YOU CAN LEARN TO DECODE US

TRANSLATIONS

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RESOURCE PACK

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ABBEYTHEATRE.IE #TRANSLATIONS

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INTRODUCTION
WELCOME TO BALLYBEG/BAILE BEAG

Brian Friel was born in Co. Tyrone, Northern Ireland, in 1929, and went to school in the city of Derry-Londonderry. However, it has been said that rural Donegal, where Friel would spend his summer holidays as a young man , is where he truly felt at home. Located just over the border that divides Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland, Donegal became the place where Friel chose to base his stories about Ireland. More specifically, he invented a town in Donegal, and called it 'Ballybeg'.

Throughout his dramatic works, Friel has repeatedly used the fictional town of Ballybeg, or Baile Beag — which literally means 'Small Town'. It is the setting of many of his most famous plays: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), *Aristocrats* (1979), *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), and it is the home town of Frank Hardy, the protagonist of *Faith Healer* (1979). So, when Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea co-founded Field Day Theatre Company in Derry 'as a cultural and intellectual response to the political crisis in Northern Ireland' , it was natural that Friel's writing would return to Ballybeg.

Translations (1980) was Field Day's first production, premiering in the Guildhall, Derry in September of the year the company was founded. The play takes place in 1833: Baile Beag is a townland of Donegal, where Irish is the primary language. During the events of the play, the locals must adapt to the presence of British soldiers, who are making an English-language map of the area. Though the play is performed entirely in English, within the reality of the story, the Irish-speaking characters and English-speaking character cannot understand each other. The audience is, in this way, omniscient: they understand everything that is being said, even if the characters do not. This clever theatrical device is used by Friel to invite the audience to think about and question the nature of language itself: how language works, and how it shapes our identity.

This play is still relevant today, particularly following the centenary of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, which created the border that separates Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The play examines the history of British-Irish relations, and how Irish culture has been affected in its colonisation by the British Empire.

This study pack will help students to closely examine Brian Friel's *Translations*: its story and characters, key themes, the context in which the story is told, and the view of the world this play shows to its audience. It will also look at the way this story is told through the genre of theatre.

This pack also contains interviews with the cast of *Translations*, as produced in 2022 by Lyric Theatre, Belfast and Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

Brian Friel (Photo by Bobbie Hanvey)

[1] Seamus Deane. 'Introduction'. *Brian Friel: Plays 1*. Faber & Faber: London (1996). pp.11-12
[2] 'Field Day—A Brief History'. Field Day Webpage. <https://fieldday.ie/about/>

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

The first act introduces all of the play's characters, setting the stage for the entire play. It begins on a typical evening in Baile Beag's hedge-school — run by Hugh O'Donnell and his son, Manus — with the attending members of the community gradually gathering together for their lessons. Near the end of the act, they are interrupted by the return of Owen O'Donnell — Hugh's youngest son — from Dublin, accompanied by Captain Lancey and Lt. Yolland, Owen's colleagues and members of the British Army.

The act opens with Manus encouraging Sarah — a local women with a speech fluency disorder — to state her name: 'My name is Sarah'. Meanwhile, Jimmy Jack, aka The Child Prodigy — an elderly student of the classics — quotes Homer's Odyssey to Manus, and describes his love for the Greek goddess Athene. They are waiting for Hugh, the school master and Manus' father, who is at a nearby christening (for a local woman, Nellie Ruadh's, newborn baby). During this time Maire, a local woman, arrives for the lessons. She and Manus exchange terse conversation about a missed rendezvous the previous night, before Doalty and Bridget enter the classroom Doalty mimics Hugh's mannerisms and shows off a surveyor's pole. He boasts that he has been moving these to fool the British soldiers who are trying to create a map of the area — a gesture that impresses Manus. They begin their studies, led by Manus, while discussing local matters: the whereabouts of the mysterious Donnelly twins; the sweet, rotting smell coming from a local farmer's potato crop; and the opening of the new national school, at which Hugh is due to be offered a job. Maire is disappointed that Manus did not go in for the same job, as we learn during a disagreement between the two of them.

