, the family around him. Frank McGuinness’s original plays follow the individual more so than the family as a whole, so his connection to Ibsen’s works is clear. On the other hand, Chekhov’s works explore the fate of the family, and many of Brian Friel’s original plays also examine how the family as a unit is challenged by

society. It is now time to turn to *Three Sisters*, originally written by Anton Chekhov, but adapted by both Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness, and analyze how each adaptor brings his own vision to this work.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TWO MEN CONFRONTING *THREE SISTERS*:

#### BRIAN FRIEL'S AND FRANK MCGUINNESS'S ADAPTATIONS OF ANTON CHEKHOV'S *THREE SISTERS*

To date, Brian Friel clearly favors Chekhov in terms of adaptations and Frank McGuinness leans towards Ibsen. However, there have been a few instances of overlap between the two men regarding adaptation. Friel's adaptation of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* premiered in 2008, whereas McGuinness's adaptation of the play went up in 1999; however, McGuinness's version is not readily available in print. Thus, this chapter focuses on both Friel's and McGuinness's treatment of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. While Friel ventured into the field of adaptation with the Russians and then moved towards Ibsen, McGuinness took an alternate route, favoring the ancient Greeks and then coming around to Chekhov. The question then becomes why this play? Both Friel and McGuinness were well-established in their profession, when they tackled *Three Sisters*. The world of Irish dramatic adaptations has been dominated by men, so this examination offers insight not only into the nuances of each adaptation, but also of gender politics in modern Ireland, as another facet of hybridity. I argue that gender and place are inextricably linked in Ireland.

Indeed, a necessary ingredient to an expanded global role for Ireland has been the expansion of the role of women in Irish society. Of course, politics is not the only motivator or restrictor, as the case may be; the Catholic Church has

certainly played a role in defining the Irish female identity. However, these adaptations of *Three Sisters* are not merely a mirror being held up to society, as the play predates these politics. Rather, the adaptations are identifications of place in terms of where women were and now are in Irish society. Homi Bhabha argues that “Political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause, come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective” (3). The “multiculturalist cause” here is thus dependent upon the unity of the community. An example of a recent challenge to this idea in Ireland is the legacy of the Magdalene laundries, which were discussed earlier. Women who were deemed immoral in the eyes of society were sent away, sometimes for life, to serve the clergy. There has been a recent movement to seek redress for these women and an acknowledgement and apology for their suffering. The acknowledgement and reconciliations of these issues is necessary, if Ireland is to move forward as a global multiculturalist nation; such interrogation is precisely what Bhabha advocates, and it is indeed what is going on today in Ireland.

Again, Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness are keenly aware of how place can marginalize people. Friel was born in Northern Ireland, but he settled and spent most of his life in the Republic of Ireland. McGuinness was born just inside the border of the Republic of Ireland, on the border with Northern Ireland. In an interview with Anthony Roche, published in 2010, McGuinness stated that Donegal is “a place of contradiction, a place of ambiguities. It’s an isolated place, as well” (18). In the same interview, he also confesses, “I am a man who



doesn't really know where he stands a lot of the time" (18). In this respect McGuinness is a writer occupying what Bhabha would refer to as an interstitial space. It is both destabilizing and enlightening. The fact that McGuinness is gay, and open about his sexuality, provides another dimension to this argument; I return to this point later in this chapter, when I discuss the character of Pyper in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. Not knowing where one stands can indicate an underdeveloped sense of home. However, this lack of roots can also allow for a greater sense of experience of, and affinity for, different places and cultures. Although Friel's plays are set in Ireland, McGuinness often uses settings outside of Ireland for his original plays. Although the settings that they choose may differ, both playwrights' original works highlight individuals who are on journeys of self-actualization. Whether the struggle to reach this goal comes from inner or outside forces, the challenge to the individual is the focus of the plots.

This chapter examines Brian Friel's and Frank McGuinness's adaptations of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. Friel was working on his adaptation of *Three Sisters* at the same time as writing *Translations*; it is the first Chekhov play that he adapted. Coincidentally, *Three Sisters* (1990) is the first work of Chekhov adapted by McGuinness, who is fonder of adapting Henrik Ibsen and other world playwrights. At the same time that McGuinness was working on this adaptation, he was writing his original play *The Bread Man*. Since *The Bread Man* is not readily available in print, I cannot analyze it here in relation to these other plays. It should be noted here that McGuinness's father was occupied as a bread man.

We must also consider *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, since all three plays involve characters who are isolated from their environments to some degree. These two adaptations of *Three Sisters*, which are separated by a decade, can be viewed on many different levels. They can be analyzed merely as adaptations, or they can be judged in relation to the playwrights' original works. However, in this case, where both playwrights have adapted the same work, we must consider how these adaptations relate to one another in the broader context of contemporary Irish drama. I argue that Friel and McGuinness are adapting these works as part of a conscious act to define Ireland from without, revisioning the country in a global context.

The fact that both Friel and McGuinness participated in the Field Day Theatre Company, which began in 1980, is exemplified by these adaptations. While *Translations* was the first play performed by Field Day at the Guildhall, Friel's *Three Sisters*, which was directed by Stephen Rea—star of *Translations*, was the second, also performed at the Guildhall. The Guildhall is located in Derry in Northern Ireland, and it was established as a stronghold of British rule, marking the city that the British renamed Londonderry. It dates back to the seventeenth century, but it has been rebuilt several times. It was bombed several times during the Troubles in Northern Ireland; in fact, it had just reopened several years before *Translations* was produced. The euphemistic word "Troubles" refers to the period of twenty years, approximately from 1968-1998, during which sectarian violence reached its peak in Northern Ireland. The divisions were not only between people of different religions, mainly Protestants

and Catholics, but also between people of different political beliefs—the Protestants who wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, the Catholic who wanted Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland, and finally those people who wanted an independent Northern Ireland. In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was reached, between the British and Irish governments; since this point, peace, with few exceptions, has prevailed in Northern Ireland. The Guildhall, as a victim of the Troubles itself, is a contested place, and the production of *Translations* by the Field Day Theatre Company, whose founders sought to promote unity across borders via art, was seen by many as a reclamation of the space. It represented a new beginning, although it would be nearly twenty years later, in 1998, when the Troubles are considered to have ended. The tension of the play reflects the tension of the theatre space: it is not just a matter of nationality, but rather language.

With this background, these adaptations of *Three Sisters* serve as attempts to return to the spirit of the original works working against the historically British translations of these works into English that had been previously dominant. In this respect, these adaptations can be viewed as deliberate political acts. Politics here refers to both the broader sense of the term, but also specifically to the politics of the body (gender) and place. Both Friel and McGuinness seek to revisit these works and adapt them in ways that make them relevant to Irish audiences. To accomplish this feat, the playwrights must make these characters, via the actors' bodies, significant in some way. These plays are adaptations; they are not renderings of the original in a foreign

land. The original language has not been preserved; some of the contexts have been altered, as they must in order to signal a new place.

It is interesting to note that “Chekhov spent more time in the composition of *Three Sisters* than on any of his earlier dramas” (Norton 241). Likewise, the process of adaptation for both Friel and McGuinness was equally laborious. In an Interview with Elgy Gillespie in 1981, Friel explains his process of adapting the play:

It is a work of love. The first purpose in doing *Three Sisters* like this is because for a group of Irish actors, only American or English texts are available. If it’s an English text of a Russian scenario, there’s a double assumption there. I felt we should be able to short-circuit this double assumption so that they [the actors] can assume a language that can simply flow out of them. (99)

We go back to Tuan here. If people define place, then the language by which those people communicate must have a role as well. As a note, both playwrights work with literal translations, as well as other available versions, of the text when adapting.

Had Chekhov survived to see Friel’s and McGuinness’s adaptations, it is doubtful that he would have approved of them. In her Introduction to *The Play Out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*, Hanna Scolnicov explains Chekhov’s feelings: “So worried was he about his plays being misunderstood in foreign tongues, that he regretted not being able to prevent their translation and production abroad. Chekhov’s repudiation of translation

represents an extreme position: a total denial of the possibility of transferring a play from one culture to another" (1). Foreign productions and translations are, for many authors, a badge of honor; these productions and translations signal a greater audience for the works, which would seem in the author's interest.

However, the world in which Chekhov lived was very different from that of today. Obviously, travel and communication were much more arduous tasks for Chekhov. In Ireland, even during Chekhov's life (1860-1904), it was common for an exchange in the arts between Ireland and England, particularly since the Abbey Theatre, the Irish national theatre, was not founded until 1904.

It is important to note that Chekhov's plays have a long history of performance in both Britain and Ireland. In her essay "Chekhov in Limbo: British Productions of the Plays of Chekhov," Vera Gottlieb explains some of the issues with these productions stem from language differences:

First, and most obviously, there are linguistic difficulties: the nuance of Russian does not translate well into English and there are almost insuperable problems in translating both idiom and irony; terms of endearment or disapproval, achieved in Russian through subtle variations in address, have no real counterpart in English. Equally problematical is the fact that the volubility of Russian in moving rapidly from 'laughter' to 'tears' often comes across as overemotional or neurotic when translated into English; and the Russian language does not carry class distinctions: like

French and Italian, but unlike English, it is not possible to gauge the background of a character from the mode of speech. (165)

Gottlieb explains that in English language productions, the class of each character was indicated by varying accents. Indeed, dialect differences within Ireland are very pronounced and can serve to indicate a person's socio-economic background. Gottlieb's comment here about "terms of endearment or disapproval" is interesting, because the Irish language contains a positive, negative and interrogative form of each verb. In this respect, Irish English, as influenced by Irish, is better equipped to illustrate these shades of meaning. Gottlieb's argument here deals with the actual script. Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness are experienced wordsmiths who understand the nuances of the English language and who appreciate how these words will come alive onstage via the actors. Again, the fact that both men worked with multiple English translations of the plays is critical, as it allows them a more accurate picture of the play in its original language.