Hugh eventually arrives from the christening, and relieves Manus of his duties to begin the lesson in earnest. He has two announcements to make: first, that he had met with Captain Lancey of the Royal Engineers, and had invited him to visit them that evening; second, that he has been offered the position of headmaster in the new national school, and that he has been assured that he will be permitted to run it in the same way he does the hedge-school; that is to say, he will be permitted to teach his students in Irish. During these announcements, Maire interrupts and tells Hugh that he ought to be teaching them English, revealing her plans to emigrate to North America.

As Hugh is about to bring his lesson to an end, Owen — his youngest son — arrives. Owen is clearly a magnetic personality, and his entrance creates much excitement. Owen has become wealthy since leaving Baile Beag, and although his clothes are more fashionable and finer than those of the local community, he does his best to fit back in with the classroom banter by imitating his father's grand announcements. Owen introduces the group to Captain Lancey and Lt. George Yolland, revealing that he is in their employ while they carry out their plans. Lancey speaks to the group, aided by Owen, who translates. Yolland describes the Royal Engineers' purpose in the area: to create a map of Ireland to aid in military activity and taxation, and to standardise the place names in every area so that they can be understood in English. Owen simplifies what Lancey is saying, underplaying the military involvement and tax implications. He also translates for Yolland, who bashfully expresses his fondness for the local countryside and its people. As the locals begin mingling with the soldiers, Manus pulls Owen aside to reprimand him for not giving an accurate translation of what Yolland was saying. He also asks why Owen didn't correct them when the two soldiers kept calling him 'Rolland'. Owen dismisses Manus' complaints as unimportant, and the scene ends with Owen introducing Maire to Yolland.

Ruby Campbell (Bridget), Andy Doherty (Doalty), Marty Rea (Manus) and Ronan Leahy (Jimmy Jack)

SYNOPSIS

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

The second act sees Yolland become more and more at ease with and fond of his new surroundings. This scene begins with Yolland and Owen (but mostly Owen) working to create new standardised place names for the surrounding area, writing them down in the Name-Book. Each time Owen brings up another Irish place name, Yolland appears to be enchanted by the beauty of the words, and asks that they leave it in its original form. Owen is far more focused on the task, and works hard to match each Irish place name to an appropriate English equivalent; Yolland is less focused, and drinks poitín throughout the scene. Yolland admits that they are running out of time: he tells Owen that Lancey had reprimanded him for not having yet completed the task, but that he stood up for himself, demonstrating his new found confidence. Manus comes through: he refuses to speak to Yolland in English — despite Owen's protests — and tells them to put away the bottle of poitín they have been drinking. When he leaves, Owen explains to Yolland that his limp is a result of an accident when he was a baby: Hugh drunkenly fell across his cradle, and this is why Manus feels he is responsible for managing their father's drinking. Later, Manus is brought away by Doalty, who tells him that a pair of strangers have asked for him.

Yolland asks about the local community — particularly Maire Chatach — and admits he would love to settle in Baile Beag. He explains the accidental way in which he came to be a soldier in the Royal Engineers, but that he is grateful that it led him to this place. He worries that, if he did stay, he'd always be an outsider. Hugh eventually emerges from his chamber, reciting poetry and announcing that he is off to conduct some business in relation to his new position in the National School. As Manus feared, he helps himself to their poitin, and discusses their project of renaming the local areas. Before leaving, he consoles Yolland on his feeling of exclusion due to the linguistic barrier; he adds, however, that language is not always fixed, and cannot fully or permanently reflect the place in which it is spoken.

As Yolland and Owen debate the ethics of renaming these places, Owen finally objects to the name "Roland". As they both laugh at the misunderstanding, Manus arrives in with the news that he has been offered a job of running a hedge school on Inis Meadhon. Amid the laughter and congratulations, Maire arrives. Despite Manus' news, she becomes caught up in conversation with Yolland — Owen acts as translator — and tells him that there is to be a dance the following night. The scene ends on this feeling of excitement and celebration, with music playing as the lights cut to black.

Aidan Moriarty (Yolland) and company

Aidan Moriarty (Yolland) and Zara Devlin (Maire)

SYNOPSIS

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

This scene opens with Maire and Yolland, who have just fled the dance, out of breath and holding hands. Throughout the scene, Maire and Yolland attempt different ways of communicating with each other without the help of a translator. Yolland attempts to mime to her, but becomes embarrassed. Maire tries speaking to Yolland in Latin, but it's a language he does not understand, and he assumes she is speaking Irish, and she gives up. She then speaks the few English words she knows — 'Water', 'Earth' — and Yolland warmly encourages her. She says the only full sentence that her Aunt Mary taught her — 'In Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoll' — even though she does not know its meaning: Yolland becomes excited, thinking she means this, and tells her his mother is from a town near Norfolk. In response, Yolland speaks the Irish words he knows: the names of all the local places around Baile Beag.