The production history of Chekhov's plays in England is fascinating. In his book *The Chekhov Theatre: A Century of the Plays in Performance*, Laurence Senelick, a prominent translator and critic of Chekhov's works examines how one director's interpretations marked a turning point for Chekhov in England: "The series of Chekhovian productions he [Fedor Komissarzhevsky] launched were far better integrated and skillfully mounted than anything that had been seen before. But this did not happen overnight, and his earliest efforts were slow to efface the caricature of Chekhov uppermost in the English mind" (154). The productions

referenced by Senelick were mounted in the first few decades of the twentieth-century; at this time, the English stage was renowned for a rigid styling of acting. When Lennox Robinson, at that time a relatively unknown playwright, was hired to lead the Abbey Theatre, he was sent to intern with G. B. Shaw and Harley Granville-Barker, a prominent English actor and director, in London. Granville-Barker had a chessboard painted onto the stage to demonstrate the blocking of the scenes for actors. When W. B. Yeats heard about this method, he encouraged Robinson to do the same, in order to establish control over the actors. Luckily, Robinson did not take the advice of Yeats; in contrast to the English method of acting, the Irish had a much more naturalistic approach. Indeed, Komissarzhevsky utilized a naturalistic approach in his productions of Chekhov.

There is a difference between regarding a play as a work of literature versus a script for performance. The actual script of a play may be edited and revised, even on an impromptu basis, throughout the rehearsal and production of the work. In his essay “Translating Chekhov’s Plays: A Collaboration between Translator, Director, and Actors,” Michael Henry Heim explains the approach that many directors have taken to Chekhov’s works:

The function of the Chekhov translations that I’ve done was clear to me from the start because they originated in request from directors for a stage-worthy text. In 1975, when the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles commissioned the first of them, *Three Sisters*, there was a vague awareness in this country that Chekhov the dramatist

had not been well served by his translators. Theaters were using two approaches to remedy the situation. The first was for directors and/or dramaturges to place as many translations as they could muster side by side and say, “I’m going to take this line from this one, that line from that one, and another line from the third or fourth”; or, “I don’t like any of the possibilities, so I’m going to do what I sense is right”—all this without recourse to the original. The second was for theaters to commission a trot, a pony, a crib—call it what you will—as a bases for “what-I-sense-is-right” emendations.

(84)

Although Heim is specifically discussing the production of a work, his ideas apply to the adaptations in question here as well. Heim’s analysis supports not only the process of adaptation that Friel and McGuinness use, but it also validates the need for multiple perspectives, via translation and adaptation, of a play. The negotiation that occurs during production also occurs during the processes of translation and adaptation. Friel and McGuinness worked not only with literal translations, but also various English language translations, during the process of adaptation.

### **Context for Friel**

Friel did not rework Chekhov, or any other playwright’s work, until he completed his watershed *Translations* (1980) which, as the central text of the Irish Field Day movement, holds as important a position in contemporary Irish drama as Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) did for the Irish



Literary Revival. At the heart of this play lies a paradox of place, as the play centers on the translation of place names and the politics of language. There is a disconnect here, as the characters in the play are speaking Irish, yet the actors on stage are speaking English, the language in which the play was composed. Many prominent Irish actors, such as Stephen Rea, as Owen, and Liam Neeson, as Doalty, starred in the premiere of this play, which took place at the Guildhall in Derry, Northern Ireland. Thus, place functions on many different levels here. In an 1981 article entitled "The Place is the Thing or Irish Writer," Selwyn Parker argued,

Friel is fighting a war of words. He is acutely aware that English culture has pervaded much of Northern Ireland, stifling his region's native voice. What he aims to do with *Field Day* is, as he puts it, "decolonize the imagination." (He is also on record as supporting a united Ireland.) He worries whether Ireland, and particularly Northern Ireland, can ever escape from this "Cinderella situation." Even the play's opening night venue, the Guildhall, eloquently symbolizes Friel's dilemma. Built in 1890 by pro-British authorities, it was twice blown up and virtually wrecked in "the troubles." Today it's in the final stages of a loving reconstruction. Friel's *Chekhov*, probably the first classic to be produced in an Irish idiom, opens in a hall surrounded by busts of past kings and queens of Britain, with Queen Victoria dominating the royal parade. Without doubt it is an odd location in which to be decolonizing the imagination. (2)

In terms of place studies, Friel interrogates how *place* is converted back to *space* via the Anglicization of the Irish place names. The Guildhall was a bastion of British rule in Northern Ireland; thus, staging *Translations* here was a deliberate political act by Field Day to move beyond lines and borders. Thus, I position *Translations* as a gateway text here from which to approach Friel's adaptations. Richard Pine has referred to Friel as the "Irish Chekhov," a title that is appropriate even when we completely discount Friel's adaptations of Chekhov. Raymond Tracy states that "Friel's translation of *Three Sisters* is at the centre of a trilogy about language and communication, flanked by *Translations* and *The Communication Cord*, all three produced by Field Day as part of a dramatic analysis of nationalist rhetorics and their discontents" (68). *The Communication Cord* is not frequently produced, but it is a striking example of Friel's humor. The root of the humor is the lack of communication between the characters. This situation, which becomes tragic in *Translations*, is treated in a much more light-hearted fashion in *The Communication Cord*, as he examines the inability of Irish men and women to communicate effectively with one another in the English language. Thus, communication, or lack thereof, is the primary thread that connects these works.

*The Communication Cord* was first produced by the Field Day Theatre Company at the Guildhall, Derry—the same company and location as *Translations* and Friel's *Three Sisters*—in 1982. *Translations* had premiered in 1980 and Friel's *Three Sisters* in 1981. The play is set in the present time in Ballybeg, County Donegal, Friel's fictional "small town" Ireland. The action

follows a few friends in their late twenties/early thirties who embark on a weekend getaway that, due to miscommunication, goes humorously awry. The main character, Tim Gallagher, is described as follows in the stage directions:

TIM GALLAGHER is in his late twenties/early thirties, a junior lecturer without tenure in a university. A serious, studious young man with a pale face and large glasses. The business of coping with everyday life makes him nervous and seems to demand more than ordinary concentration. He is relaxed and assured only when he is talking about his work: he is doing his Ph.D. in an aspect of linguistics. The enterprise he is now reluctantly embarked on has made him very agitated. (11-12)

The “enterprise” is a weekend getaway, during which he will meet his girlfriend Susan’s father, with his friend Jack—who had a fling with Susan himself—as reinforcement. Of all of Friel’s plays, *The Communication Cord* is perhaps his most laugh-out-loud work. Here, he does not have history to deal with as he did in *Translations*. The plot of *The Communication Cord* is much more common.

The character of Tim Gallagher is an embodiment of all of the persistent miscommunication that runs throughout Friel’s plays. Tim’s thesis deals with “Discourse Analysis with Particular Reference to Response Cries” (18). This title harkens back to Sean O’Casey’s play *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), where the character of the Covey, a young supporter of the cause of the Irish working man, speaks to the play’s heroine Nora about her uncle Peter, “Well, let him mind his own business, then. Yestherday I caught him hee-hee-in’ out of him an’ he

readin' bits out of Jenersky's *Thesis on th' Original, Development, an' Consolidation of th' Evolutionary Idea of th' Proletariat*" (148). Much as the Covey hides behind this work to justify his beliefs, Tim Gallagher uses his research as a means of masking his own social awkwardness. Thus, he constantly overanalyzes the minutia of conversations, often resulting in his own misunderstanding of the scenario. Tim explains his work to his friend Jack:

Exactly. Words. Language. An agreed code. I encode my message; I transmit it to you; you receive the message and decode it. If the message sent is clear and distinct, if the code is fully shared and subscribed to, if the message is comprehensively received, then there is a reasonable chance—one, that you will understand what I'm trying to tell you—and two, that we will have established the beginnings of a dialogue. All social behavior, the entire social order, depends on our communicational structures, on words mutually agreed on and mutually understood. Without that agreement, without that shared code, you have chaos. (18-19)

In essence, Tim Gallagher gives voice here to Friel's message in many of his plays. The issue here is not just language itself; *The Communication Cord* involves German-speaking neighbors. However, the largest source of humor and miscommunication comes from the Irish characters themselves. There is a separation here between country and city folk, but they do share a common language. If miscommunication can occur between these people, then the task of adaptation is enormous indeed. The playwright must decode, so the audience

understands what is happening onstage. *The Communication Cord* emphasizes how one misstep can lead to a domino effect in terms of miscommunication of ideas and thoughts.

In his adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, Friel continues this exploration of communication and the limits of language. In her essay "Brian Friel's Theatrical Adaptations Of Chekhov Works," Virginie Roche-Tiengo links Friel and Chekhov: "In both Friel's and Chekhov's works, quotations are always uncompleted, reminding the audience of other texts and requesting the readers to read or remember earlier texts" (102). Adaptation involves another layer, as the audience may be familiar with the original work, whether in the original language or in translation. Both Friel and Chekhov—and I would argue McGuinness as well—are demanding of their audiences.

### **Friel's Adaptation**

While Friel's adaptation of Chekhov's play stays fairly close to the spirit of the original play, there are some significant differences. First, there are cultural and chronological barriers to bridge. When asked if he resorted to a literal translation, he responded as follows:

No, I sat down at my desk with six English versions in front of me.

But on one occasion, in particular, I did: when I wasn't sure what to do about the soldier bringing in a samovar as a gift to the sisters.