Eventually, they hold hands and speak to each other in their own languages. They tell each other how they feel about one another, almost understanding each other. However, when Yolland tells Maire he wishes to stay with her in Baile Beag, and she tells him she wishes for him to take her away from there, it is lost in translation. They kiss, and are spotted by the arriving Sarah, who rushes off to tell Manus as the scene ends.

ACT THREE

In this scene, the fine weather has been replaced by rain. It is the evening after the night of the dance, and Manus, Owen and Sarah are back at the hedge school. Yolland is missing; Manus rushes about, packing his things. He reveals to Owen that, when he heard Yolland and Maire left the dance together, he followed with them, meaning to attack Yolland. In the end, he only shouted at them — however, Manus has decided to leave Baile Beag. He asks Owen to tell the men from Inis Meadhon he still wants the job at their hedge school, and advises him on looking after their father. Owen begs Manus to stay: he fears that this will arouse the suspicion of Lancey, who is looking for Yolland. However, Manus is resolved in his decision. Before leaving, he makes Sarah — who is distraught, and feels responsible for informing on Maire and Yolland — speak her name to him. As he leaves, Sarah apologises ('I'm so sorry, Manus…'), and these are the last words she speaks in the play.

ACT THREE

Doalty and Bridget soon arrive, excitedly telling Owen and Sarah that fifty more soldiers have arrived in search of Yolland. They describe how the soldiers have torn through fences, haystacks and turf-stacks, disturbing the farmland and scattering animals — and how Hugh, Jimmy Jack and local farmers confronted them angrily for their vandalism. They learn Manus has fled, and when Owen asks them who was really responsible for Yolland's disappearance, they deny knowing anything about it. However, Bridget hints that the Donnelly twins may have been involved. Maire then arrives, putting on a brave face but clearly upset. She asks Owen if he's heard anything about Yolland, and then begins to describe the last hours they spent together: with Yolland, on the beach, drawing a map on the sand of where he is from in England and teaching Maire the names of those places. Before she leaves, she reveals that Nellie Ruadh's baby — whose christening Hugh attended during Act One — has died.

Captain Lancey then arrives at the school. He instructs Owen to translate for him, and tells those present (Owen, Sarah, Doalty and Bridget) that it is their responsibility to pass his message on to the wider community: that if Yolland is not found within 24 hours, he will have his men begin killing the livestock in Baile Beag; if Yolland is not found in 48 hours, he will begin evicting and levelling the houses in the surrounding area. He begins taking the names and addresses of the classmates, but Sarah cannot speak. Then, when Doalty tells Lancey that his men's tents are on fire, Lancey leaves. Bridget hurries away, announcing her plans to hide the livestock. Doalty tells Owen that he plans to stand up to the soldiers, and that the Donnelly twins would help them. He asks Owen to come find him when he is ready, and leaves.

Hugh and Jimmy finally arrive, very drunk: they have been at the wake for Nellie Ruadh's baby. Hugh reveals that he has been passed over for the primary school job for a school-master from Cork. Jimmy — who has been trying to get a word in — has important news for Hugh: he has become engaged to the goddess Athene, and he wants Hugh to be his best man. He suddenly breaks away from this story, revealing how lonely he is, and that all he wants is 'companionship, company, someone to talk to'. He collapses, falling asleep. Owen, who has been upstairs, finds his father reading the Name-Book. He apologises for the book, and for his work with the Engineers. However, Hugh cuts him off, saying that they need to learn the new place names and make their peace with these changes. He warns Owen that if they don't adapt to the changing world, they will end up stuck in the past. like Jimmy. Owen is more concerned with the threats Lancey has made: he leaves, going to find Doalty.