Samovars are normally given only to long-married matrons. So why should everyone be shocked if you don't happen to know samovars aren't given to girls? I wanted to be both absolutely

faithful, and true to naturalism. In the end I just fucked it. I put:  
 “Would you look at what he’s got her! A samovar! Oh my god!  
 That’s what you give to old maids!”, which made it different again.  
 The ideal condition would be to have a playwright who was fluent in  
 Russian. But if you have to forgo the one, I think it’s better for the  
 translator to be a dramatist. There are bigger truths beyond that of  
 the literal translation. (100)

Thus, that interstitial space of drama interferes. A dramatist must not only  
 engage the words on the page, but also on the stage. What happens on the  
 stage, then, must be relevant to the audience for the work to succeed.

The initial reviews of Friel’s *Three Sisters* were not overwhelmingly  
 positive. The play was put on as part of the twenty-third annual Dublin Theatre  
 Festival in 1981, and, interestingly enough, it went up alongside another Irish  
 adaptation of Chekhov. Thomas Kilroy, who himself has adapted many works of  
 world playwrights, adapted Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, which was performed at the  
 festival. A review was published in the *Boston Globe*:

Alas, Friel's interpretation of “Three Sisters,” recast from six other  
 translations of the past, was the festival's major disappointment.  
 The language was fine, and the acting was the same, but Friel's  
 “Three Sisters” gabbled on with growing lugubriousness until long  
 past the last bus home. If the response of the Dublin critics can be  
 summed up in a few words, it might be, “Was this translation really  
 necessary?”

The Irishfied “Sea Gull” by novelist, playwright and Galway College professor Thomas Kilroy was a different kettle of caviar altogether. Kilroy re-set Chekov's [sic] play in the west of Ireland in 1880 at a time when upper class landowners were going through the same pre-revolutionary crises that the upper crust in Russia would soon be experiencing. Kilroy converted the actress Irina Arkadin to Isobel Desmond and Boris Trigorin to Mr. Astin, while dotting the play with other Irish allusions. His version, with sharp dialogue and high good humor in the face of the oncoming tragic events cut through a lot of the dreamy indolence that sometimes infects Chekov productions. So, even if Friel's more classic rendition of Chekov failed to inspire, Kilroy's attempt at the greening of pre- Communist Russia was an acknowledged success. (“Russians are Coming” 2)

While such a review may seem shocking to a modern audience for Friel, it contains two critical messages. First, the fact that other Irish playwrights are also adapting these works signifies that such acts are more than a fad. They are symptomatic of a larger engagement with world drama. Second, it must be noted that Kilroy set his play in Ireland. Both Friel and McGuinness kept the original Chekhovian setting.

I agree that the change of setting makes this adaptation more palatable for a general audience, but I also contend that someone familiar with Irish literature and drama would make these connections even in the original setting. The peasant play, centered around the hearth, the heart of the home, was a staple in

early Abbey Theatre drama, as evidenced by plays by J. M. Synge and Padraic Colum. The pastoral connection between Ireland and Russia is evident; they are countries of communities, dotted by urban landscapes.

Peppered throughout Friel's *Three Sisters* are Irish turns of phrase, which clearly connect the work to an Irish audience. However, in "Friel's Ballybeggared Chekhov," David Krause argues that "As a result of all these insensitive and inappropriate language problems, Friel's version of *Three Sisters* often sounds like an ill-chosen collection of discordant voices, English-speaking and Irish English-speaking Russian voices that do not come together to form a unified and credible whole" (641). Many of Friel's original works involve collections of voices, and here the line must be drawn between the plays as literature, written works, and the plays as performance. Yes, the Irishisms are problematic at points, but what intrigues me the most is that Friel often chooses to transform Chekhov's monologues into dialogue. Tracy notes that Friel "reworks the characters' speeches to make them listen to and respond to one another in a way that subverts one of Chekhov's ways of emphasizing his characters' self-centeredness" (70). Thus, Tracy argues that Friel "creates communication where none really existed" (70). However, the spirit of the original is intact, as Friel's dialogue emphasizes the lack of communication between characters. Although Friel's characters are speaking to each other, the words seem to evaporate into air. That is, no information appears to be communicated from one actor to another.



An example is the exchange between Irina and Chebutikin early in Act I. What was a monologue by Irina is turned into dialogue. However, Chebutikin's responses are programmed retorts, which is the protagonist's area of study in Friel's *The Communication Cord*. Chebutikin simply repeats Irina's sentiments, inserting exclamations where needed. However, Chebutikin does not change his action based on her words; no communication occurs. Tracy ends his examination by stating,

I have been suggesting Chekhov not as a source nor an influence but as a kind of presence in certain of Friel's plays, sharing, as he does, Friel's preoccupation with language, communication, and memory both as themes and as dramatic devices. Chekhov wrote in a misruled society that he sensed would dissolve. Ireland, north and south, has for most of Friel's career been preoccupied with the consequences of misrule in Northern Ireland: language as shibboleth, non-communication, uneasy and conflicting memories of the past. The writer writes his times. It is exciting to anticipate Friel's future work in the new Ireland that is emerging, north and south. (77)

With Friel's death, such anticipation has ended to a great extent; however, there is hope for unpublished work to appear. In any event, rule cannot be maintained without communication. Such communication is predicated on the ubiquitous nature of a language in a country. Friel's plays—whether original or adaptation—interrogate how order can be maintained, if communication cannot, or will not,

occur. Friel's *Three Sisters*, as a work of the Field Day Theatre Company, sought to promote cross-border communication.

In his 1981 article entitled "The Place is the Thing for Irish Writer," Selwyn Parker includes insights from both Friel and Stephen Rea as to why Chekhov's *Three Sisters* was chosen as the second play to be performed by the Field Day Theatre Company:

"We wanted to do a classic," he [Friel] says. But for Friel it was no good doing an English translation by English linguists for English actors.

He explains: "There are several excellent translations available, but for Irish actors to perform them, they would really need to use English accents and that distances them from Irish audiences." For example, one of the six translations which Friel labored through line by line before coming up with his own version in the Irish idiom required one actor to describe a group of soldiers as "absolutely splendid chaps." Plainly that's not idiomatic Irish-English.

Director Stephen Rea describes the Friel version as "not just an Irish Chekhov. It's a new Chekhov." Certainly it's startlingly original.

(2)

Again, the idioms of the dialogues and monologues were altered to accommodate Hiberno-English. An excellent example is towards the second act in *Three Sisters*. Olga announces that dinner is served; in Chekhov's play, the dinner is meat pie, a delicacy (261), whereas in Friel's adaptation is lasagna (23);

in McGuinness's adaptation, roast turkey and an apple pie are served (18). Friel choose a more exotic meal, whereas McGuinness choose a traditional one. While preparing to dine, Masha reminds Chebutykin that he should not drink. In Chekhov's play (261) and McGuinness's adaptation (15), Chebutykin explains that he has been sober for two years. However, in Friel's version, Chebutykin is much more precise: "I've been dry for five hundred and ninety-seven and a half days now" (23). Friel's Chebutykin goes on to rebuke Masha, when he doubts his sobriety: "Who gives a damn about that, my love? Who gives a tinker's damn?" (23). While McGuinness's Chebutykin "Grows impatient" (15) with Masha, Chekhov's Chebutykin is more relaxed; he does not rebuke Masha. Masha's indictment of Chebutykin's sobriety is, as evidenced by the adaptations by Friel and McGuinness, a serious one. Ireland, as a nation, has a strong association with alcohol, with products from the Guinness brewery and Jameson distilleries distributed worldwide. However, the "Irish" Chebutykin is adamant about his sobriety, and these statements would particularly resonate with an Irish audience.

Masha is not the only more aggressive female figure in Friel's *Three Sisters*, Irina also asserts herself, using strong language. Early in the play, Chebutykin and Irina are discussing the notion of work and how important it is to the human race. Chebutykin tries to speak over Irina, but she grabs his attention with alliteration, "Dear, darling, dopy doctor!" (8). Chebutykin does not acknowledge Irina's voice; his language dismisses her: "You're my tiny white bird" (8). However, Irina is adamant about expressing herself, and in an

extended monologue about how she would rather die than be lazy, she states, “Because if I’m just a slut having my breakfast in bed and lying on till noon and then spending a couple of hours dithering over what I’ll wear, then wouldn’t I be far better off being a cart-horse or a donkey—anything at all just as long as I can work, work, work” (9). Her use of the term “slut” is intended to command Chebutykin’s attention; his response is serious. However, Olga, Irina’s older sister, does not have the same reaction. Irina responds, “You think it’s funny when I’m being serious. That’s because you persist in looking on me as a child. I am twenty years old today, Olga” (9). This exchange takes place in McGuinness’s adaptation as well, but instead of “slut,” Irina describes herself as a “young woman” (4); thus, McGuinness’s Irina is less forceful here. In any event, the reaction from Chebutykin and her sister Olga is still the same in McGuinness’s *Three Sisters*. Indeed, McGuinness’s Irina is similar to Chekhov’s Irina, who uses “young woman” (253) and achieves the same reaction as that of McGuinness’s Irina. The use of the word “slut,” particularly coming from a twenty-year-old Russian girl onstage, would have shocked Chekhov’s audiences. The use of the term in Friel’s adaptation is meant to grab the audience’s attention. Again, there is a lack of communication here, which Irina perceives as a function of her age. No one is listening to her, because she is younger and less experienced than her sisters and the people around her. Again, this notion resonates with a contemporary audience of these adaptations, who themselves are seeking to be heard in their societies. In Friel’s adaptation of Chekhov’s

*Three Sisters*, he argues, through Irina, for the need to listen to the voice of the younger generation.

This lack of communication here can also be viewed from a political perspective, in terms of the conflicts inherent in Northern Ireland. Indeed, there is generation of people growing up in Northern Ireland today who have only known peacetime. These are the children born and raised after the period known as the “Troubles,” which I have previously explained. In many ways, the voices of younger generation—those who have grown up in a Northern Ireland without constant political strife—are overshadowed by those of people who have experienced the most violent of periods, the Troubles, and who do not seek to repeat the errors of the past. Clearly, there is a need to bridge this communication gap between generations and experiences. The idea of miscommunication is so prevalent in Friel’s repertoire that we are left to question if such a form of complete communication exists. Regarding how Friel paints the “windbags” Vershinin and Tuzenbach, Tracy states: “In doing so he [Friel] challenges a political rhetoric of hope and escape then common in Northern Ireland, and presumably all too familiar to his Field Day audience” (72). Thus, the situation in the play reflects the prevalence of lack of communication on a larger, national scale. Friel’s dialogues here are, in fact, false or failed dialogues. When we consider that this play was the second one performed by the nascent Field Day Theatre Company, this monologue to dialogue metamorphosis becomes even more fascinating. If one person speaking to the masses, a la monologue, does not work to promote change, then perhaps two people

speaking will accomplish this feat? For Friel in this work, the answer appears to be no, as the dialogue here often resembles the empty rhetoric of politicians.

Friel has adapted other works by Chekhov, but he has also taken his admiration a step further. *Afterplay* appeared in 2002, four years after Friel's *Uncle Vanya* and over twenty years after his *Three Sisters*. In the introduction to the work, Friel expresses a feeling of being a "godfather" to these characters: Andrey from *The Three Sisters* and Sonya from *Uncle Vanya*. The play engages these two characters in a chance meeting twenty years after their own dramas end. Friel offers possible futures for these two young people, but Andrey and Sonya spend most of their time lying to each other, imagining what could have been. Again, self-actualization eludes these characters. Indeed, Frank McGuinness has also referred to his adaptations as his "children"; however, to date, there is no such play as *Afterplay* in his repertoire.

### **Context for McGuinness**

Likewise, McGuinness's *The Three Sisters* must be analyzed alongside *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. Characters in all three plays experience some degree of isolation from their environments. In *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, war is clearly the cause of separation, but McGuinness exposes deeper divisions of national identity and sexuality.

While many of Friel's characters are on a path towards self-actualization, McGuinness's characters are often victims of inertia; they are bodies at rest. In her essay "Self-Dramatization in the Plays of Frank McGuinness," Joan

Fitzpatrick Dean compares Beckett's characters to those of McGuinness: "His [McGuinness's], like Beckett's are characters in extremis. Poverty, war, grief, or imprisonment deny them the supports for identity traditionally found in family, community or nation. Characters may be immobilized physically by imprisonment, grief or authority, but their physical constraint only intensifies the relentless mobility of their thoughts" (146). An example can be seen in McGuinness's play *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992), which focuses on an American, Englishman, and an Irishman who are prisoners of war in Lebanon. The characters are constrained; they are individuals disconnected from their families who must find a new sense of normality. Indeed, war produces an in-between space, what Bhaba would consider an interstitial space. This space lies between the battlefield and home; it is a peaceful, at times, quasi-home. We see this same type of scenario in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*.

In each of these plays, the characters are trapped, and in their isolation, they seek to perform their realities. Joan Fitzpatrick Dean examines this motif in McGuinness's plays:

Wrenched from their traditions, McGuinness's characters assert their identity through self-dramatization—the characters' creation and performance of versions of themselves. His characters routinely draw upon and define themselves through extradramatic or metadramatic devices. These include game playing, nomination (the act of renaming people and things), the re-enactment of

historical and personal events, role playing, and plays-within-plays—as well as such intertextual devices as storytelling, recitation, song, and the retelling of dreams. All of these dramatic tactics share two non-naturalistic qualities. First, they necessarily involve an element of artifice in that they are ‘scripted,’ non-spontaneous or performances, theatrical by their very nature. Second, because they elicit a tension between the self and a persona, all play on that disparity—between the ‘true’ character and the storyteller or between the self and the game player. (144)

An example of such performance of characters comes in the third act of *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, when we see the men broken into pairs in separate locations. These men are essentially performing themselves for both the other man in the location as well as the audience. Thus, there is an opportunity to assume a new version of oneself. It is not a journey towards self-actualization here, but a journey towards what could have been, lost opportunities.

The first production of *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985) was directed by Patrick Mason, an award-winning director who served as artistic director of the Abbey Theatre. This play premiered at the Peacock Theatre, the black box theatre situated in the same building as the Abbey Theatre. Again, I focus on the third act here, when the men are separated into pairs in four different locales onstage, and I am particularly concerned with the pair of Pyper and Craig. Pyper stands out from the rest of the men for many



reasons—his background, education, wealth. However, he is also portrayed as other due to his homosexual tendencies; although they are never specifically referenced in the text or stage directions of McGuinness's play, they are indicated in the text. It must be noted here that McGuinness is open about his own status as a gay man, although he minimizes its influence on his writing. In a 2014 interview with McGuinness conducted by Maurice Fitzpatrick and published in *Breac: A Digital Journal of Irish Studies*, the playwright is asked directly about his sexual identity. Fitzpatrick asks McGuinness, "You don't think your sexuality in any way brought you to writing, stimulated the writing?" McGuinness responds:

It must have. It is not the be-all and end-all. I am certainly aware of how much gay writing was censored and gay people were censored. I am aware of that, especially in Ireland. But then again, that is a worldwide phenomenon. I am absolutely determined for that not to be the case for me. But I am equally determined that it is not going to become a mission in life. I am "out." I have been out for a long time. If you've got a problem with it, fuck off. That's my attitude. I don't want to know you. I am not interested. I'm equally not going to let definitions such as my sexuality become the be-all and end-all of my art.

Fitzpatrick mentions the novelist Colm Tóibín, whose works directly grapple with issues of gender and sexuality. Indeed, while examining McGuinness's repertoire from a queer studies perspective is beyond the scope of this

examination, it is certainly a necessary scholarly endeavor. McGuinness's sexual orientation adds another dimension to his works, as it positions him, particularly from the viewpoint of an Irish Catholic sensibility, as "other." Thus, he is separated not just by location but also by sexual identity. Thus, a scholarly exploration of this dimension—which is outside the main focuses of my study—is certainly needed.

However, it is only through performance that the homosexual dimension of Pyper's character explicitly comes to life. As director, Mason chose this moment—the two men alone on an island—for Pyper and Craig to kiss passionately. In David Cregan's article, "Irish Theatrical Celebrity and the Critical Subjugation of Difference in the Work of Frank McGuinness," he comments on this historic moment in Irish theatre:

The kiss represents a truly theatrical moment when the live physical action of the stage extends the dramatic intent of the author inherent in the text to create the type of artistic occurrence possible only in live theatre.

The kiss between Pyper and Craig was the first overt representation of gay physical action on the stage at the National Theatre in Dublin. Although critics were highly impressed by the play and the performance, they failed to acknowledge this unique moment in the representation of Irishness at the Abbey.

McGuinness had used the context of deeply rooted Irish sectarian myth of national heritage by referencing the Battle of the Somme,

and yet he chose to tell this cherished story that signifies national pride from the perspective of the homosexual protagonist, Pyper. While critics dealt efficiently with the historical and cultural references within the play, they failed to respond to McGuinness' dramaturgical strategy inherent in the controversial use of a gay character to be the voice of the people of Northern Ireland. (673)

The decision here to have a gay male protagonist is risky enough, but as Cregan points out, Pyper is a representation of his community; he is a voice for others.

Northern Ireland is "other" to the Republic of Ireland; gay is "other" to straight. However, when you have two "others," which one is other? McGuinness's play interrogates issues of history and politics, but not just on a broad, national scale; it also does so on the individual, personal level. In order to build a national identity, homogeneity, not heterogeneity, must reign. Cregan argues that this conflict occurs throughout McGuinness's repertoire:

McGuinness' body of work represents a cultural struggle in Irish theatre to maintain an Irish identity through the subjugation of difference. Such a subjugation maintains rather than challenges the industry and, in the case of McGuinness' work, struggles to absorb the queer into the normative, neutralizing its effect, emptying its politics, and defusing its inherent meanings. (683)

The impulse to create a unified Irish identity inherently builds on similarities, not difference. However, refusing to acknowledge difference within the population does not strengthen a national identity. Identities are constantly refined, and it is

now time for Ireland to look inward again. Ireland, mainly due to its involvement in the European Union, has been thrust into a global community. In order to engage fully in this community, Ireland must participate in the dialogue about gender politics and identity that is occurring throughout the world.

### **McGuinness's Adaptation**

Just as *Translations* marks a shift for Friel into the field of adaptation, McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, which premiered in 1985, serves as a starting point in this examination. Two years later, McGuinness adapted his first play by Ibsen: *Rosmersholm*. War serves as a backdrop in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, but the focus is on individuals. His treatment of place in this play—four pairs of characters inhabiting four different places concurrently—reflects his inclination to travel beyond Ireland with ease in his work. His treatment of Chekhov is thus an extension of his own creative work; as with Friel's, McGuinness's adaptations form a vital part of his repertoire. Coincidentally, *Three Sisters* (1990) is the first work of Chekhov adapted by McGuinness.