After he is gone, Hugh begins to reminisce about the 1798 Rebellion: when he and Jimmy, as young men, marched 23 miles towards a battle, only to turn back to Baile Beag out of homesickness. Maire arrives back at the school, and Hugh immediately offers to teach her English. Maire accepts eagerly, and asks him about a word Yolland had used the previous night: 'always'. Hugh translates, but tells her it is 'a silly word'. Maire starts reading the Name-Book, saying that Yolland will return to her as he was happiest at Baile Beag. Jimmy sits beside her, and asks her if she knows the greek word exogamein: 'to marry outside the tribe'. He tells her this can cause anger; however, he is not referring to her and Yolland, but rather to himself and Athene. The play ends with Hugh trying to quote a passage from Ovid's *Aeneid*, which describes the ancient city of Carthage, before it was destroyed by the Roman Empire.

Brian Doherty (Hugh) and Ronan Leahy (Jimmy Jack)

THE CHARACTERS

MANUS

'THE LAME SCHOLAR'

Manus is the older of the schoolmaster's sons, in his late-twenties or early thirties. He acts as an assistant to his father, Hugh, at the hedge school, sometimes taking over lessons and often ensuing that his father has bread and tea. He is a loyal son, sacrificing his independence in order to assist and support his father. His brother, Owen, explains that this loyalty is largely a result of an accident that occurred when Manus was a baby: 'Father fell across his cradle. That's why Manus feels so responsible for him' (Act 2, Scene 1). The accident has left Manus with a permanent limp, which can be seen when he walks across the stage. Rather than resenting Hugh for this, Manus takes it upon himself to ensure that his father's drinking habit is monitored, that he is provided with bread and tea, and that he is kept safe when he has had too much to drink (an example of this is seen in Act 3, when Manus worries about the stairs to Hugh's room being dangerous without a proper bannister).

Manus even puts his father's professional aspirations before his own, refusing to go in for the schoolmaster job in the new national school because Hugh has applied. This becomes a source of conflict between Manus and Maire Chatach: Manus has proposed marriage to Maire, but his inability to provide financially for them — and reluctance to emerge from his father's shadow — have acted as a barrier to this match. Manus cares deeply for Maire, and is torn between his desire to be with her and his feelings of duty towards Hugh. It appears, briefly, that Manus' hopes for success and happiness are about to come true, when he is offered a position of schoolmaster at a hedge school in Inis Meadhon in Act 2, Scene 1. He is eager to tell Maire's mother about this job, perhaps believing that she will now bless his proposal of marriage to Maire.

Manus also has a deep connection with Sarah, and is committed in helping her to overcome her speech defect. It is possible that this connection comes from a sense of empathy: both he and Sarah live with what might be called "disabilities" or "defects". However, he often demonstrates insensitivity towards Sarah, ignoring her when Maire is around.

Manus is deeply suspicious of the Royal Engineers upon their arrival in Baile Beag, and demonstrates an open disliking of Yolland. After Yolland and Maire are seen together on the night of the dance, Manus admits to having followed them carrying a rock and intending to attack Yolland — although he does not go through with this. Maybe Manus cannot bear to see Maire with someone else, or maybe he fears being suspected for Yolland's disappearance. Whatever the reason, Manus decides flee, leaving behind him his family and the prospects of success and happiness that he believed were so close before Yolland's disappearance.

Marty Rea (Manus)

THE CHARACTERS

SARAH

'MY NAME IS SARAH'

Sarah is a student of Hugh's hedge school in Baile Beag, who struggles to speak. As Friel describes it in his stage directions, 'she is considered locally to be dumb and she has accepted this'. The fact is that Sarah can speak, but her reluctance to makes it very difficult to find her voice. Manus is the only person in the community who seems to understand this, and takes it upon himself to give her the confidence to speak through lessons. Because of this reluctance to speak, Sarah is a slightly mysterious character. The audience does not know if her speech defect has a specific cause; if something happened to her that made her so reluctant to talk. It is suggested that perhaps Sarah is a new member of the community: she is the only person who Owen doesn't recognise after returning to Baile Beag. Indeed, we don't really know what age she is: as Friel says, Sarah 'has a waiflike appearance and could be any age from seventeen to thirty-five'.