There is not much written about McGuinness's adaptation of *Three Sisters*; indeed, his numerous—I believe nine—adaptations of Ibsen have attracted much more critical attention. Frank McGuinness first adapted Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* in 1987, two years after *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. His version of *Three Sisters* premiered in 1990 at the Gate Theatre, and it is much more economical than that of Friel. Chekhov's extended monologues are often condensed into dialogue that conveys the idea

to the audience, perhaps not the intended recipient, more succinctly. One example is at the end of Act 3, when the siblings confront each other. The voices of the sisters in this play often overlap each other, and it is often difficult to tease them apart. However, what exists as monologue and extended dialogue in Chekhov and Friel becomes more direct in McGuinness's adaptation. Olga states, "I will not hear it, I refuse, no. Talk any nonsense you want, go ahead. I will not hear it" (52). This economy of lines makes Olga appear strong here. Throughout McGuinness's *Three Sisters*, this directness has a stunning effect on the audience. Indeed, this succinct approach runs throughout McGuinness's adaptations, and it brings an immediacy to his work. McGuinness, unlike Friel, has widely adapted the works of world playwrights. He once said that "We no longer need to assert that we have a right to do these (other European) plays, we take it for granted, of course we do it" (qtd. in Csikai 86). Friel once remarked on the brashness of early Field Day, and we can see this echo here in McGuinness. In an interview with Anthony Roche, McGuinness stated that "I never found a sense of place an easy thing to grasp and I certainly never found it an easy thing to celebrate" (18). Indeed, his reworkings of so many world playwrights—Brecht, Lorca, Ostrovsky, Chekhov and Ibsen, not to mention the Greeks—indicates a search for meaning in place.

The conciseness of McGuinness's adaptation of *Three Sisters* is not unprecedented. In her article "Intercultural Aspects in Post-modern Theatre: a Japanese Version of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*," Erika Fischer-Lichte outlines the details of a Japanese production of this work: "Suzuki's production of *Three*

*Sisters* did not take more than one hour to perform, which is the usual length of his productions. Chekhov's text had therefore to be drastically curtailed: more than half of the dialogue was cut. The four acts were revised into ten scenes" (176). Such brevity would probably not work on the Irish or British stages, where audiences are more familiar with Chekhov's repertoire, and who come to the theatre expecting to see a show of a reasonable length. Chekhov did write many one-act plays, so it is clear the he intended *Three Sisters* to be a multi-act play. However, such reinterpretation does allow the work to grow, if only because it draws critical attention that reignites a conversation about the play. These cross-cultural productions are critical in this respect. In his article "The Play: Gateway to Cultural Dialogue," Gershon Shaked explains how the act of reading or viewing a play inherently involves the audience in its own process of translation: "reading or viewing is the constant process of translating an alien experience, with its own memories and associations, to our own realm of experience, with its memories and associations. That process of translation leaves gaps and interstices [Bhaba's third space] between our world and the image of the world created within us by what is read or viewed" (7). Thus, even an audience of an original play by McGuinness will have to assimilate the work to a degree. The audience of an adaptation by McGuinness, in some respects, has a more difficult task. However, the transformation of the language in each adaptation helps to produce a sense of familiarity for the reader and viewer.

The Prozorov household serves as the main setting for *Three Sisters*. It is a home, yet it is also viewed as a stop along the way. The three sisters are

eager to move back to Moscow, favoring the big city over the country. The scene in Act Four in which the traveling musicians pass through is an example of the house as what Bhabha would describe as an in-between space for people. In Chekhov's play, the scene is as follows:

OLGA Our garden's like an empty lot; people walk and drive right through it. Nanny, give those musicians something! . . .

ANFISA (*Gives something to the musicians.*) God bless you, sweethearts. (*The musicians bow and leave.*) Hard-luck folks. When your belly's full, you don't have to play. (301)

In Friel's adaptation, the scene is as follows:

OLGA. Our garden's become like a public road—everybody seems to walk through it. Nanny, give those musicians something. (*Irina leaves her swing and joins the others. Anfisa, now much more assured and confident than in Act Three, gives money to the musicians.*)

ANFISA. There you are. Thank you. Off you go. (*The musicians leave.*) God help them, the creatures; sure if they had a full stomach, they wouldn't be jouking about the countryside like that. (83)

Friel's choice of "public road" to describe the house conjures the picture of a crowded, bustling place, certainly livelier than an "empty lot." Friel's Anfisa responds in an Hiberno-English manner that retains the spirit of Chekhov's play. In McGuinness's adaptation, the scene is as follows:

OLGA: Our garden is like a public road. People walk and ride right through it. Nanny, give those musicians something.

(ANFISA gives the musicians money.)

ANFISA: God be with you, good souls.

(The musicians bow and exit.)

Poor people. You don't play for the pleasure of it. (68)

McGuinness, like Friel, opts for the use of “public road” to describe the house. Thus, we see the house as a hub of activity, not a vacant lot, devoid of people. Also, Anfisa welcomes the musicians with a traditional Irish greeting, “God be with you,” or in Irish, “*Dia duit*.” It is important to point out here that the person who is speaking the most “Irish” English is the nanny, the hired help. If the distinction is evident in the written text of the play, one can imagine how clear the differences in speech would be on stage during a performance of the plays. I return here to Vera Gottlieb’s point that the Russian language does not denote class distinctions and her comment that in English language productions of Chekhov, class was often indicated by accent.

Friel’s and McGuinness’s adaptations adopt this practice. Anfisa’s Irish greeting resonates with the audience, and it makes the audience feel closer to the action onstage. There is a sense of familiarity; in this respect, the space between the audience and the stage has been bridged. In *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, Patrice Pavis argues that playwrights must find a way to relate to the audience via signals: “Theatre can resolve one of anthropology’s difficulties: translating/visualizing abstract elements of a culture, as a system of



beliefs and values, by using concrete means: for example, performing instead of explaining a ritual, showing rather than expounding the social conditions of individuals, using an immediately readable *gestus*" (16). Hospitality and compassion are performed for the audience by Anfisa, via her use of Irish idioms. An explicit signaling of her use of Hiberno-English, as opposed to the English used by many of the other characters, could be expressed in the stage directions, but it is much more effective as is, seamlessly sewn into the fabric of the play itself. The use of Hiberno-English produces a rhythm to the play that it would not otherwise evince, and it is precisely this music with which the audience identifies.

The end of the play revolves around music, as a military band plays in the background. Chekhov's Chebutykin sings quietly, "Tara . . . ra . . . boom-de-ay . . . I sit in gloom all day" (306). Friel's Chebutykin sings to himself (90). However, McGuinness's Chebutykin sings out loud: "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ai, dance on a grave today" (73). The first part of this line is from a popular London music hall song; in more recent times, the song was used as the theme song to the television show, *Howdy Doody*.

The issue of where the original ends and the adaptation begins is not easily determined. The adaptations of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* by Friel and McGuinness fit into each other repertoires; they do not stand out as other. In her essay "Translating Chekhov's Plays Without Russian, or The Nasty Habit of Adaptation," Sharon Marie Carnicke argues that adaptations are inevitably branded by playwrights:

Whether “channeling” or “exorcising” Chekhov, whether translating or adapting him, playwrights put their own stamps upon his plays. While one could argue that all translators reflect themselves through the inevitable linguistic and cultural compromises that the very act of translating entails, I would argue that playwrights do so in spades. Unlike professional translators who expect to become the invisible medium of an author, playwrights struggle over the course of their careers to develop recognizable voices of their own. Their reputations depend upon it. Playwrights can ill afford to lose themselves in Chekhov. (93-94)

Neither Friel nor McGuinness “lose themselves in Chekhov”; however, again, it must be noted that Friel came to adaptation later in his career. Once he started adapting, he did continue to write original plays as well. However, McGuinness started adapting plays early on in his career, and he routinely goes back and forth between original works and adaptations.

## **Conclusion**

Brian Friel’s and Frank McGuinness’s adaptations of Anton Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* serve to enhance an overall understanding of the play. In interrogating how the culture of Russia can be interpreted for an Irish audience, the plays provide insight into the connections between these countries and cultures. In her essay entitled “*Mrs. Warren’s Profession* In China: Factors In Cross-Cultural Adaptations,” Kay Li examines why G. B. Shaw’s play was so popular to a reading audience in China yet was unsuccessful onstage: “The

popularity of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in print and the relative unpopularity of the play in performance drew attention to the role of the dramatic medium and the need for ideological and theatrical bridges between Chinese and Western cultures" (203). Li argues that the first production of the play served as an introduction to Western culture and ideology for the audience. However, in order to engage the audience, the directors had "[t]o understand the difference between the cultural reproduction of everyday life and the cultural reproduction of ideology" (208). They needed to recreate everyday life; engaging the audience on this basic level is vital. Friel and McGuinness accomplish this feat in their adaptations of *Three Sisters*.

In her essay "Towards a Theory of Interculturalism in Theatre?", Patrice Pavis warns of the tendency to view adaptation as a mode of homogenization of cultures:

The generalizing on a global scale of economic and cultural exchanges sometimes leads us to think that a "one-world culture" is in the process of emerging. But it is, rather, a standardization of social practices dominated by the capitalist West. Its so-called universality, which subsumes all individual culture, is in fact only a construction of the dominant West" (16-17)

The dramatic adaptations of Ibsen and Chekhov by McGuinness and Friel are not attempts to homogenize cultures. Rather, they are celebrations of hybridity, the fact that disparate cultures can coexist in a global environment. These adaptations highlight both the similarities and differences between these cultures,

but they do not favor the evolution one singular culture. Drama, particularly as a performative art, has the ability to connect people over great distances, and these adaptations are another example of these associations.

In conclusion, when asked about the affinity between the Irish and Russians, Friel and McGuinness are separated by almost a quarter of a century in age, and this gap represents a time of transition for Ireland. In his article “Friel’s Irish Russia,” Richard Pine highlights the comparison between Ireland and Russia: “As in Russia, so in Irish society, especially in the nineteenth century, there is a meeting place of those in possession (the gentry) and the dispossessed (the peasantry). Neither party is able fully to occupy or relinquish its condition, but lives in uneasy symbiosis with the other” (109). Pine’s words are still relevant today, particularly in light of the economic crises that continue to ripple across the global community. The line between the haves and have nots has perhaps never been wider, particularly in Ireland; the traveler community in Ireland is an excellent example, as they continue to seek rights, routinely afforded to Irish citizens. Travelers were traditionally viewed as “other,” but the connections between these communities across Europe complicate this perception.

The conflicts within cultures can be just as critical as the conflicts between cultures. By conflicts here, I refer to the point at which the differences are brought to light; there is not necessarily a resolution here, but a comparison is now possible. In Homi Bhabha’s *Location of Culture*, he theorizes how differences across cultures are related to those within cultures:

The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic. That iteration negates our sense of the origins of the struggle. It undermines our sense of the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols and icons, by questioning our sense of the authority of cultural synthesis in general. (35)

Bhabha describes here the plot situation in Friel's *Translations*, in which the present and past clash in an attempt to move forward in some unified fashion. Of course, such a blending and resolution is not provided here. The play ends with individuals attempting to resolve their own fates, but again, such resolutions prove impossible in the face of a community and nation that cannot successfully move forward. McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* engages in the same discussion through his use of the historical places in Part Three of the play. However, unlike Friel's stage in *Translations*, McGuinness's stage in this play is split into four distinct locations that do not interact with each other. This lack of engagement highlights the isolation of the individual, particularly in larger global struggles, to which he may not believe that he can impact. Thus, McGuinness's approach, in many ways, resonates more

with a contemporary audience. The action of both plays is set in an historical period in the past and, ultimately, both plays deal with war. However, McGuinness's play is told via one man's memory; therefore, the individual is paramount here. Pyper goes to war to escape his own place, only to find another place against which he must battle. In Friel's *Translations*, the marks of the battle within the play are evident everyday for the people who occupy those places. The struggle has been internalized by the renaming of the place names from Irish to English. Friel's struggle is more communal, whereas McGuinness's characters often battle within their own minds.

In her essay "Brian Friel's Theatrical Adaptations Of Chekhov Works," Virginie Roche-Tiengo explains the role of language in Irish adaptations:

The importance of adaptations in the Irish literary landscape and even mindscape, at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first, echoes the human quest for a universal language, which can transcend the metaphysical questioning of man facing the unbearable and absurd silence of God. (109-110)

The term "universal language" here relates to human experience, more than an actual physical tongue. These adaptations represent a desire by Irish authors to engage in dialogue with a global community. Brian Friel's work often deals with issues of nationhood and identity that have plagued Ireland for centuries.

However, he has revitalized Irish drama as a theatre practitioner who has used the Irish stage as a medium for communication and discussion with the world.

Frank McGuinness's body of work illustrates an attempt to reconcile the position of Ireland in a changing world. As a genre, drama is an attempt to reflect the world of its composition; thus, it must inherently adjust to a changing environment, if it is to survive. These adaptations represent Ireland's attempt to engage in the ever-changing global community. One can theorize that there will be more examples of common adaptations by both Friel and McGuinness. I will end with Friel's response to why he feels an affinity towards Russian works; he states:

I'm not sure why I find the late-nineteenth-century Russians so sympathetic. Maybe because the characters in the plays behave as if their old certainties were as sustaining as ever – even though they know in their hearts that their society is in melt-down and the future has neither a welcome nor even an accommodation for them. Maybe a bit like people of my own generation in Ireland today. Or maybe I find those Russians sympathetic because they have no expectations whatever from love but still invest everything in it. Or maybe they attract me because they seem to expect that their problems will disappear if they talk about them – endlessly. (Seven Notes for a Festival Programme 179)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The first Irish play that I ever saw performed was Brian Friel's *Lovers*, but it was only the first part, *Winners*; my beginners Irish class went as a cultural outing during my sophomore year of college in Philadelphia, in 1995. I distinctly remember thinking, "If Joe and Mag are 'winners,' then what does Friel consider a 'loser'?" As we discussed the play afterwards over dinner, I realized that I was at a loss for words; I lacked the vocabulary, both as *Gaeilge agus as Béarla* (in Irish and in English), to explain what I had just seen. I circled about the rabbit hole of Irish drama, still not ready to dive in. Fast forward a year to 1996 when, after studying at Trinity College, Dublin for the summer, I had the chance to see *Translations* at the Abbey Theatre. Of course, the show was sold out, but the partially obstructed view seats were perfectly aligned with my student budget. The fact was that it did not matter which seat I was in. The space around me disintegrated, and I felt like it was a private performance. I had postponed backpacking through Scotland to see that play, and it made all the difference. To this day, *Translations* is perhaps my favorite play; each time that I read it, something new strikes me. Each time that I see it produced, I do so with a new set of eyes. There is something about theatre that transcends place, and I know that seeing that production of *Translations* at the Abbey Theatre that summer is an experience that I will always treasure.



By that time in my studies, I was acutely aware of the critical role of that physical space in the evolution of Irish drama, and I was ready to jump into the rabbit hole and start my wild adventure in Irish studies. I left for Ireland that summer as a biology major at the University of Pennsylvania who was interested in Irish literature. When I returned to campus that fall, I declared a second major in English, with a concentration in Celtic studies. At that point, I knew that this was a field in which I wanted to pursue graduate studies, and the best fit for me was Boston College, particularly because of the school's unique partnership with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

As a Masters candidate in Irish Studies at Boston College, I had the awesome opportunity to participate in an internship with the Abbey Theatre. At this point, I was committed to my study of Irish literature, particularly drama, and just walking onto the Abbey Theatre stage gave me goosebumps. G. B. Shaw's *St. Joan* was on stage, so the stage itself was a treacherous maze of escape hatches that could have easily proved disastrous for a doe-eyed graduate student. Remarkably, we were being directed by Tomás Mac Anna, a legend in Irish drama, who died in May 2011. As Richard Pine writes, "Dubbed 'the Gorbachev of Irish theatre', he sought a cultural glasnost, promoting modern Irish and world drama" ("Tomás Mac Anna obituary"). At the time, I knew he had begun his career at the Abbey Theatre as a director of Irish language drama, but he wrote his own plays in Irish and in English as well. To me, he personified the Abbey in many ways, and I was in awe of a man who was willing to sit down with me and talk about his "new" production of Lennox Robinson's *The Whiteheaded*

*Boy at the Abbey* in 1974. As a note, the Abbey Theatre, on tour, staged this play in Indiana, Pennsylvania in 1931 (Kane and Cahalan 10). The undergraduates on our trip probably saw an old man who, at some point, would be burned by the ashes that he dangerously let dangle off his cigarette. They may have taken his criticism with a grain of salt. I, on the other hand, could not hold back a dazed grin each time that he yelled in my direction—for an actor I am not!

Luckily, I was saved, and not just from certain doom at having fallen down a stage trap. Studying at the place that had seen so many legendary playwrights, directors, and actors was a watershed experience for me. I have returned to that place many times in my mind when I read a play, but particularly when writing this dissertation. Place and theatre are inextricably linked for me. Throughout the years, I have had the opportunity to see countless more productions of Irish plays, but I do tend to remember the theatre space as much as the production. The play itself transforms the space into a place for me. The theatre space is inevitably infused with memories. Often, those memories are of previous plays that I have seen performed in that venue. In thinking back, if I cannot remember the theatre space, I cannot remember the play. Of course, this cognizance lasts only during the actual play, while the lights are down, and I am transported to the world on the stage.

In one sense, drama demands that space be transcended. The audience must be fully absorbed into the play; the fourth wall has, for the most part, disintegrated, so engagement is expected. Drama is a mimetic art, so we

experience the play, as we experience the episodes of our own lives. I recently had the opportunity to see a production of a play that I had not read; the play was Enda Walsh's *Penelope*, and it was staged by Inis Nua Theatre Company in Philadelphia in spring 2015. It was so exciting to sit in the audience and wonder what would happen next; in the process of studying and writing, I have seen countless plays, but I have almost always read them ahead of time. I knew what was going to happen; like the ancient Greek audiences, I knew the story, but I was waiting to see how it would be staged. I can imagine that viewing an adaptation is somewhere between these two extremes. One knows the play, but she must be every vigilant to what has been changed. The adaptations are reinterpretations, yet, of course, many people are seeing these plays for the first time. Thus, the adaptations stand as their own works.

In my examinations here, I have compared the plays, but I hope that I have been careful not to create a hierarchy. Instead of seeing the "original" work as the ultimate, I prefer to look at the original and the adaptation(s) as all parts of a whole. In his essay "Why Compare?", R. Radhakrishnan argues that the "The project of comparison in a way ups the ante by suggesting perhaps that a knowledge based on comparison could be more sophisticated, progressive, worldly, and cosmopolitan than a form of knowledge that is secure in its own identity and provenance" (456). Indeed, in my examination here I made some global connections in an effort to promote a deeper understanding of the plays and playwrights discussed. However, such a synthesis should not be conducted at the expense of the individual works. My examination of Friel's and

McGuinness's adaptations of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* is a prime example. It would be a gross oversimplification to order them as Chekhov (#1), Friel (#2), and McGuinness (#3). Instead, together, they form a more complete picture of the play; the plays all inform each other. A fascinating exercise would involve surveying the younger generation who grew up seeing the adaptations as their first experiences of this play.