Despite these factors, Sarah is a popular member of the hedge-school classroom. She excels at maths, and joins in conversations with the other characters — albeit, mostly through hand and physical gestures. In Act One, we see how pleased she is at the progress she is making in her speech lessons, and when she introduces herself to Owen, he does not notice any impairment. She cannot wait to show this off to Manus:

(SARAH, very elated at her success, is beside MANUS)
SARAH: I said it, Manus!

Indeed, she has a strong bond with Manus, and is excited at the opportunity to show off her improvement to him, or to engage with him, in general. Of all the people at the hedge school, it is Manus whom she connects with the most.

Her loyalty to Manus is, unfortunately, a reason why he must flee Baile Beag at the end of the play. When Sarah sees Maire and Yolland together in Act Two, Scene Two, he first instinct is to run and tell Manus. When Manus goes after Yolland and Maire, there is a suggestion that he has become a suspect in Yolland's disappearance. Indeed, Lancey is looking for Manus in Act Three, saying to Owen: 'I want to talk to your brother — is he here?'. Perhaps Manus fears he will be blamed for Yolland's disappearance, or perhap he just cannot bear to see Maire with someone else: whatever the reason, he flees. Sarah is devastated by this: she has lost her friend, and feels partly responsible for the situation. After Manus leaves, she never speaks again. When Captain Lancey interrogates her, asking her her name and where she is from, she is unable to reply — even though she was able to say this in Act One. Owen tries to reassure her that she'll find her voice again, but Sarah knows that she will not:

OWEN: Don't worry. It will come back to you again.
(SARAH shakes her head.)

While it is tragic that Sarah loses the progress she had made in her speech lessons, the audience can see that she has the ability to communicate without verbal language. She has been able to maintain relationships without speech, and will continue to do so - or so we hope.

Suzie Seweify (Sarah)

Interview with Suzie Seweify

Could you briefly describe your character?

Well, Friel describes Sarah as having 'a speech defect'. She chooses not to speak because she doesn't believe she can — but Manus believes she can. At the very start of the play, he gets the words out of her and this instills an immense hope in her. I think 'hope' is a really important word for Sarah: at the end of the play, when she suffers such a loss, it's devastating because she had this hope.

I think, throughout the whole play she has a lot of built-up frustration, and she lets that out in a very physical was because that's the way she knows how to express herself. She spends most of her time outdoors, she's very in tune with nature and she has very heightened senses. She's not animalistic, but we discussed her being feral. She's very independent, and highly intelligent — Friel shows this in many different ways within the script.

She is unapologetically herself. She is impulsive: she doesn't really think too much, she just acts on a feeling. It's like when you don't care what anybody else thinks, you'll just say what you feel! I love that about her. Sometimes people might think that, just because she doesn't speak, Sarah is this quiet, meek, weak, small character. We worked a lot in the rehearsal room really building that, her past, her history and her heritage… where that came from and why she doesn't want to speak. And when she does speak, it means so much and it scares her. Because, until now, she has been in control of the fact that she doesn't speak.

Is there an added significance to representing a character like Sarah within a live theatrical performance — as opposed to, for example, in a novel?

Through the live performance, you get a real sense of her reaction to things. She experiences a lot of rejection, specifically from Manus, and you see that on stage: you see how this affects her, and how long the impact of this rejection lasts for her. For example, the moment when she gives him the flowers. And, at the end, when she goes to speak to him and he rejects her — he doesn't want to speak to her anymore — these are huge moment for her. I think there's such power in seeing this on the stage; it helps the audience to understand the loss and the pain she that she goes through. Of course, you can get a sense of this from reading the script… but when you see it on the stage, it is different.

You can also see that, although she doesn't speak a lot, she's very involved in what goes on in the classroom. In every scene that she's in, she's really involved. You can see how she communicates in different ways: with her own little signs that she and Manus only understand, or through making noises, or through her facial expressions in response to things that happen. These are things that you can't always see on a page, but they are there. And, because she is so intelligent, she definitely picks up on a lot of things that maybe other characters haven't.

Sarah often cuts an isolated figure in the play. Could you talk a little about Sarah's difficulty in forming connections?

Well, I think that because she is so independent, she doesn't necessarily need anyone else. She obviously does have this relationship with Manus, which is really important to her and affects her differently to any other relationships she has had. So, while she does struggle to form connections she also doesn't need to because she has been so independent for so long in her life.