These plays are so often adapted precisely because their themes seem so widely appealing. Thus, a knowledge of Chekhov's play is not required to appreciate McGuinness's *Three Sisters*. However, I argue that the more the play is experienced, the richer the experience is for the audience. Indeed, seeing multiple productions of a play provides an insight that is impossible to glean from just one viewing. Each adaptation serves as another lens through which to view the original work. Thus, the adaptations are not necessary to a basic understanding of the piece; rather, they serve two purposes. First, for those who have never read or seen the original play, the adaptation serves to introduce the audience to the work. Such an exposure may lead to an urge to seek out the original work; however, this is not always the case, nor must it be the case. Second, for those who are familiar with the original, the adaptation promotes a deeper understanding of the work by providing a broader context. In other words, Friel's and McGuinness's adaptations of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* indicate a relevance for this work in contemporary times. Thus, it demands that the audience take another look in order to achieve a deeper level of understanding.

There are several limitations on this dissertation that may be remedied with time, thus allowing an expanded examination of these issues. First, at this point, the Irish adaptations are male-dominated. In general, Irish drama has long been a male-dominated genre; however, there is a growing number of female playwrights today. Also, there has been a clear interest in searching out female playwrights from the past. For example, the Mint Theater in New York City, under the direction of Jonathan Bank, specializes in producing neglected Irish playwrights. In 2009, the theater produced Lennox Robinson's *Is Life Worth Living?*, which was produced in Ireland as *Drama at Inish*. The play outlines what happens when a traveling troupe of actors visits a seaside Irish town and produces plays, such as those of Ibsen and Chekhov, that contaminate the native population. This play details in many ways Robinson's own struggle to bring continental European drama to the Abbey Theatre. After producing this plan, the Mint Theater turned to the work of Teresa Deevy and produced three of her plays: *Wife to James Whelan* (2010), *Temporal Powers* (2011), and *Katie Roche* (2013). The fact that such work is being re-examined in the United States is a promising sign.

Male playwrights have adapted works by other male playwrights. Adding a female dimension to this situation will both complicate and inform the conclusions formed here. While the number of female Irish playwrights is increasing, Marina Carr has emerged as a leading figure. In his book *Modern Irish Drama: W. B. Yeats to Marina Carr* (2010), Sanford Sternlicht declares, "Marina Carr is the most significant and successful female Irish playwright since

Lady Gregory. Her powerfully original plays have changed the ways women have been and will be represented in Irish drama at the expense of patriarchy and nationalist fervor” (150). In addition to her original plays, she has, on several occasions, reworked ancient drama. Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* (1988), which was produced most recently at the Abbey Theatre in August 2015, is a retelling of Euripedes’ *Medea*. She has tackled interpretations of other works by Euripedes, and she has also reworked Irish myths, such as *On Raftery’s Hill* (2000), a clear personal favorite of mine, as a Raftery myself.

Anthony Raftery (1779-1835) is considered by many to be the last great bard of the Irish language. Although there are only a handful of creative works dealing with his legacy, he achieved prominence, as a poem written in his honor, “Mise Raifteirí an File” (“I am Raftery the poet”), graced the Irish five-pound note, before the advent of the euro. I was so excited to bring home a five-pound note to my father, after my first trip to Ireland. My father’s family emigrated to the United States before the Famine, so it is difficult to trace them. It is even more arduous, considering that my paternal grandmother’s name was Ita Murphy; tracking a Murphy in Philadelphia is a task indeed! I grew up with people constantly misspelling my last name; I went to the local Catholic elementary and high school, and I distinctly remember, on one occasion, my father refusing to sign my report card. I had all high marks; however, my surname was misspelled as “Raferty,” a common occurrence, and he found this situation completely unacceptable, since these nuns were being paid to educate me. After my father died, I remember my nephew telling me that his teacher explained to him that our

name was probably misspelled at Ellis Island. I know how my father would have reacted, and I think that I successfully tempered myself; however, I did give my nephew that Irish five-pound note to show his teacher. I told him to “hint” at the fact that we are related; there is no conclusive proof that I am descended from Raftery, but the striking physical resemblance between Anthony Raftery and my father, coupled with the recalcitrant nature of both men, provides enough circumstantial evidence for me. There are still events held in Raftery’s honor in Mayo, and there is a Raftery Room Restaurant in Castlebar, Mayo; interestingly enough, the restaurant used to be owned by a family named Walsh. My maternal grandmother’s name was Anne Walsh, and Castlebar, Mayo is not too far from where she was born and raised in Cloonraver, Sligo.

Even when Marina Carr is not discreetly adapting the ancient plays, she rewrites the myths into new works, often incorporating more than one myth at a time. Furthermore, Carr’s retellings often highlight and expand the roles of the women in these works. An examination of how Carr’s work compares to earlier adaptations of Greek plays is needed. One of Carr’s most famous adaptations is her take on Euripides’ *Medea* entitled *By the Bog of Cats...*, which premiered at the Abbey Theatre in October 1998. The female protagonist here is named Hester Swane, and as Brian Arkins explains, her fate differs from that of her predecessor:

Carr here gives a significant new twist to the Medea theme. Writing as a woman about women, Carr deconstructs the currently dominant reading of Euripides’ *Medea* as a feminist statement, in

which Medea's revenge through infanticide is vindicated. Hester Swane is not vindicated, but dies by her own hand; she who lives by the knife will die by the knife. If Hester Swane is a feminist icon, she is a very different one from Medea. (81)

Hester's suicide connects her more with Carr's other female protagonists such as the Mai and Portia Coughlan (Arkins 81). Carr is challenging the preconceived notions of this heroine and perhaps heroines as a whole. Carr's work deserves more attention, particularly since she is one of the only female Irish playwrights adapting these ancient myths.

On a more practical note, one of the limitations of this study is clearly the availability of texts, since some of these adaptations exist only in performance. Greater access to print versions will no doubt build on the analyses begun here. Looking at the other adaptations, beyond the genre of drama, done by both Friel and McGuinness is another path that can be taken to follow on the ideas generated here. As both Friel, at least up until his death in October 2015, and McGuinness are still writing and premiering plays, this examination is perhaps already dated, yet I hope that it provides a framework from which to view future adaptations by these authors.

Each season, more and more adaptations are produced. Many playwrights have returned to Chekhov and Ibsen; Mark O'Rowe's version of *Hedda Gabler* premiered at the Abbey Theatre in spring 2015. What is fascinating is that a younger generation of Irish theatregoers is experiencing multiple adaptations of classic plays. In this respect, these plays have been



reborn; the adaptations make the classics relevant to the contemporary audience.

When the Abbey Theatre was founded officially in 1904, Ireland was struggling for her independence. Today, Ireland is a thriving entity in the European Union. However, change brings challenge. How does Irish drama, which fought so hard to stand on its own, incorporate and integrate other world dramas? The art of adaptation is one such option. Irish drama has traditionally resisted outside influence, yet without an outsider perspective, art will surely become stagnant. There is a clear movement towards a global perspective in Irish studies, as evidenced by many conferences embracing such a theme. This phenomenon raises another fact: people from other cultures are studying Irish drama and relating it to their own dramatic cultural histories. Such internalization can yield exciting conclusions. The days of looking no further than England for theatrical comparison are in the past. There is a clear need to espouse inclusivity over exclusivity in the study of Irish drama.

I hope that my study here is just the beginning. There is certainly much more to do, as each year, there are more and more Irish dramatic adaptations. In her essay "Stage Adaptations and the Dublin Theatre Festival," Catherine Piola states, "In the 2007 [Dublin] Festival there were no less than six adaptations; this is no doubt the sign that drama is more and more a world without frontier in which texts, new or not, can always be brought to life, in the eye of the audience" (43). Of course, the festival atmosphere is different: it is geared towards performance. In his essay "Adaptation(s), Staging Otherness or

Translation at Play,” Alain Labau argues, “Adaptations and translations do not choose to approach a work from the same angles. Simply put, translation is source-oriented; adaptation heads for the target” (34). Labau makes an intriguing distinction here, but for Friel and McGuinness, translation and adaptation are linked, as both men worked with multiple translations in order to formulate each adaptation.

Scholars must contend with the availability of print copies of these adaptations. It would be fascinating to delve deeper into the performative nature of these adaptations, to closely examine the productions for deviations from the scripts, but also for any changes based on production locale. For example, do productions of McGuinness’s adaptation of Ibsen’s *A Doll House* differ between Dublin and London? If so, what do these changes reveal about the relationship between the original, the adaptation, and the performance? Such an examination is beyond the scope of my project, but it is needed.

While this examination focused only on adaptations of Ibsen and Chekhov, there are many modern and contemporary playwrights who have adapted other European plays and beyond. For example, McGuinness has adapted Brecht and Lorca; it would be beneficial to do a longitudinal study of each playwright’s adaptations. However, drama does not exist in a vacuum. Thus, there is the possibility for comparative analyses of playwrights’ adaptations of others’ works. My examination of *Three Sisters*, as adapted by both Friel and McGuinness, is one movement in this direction. Thus, the field of study is ripe, and it offers hope for young scholars. However, just as most other topics in Irish

studies, it is interdisciplinary. Irish studies, in general, demands an interdisciplinary approach, as we cannot divorce history from the literature. Over the years, many other lenses such as folklore, political science, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and art been added to provide a richer experience.

While my study and many other projects that I have mentioned here are qualitative in nature, there is also a need for some quantitative research. It seems that more and more adaptations are being produced. *Oedipus*, in a new version by Wayne Jordan, opened at the Abbey Theatre in September 2015. At this point, I am not sure if I am just hyper-aware of these adaptations or if there are truly just more adaptations being produced. The truth is probably somewhere in between or both, but with the advent on online databases—the Abbey Theatre has one—such research can be reasonably accomplished. The venue for such adaptations would also be intriguing to examine. For example, is the Abbey producing the majority of these adaptations in Ireland? The smaller Peacock Theatre, also housed on the site of the Abbey, was founded to promote new works of Irish drama. Usually, the works of lesser known or new playwrights would be staged at the Peacock, while the Abbey stage housed the big names and better known plays. However, it appears that the trend is shifting. To take this idea a step further, it would be fascinating to see which adaptations were taken on tour, particularly by the Abbey. How these adaptations have performed at drama festivals would also be an interesting study.

My scholarship was limited to English language adaptations and productions. However, there have been works translated and adapted into the

Irish language. What is different about these adaptations is that they are often of ancient Gaelic legends. Of course, there are clear demands, both in terms of production and audience, for such works. An Taibhdhearc, Amharclann Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, was founded in 1928 and is the National Irish Language theatre in Galway. While there had been Irish language productions in and around Dublin, An Taibhdhearc (which translates as “The Theatre”) was established to focus solely on the promotion of the Irish language via drama. The mission has expanded to include other performing arts in Irish, and the theatre is a hub of activity during the Galway Arts Festival. Indeed, the geography here is critical. An Taibhdhearc stands in Galway, while the Abbey Theatre, the National Theatre of Ireland (in English), is almost directly across the country on the east coast in Dublin.

One cannot help but think back to the argument between Miss Ivors and Gabriel Conroy in James Joyce’s “The Dead.” Frank McGuinness adapted Joyce’s story for the stage in 2012. Miss Ivors scolds Gabriel for heading east, to the European continent, on holidays; clearly, he should be heading west to explore his own country. The two have a heated exchange:

Who is G. C.? answered Miss Ivors, turning her eyes upon him.

Gabriel coloured and was about to knit his brows, as if he did not understand, when she said bluntly:

—O, innocent Amy! I have found out that you write for *The Daily Express*. Now aren’t you ashamed of yourself?

—Why should I be ashamed of myself? asked Gabriel, blinking his eyes and trying to smile.

—Well, I'm ashamed of you, said Miss Ivors frankly. To say you'd write for a rag like that. I didn't think you were a West Briton. ("The Dead" 204)

Joyce himself wrote many reviews for *The Daily Express*, which was considered a Unionist periodical. Miss Ivors calls Gabriel a "West Briton" ("The Dead" 204) to illustrate her point; he identifies himself not by the placement of Ireland, but by that of Great Britain. The West of Ireland has historically contained more Gaeltacht, Irish-speaking, areas than the eastern portion of the country. In a later exchange, Miss Ivors and Gabriel debate the language issue. Miss Ivors asks where he and Gretta usually go on vacation:

—Well, we usually go to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany, said Gabriel awkwardly.

—And why do you go France and Belgium, said Miss Ivors, instead of visiting your own land?

—Well, said Gabriel, it's partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change.

—And haven't you your own language to keep in touch with—Irish? asked Miss Ivors.

—Well, said Gabriel, if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language. ("The Dead" 205)

Gabriel was certainly not alone in his belief here; in fact, the debate over the medium through which Irish literature should be appreciated is one that has plagued Irish literature, since the beginning. The authors of the Irish Literary Revival understood this conflict, yet they, for the most part, catered to the language that was more in demand, English. For a theatre to succeed, there must be an audience; thus, An Taibhdhearc was founded in Galway. The theatre has produced Irish language versions of plays, as well as original plays in Irish.

As I have detailed earlier in this dissertation, experimenting with other drama from other cultures is not new in Irish drama. Brian Arkins' *Irish Appropriation of Greek Tragedy* documents the numerous adaptations of Greek drama by Irish playwrights. However, some playwrights have widened their scopes; for example, W. B. Yeats was drawn to Japanese Noh drama. Yeats was dissatisfied with the naturalistic drama that dominated the early years of the Abbey Theatre. He yearned for what he considered to be a higher form of drama. While he did not adapt any pieces of Noh drama, he did use them as inspiration, in much the same way that he used Celtic mythology. Whatever may be said about the success of this experiment, the critical point is that Yeats experimented. The early years of the Abbey were suffocating in their focus on being completely Irish—plays by Irish dramatists with Irish stagehands and so on. Yeats's decision to look abroad for inspiration may have been viewed by some as a slight to Ireland, yet the opposite was true. It opened a dialogue between two dramas. A narrow Irish drama, as it existed in Yeats's time, was insufficient for expressing his aesthetic. Noh drama provided an outlet for his

ideas, and it served its purpose. In this vein, adaptation can be viewed as an experiment, not the norm. Yeats's pursuit of Noh drama informed Irish drama, and this exchange is certainly a goal of adaptation. The playwright seeks to make outside material relevant to the audience. Yeats's imagined audience was very different from his realized audience, as evidenced by his numerous clashes with the Abbey Theatre audiences after riots.

My idea for this dissertation began, when I started teaching Introduction to Literature, a freshman survey course in short fiction, drama, and poetry. I can remember a veteran faculty member telling me to teach what I know best, so I did. Of course, over the years, I have changed assignments, as I felt more equipped to tackle new works. However, I distinctly remember being at the whiteboard one day, talking about the national theatre movements in Ireland—we were reading W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John Millington Synge from Ireland; Ibsen from Norway; and Chekhov from Russia. In that moment, it struck me how these movements were occurring around the same time and how related they in fact were. My initial inclination was to examine the influence of Chekhov and Ibsen on the early years of the Abbey Theatre. However, Miglena Iliytcheva Ivanova, in her dissertation at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, entitled "Staging Europe, Staging Ireland: Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov in Irish Cultural Politics, 1899-1922," had already beautifully examined that topic. My interest then turned to the recent adaptations that I had seen published and advertised in production. After testing out the ideas in an independent seminar with Dr. James Cahalan, we concluded that I had a viable dissertation topic.

I end this dissertation with more questions than answers, more projects postulated than actually completed. It is both overwhelming and exhilarating. In my mind, all of this means that I am onto something here. The field of dramatic adaptation is thriving in Ireland, so it is certainly an exciting time to study Irish drama. One of the characteristics of Irish studies that first drew me to this field was its interdisciplinary nature. I majored in Biology and English as an undergrad, so I enjoy using different lenses to study fields. Drama itself incorporates many different arts, so the layers implicit in the study of Irish drama are limitless.

On October 2, 2015, Brian Friel passed away at the age of eighty-six. I distinctly remember waking up at 6 a. m. that morning with all the newsfeeds on my phone flashing the headline. My first reaction was to email Jim Cahalan in complete disbelief; my clumsy email was certainly no tribute to Brian Friel. Although I had never met him, I feel like he was a part of my life for the past twenty years. I was always eager to see the title and description of his new play; his profession writing career spanned almost sixty years and various genres. What would he do next? This question kept me engaged with him. I am sure that some more work by Friel will be published posthumously; from what I understand, his work ethic rivaled that of Benjamin Franklin. However, the field of Irish literature, and I do not think that it is a stretch to say world literature, will feel a void here. In his lifetime, Brian Friel did not receive the Nobel Prize for Literature; for me, he was so attractive, because his work was so accessible. Yes, he is the subject of many dissertations, but his work is available to



everyone, either in text or in performance. There is a character in his repertoire for everyone; there is an undeniable humor and love of words that comes through in each play.

I would be remiss if I did not mention Friel's countryman Seamus Heaney, who died in 2013. I was fortunate enough to have met the Poet Laureate a few times, and he actually sat with a group of us and had a pint, while I was studying at Trinity College, Dublin in 1996. Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995, and here he was taking the time to speak to undergraduate students interested in Irish studies. It is important to note here that Heaney was fluent in Irish; Field Day Publications published his own translation of *Buile Shuibhne* (Mad Sweeney) entitled *Sweeney Astray* in 1983. His translation of *Beowulf* (1999) is now considered canonical. Heaney has often been referred to as a modern Yeats, which is a characterization with which I have some difficulty. Without a doubt, Heaney's careful manipulation of the English language is reminiscent of Yeats, but Heaney was able to connect with the everyday person, a skill which I do not believe Yeats even cared to attempt. In this respect, Heaney and Friel are similar. At this point, we do not know what the future will hold, but I imagine that there will be many exciting developments arising from Friel's papers. It is perhaps wishful thinking, but I wonder what role Frank McGuinness will play in this process. The two men worked closely together on many projects, so it is only fitting for McGuinness to be involved in Friel's final endeavors.

As Ireland itself evolves in its role both as a European Union nation and as a global entity, the need for dramatic adaptations such as the ones discussed here will persist. Drama, due to its performative nature, provides a vehicle for the transmission of ideas that other genres are incapable of. In order to move ahead, connections to the past must be strengthened across borders, and the adaptations accomplish this feat. Highlighting commonalities aligns people and, by extension, nations. The plays discussed here cross linguistic borders in order to unite people on a more basic level of humanity, by emphasizing the plight of the individual and the family. Language is a vocalization of experience and, therefore, place. The exact socio-historical circumstances may change, but the challenges experienced by the individual person and the family prove steadfast. The mere existence of the adaptations examined here reminds us a deeper connection between people across cultures and nations; they point to a more globalized notion of experience.

Brian Friel was notorious in his avoidance of critics; he rarely gave interviews or commented publicly on his works. However, Christopher Murray, a leading scholar in the field of Irish drama, edited a collection entitled *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews, 1964-1998*. In the section entitled “The Theatre of Hope and Despair (1967),” well before he attempts his own adaptations, Friel beautifully captures the connections between the original works and these adaptations:

The arts grow and wither and expand and contract erratically and sporadically. Like beachcombers or Irish tinkers they live

precariously, existing from idea to idea, from theory to theory, from experiment to experiment. They do owe something to the immediately previous generation; they owe something to the tradition in which they grow; and they bear some relationship to current economic and political trends. But they are what they are at any given time and in any given place because of the condition and climate of thought that prevail at that time and in that place. (16)

The adaptations by Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness examined here pay homage to the past, while embracing a new future, replete with new experiences and new ideas.

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