However, I do think that she has a relationship with everyone in the hedge school: she is playful and she enjoys what happens in the school, she is involved and the others often ask her what she thinks sometimes. But, a lot of the time, she is ignored and that really frustrates her. Maybe they think that, because she doesn't speak, she doesn't understand: but it's not like that.

At the end of the play, she loses Manus, and this huge loss is a result of her speaking. This is something that she had so much hope about at the start of the play, even though it was so reluctant to speak. The result of her speaking — and telling Manus about Maire and Yolland — is that she loses Manus forever. That was the only time she opened up and let someone into her space; other than that, she's quite independent and makes her own decisions. But her voice is the reason that she lost the most important thing in her life. So, when Owen says 'Don't worry. It will come back to you again', her response is basically "No, I'm sure in my head that I'm never going to speak again".

THE CHARACTERS

MAIRE

'I HOPE TO GOD THERE'S NO HAY TO BE SAVED IN BROOKLYN'

Another student at the hedge school, Maire is a hard-working and ambitious woman in her twenties. She works on her family's farm, feeding their cows and delivering milk to members of the community. However, she is keen to get away from Baile Beag, and is actively trying to emigrate to America — despite the protests of Manus, who hopes she will marry him and stay in Ireland.

She is good at languages, but frustrated that all they are being taught in the hedge school is Latin and Greek — telling Hugh in Act One, 'I want English'. She is very keen to learn English as she sees it as a necessary step towards becoming part of the modern world. Indeed, she appears to be slightly fed up with the life she has in Baile Beag, working tirelessly on the land in order to help provide for her large family (she mentions in Act One that she has ten younger siblings). This urge to move past life in Baile Beag is demonstrated in her plans to leave for America, and in her connection with Lt. George Yolland. She is drawn to the fact that Yolland is an adventurous character: he has seen the world (or at least more of the world than Maire). As she says to them in their romantic encounter in Act Two, Scene Two: 'Take me away with you, George'. Another thing about Yolland that Maire admires is that he is a gentleman — as she says, he has 'Soft hands; a gentleman's hands'. Yolland represents a social class that is modern and independent: he comes from a wealthy background, and so he has had the opportunity to travel and he has not had to labour in the same way that Maire has on her family's farm. Maire yearns for the same opportunities and independence; she sees the difference between herself and Yolland in her own hands: 'My hands are that rough; They're still blistered from the hay. I'm ashamed of them'.

In Act Three, after Yolland has gone missing, Maire is distraught. She tells Owen and the others about their time together, and how she had learned all the place names around his home in England. It is clear to the audience that they had fallen in love during their short time together. When Hugh, in the final moments of the play, agrees to teach her English, we feel some hope for Maire. Perhaps she will learn English, move abroad and experience the modern world outside of Baile Beag. However, there is also the chance that she will never leave, and that she will wait for Yolland to return to Baile Beag: 'The the comes back, this is where he'll come to'. This is a tragic moment, as it is suspected that Yolland will never return.

Zara Devlin (Maire)

THE CHARACTERS

LT. GEORGE YOLLAND

'YOUR IRISH AIR HAS MADE ME BOLD'

Lt. George Yolland is a member of the Royal Engineers of the British Army, and has travelled to Baile Beag to assist Captain Lancey in creating a map of the area, with standardised place names that can be understood in the English language. Yolland is described as 'A soldier by accident': indeed, as he tells Owen in Act 2 Scene One, he was supposed to be working in Bombay but he missed the boat, and then joined the army. He is nervous about coming to Baile Beag without being to understand the Irish language, but falls in love with the natural surroundings almost immediately and tries to embrace the local culture.

Yolland comes from a wealthy background, and he describes how industrious his father is, building roads across the British Empire. He feels that he doesn't live up to his father, who believes in the modern ideals of progress and development. When he arrives in Baile Beag, he feels more at ease: it is a place that has more simple and old-fashioned values. As the play goes on, Yolland becomes less certain about the work he is carrying out on behalf of the Royal Engineers: he says that, by changing the Irish place names into English, 'Something is being eroded'.

Yolland's love for the Baile Beag landscape and way of life extends to its people. He is kind and well-meaning to every local that he encounters. He clearly has a strong friendship with Owen, who acts as his guide during his time there, and shows much admiration for Hugh. Even with Doalty, who does not speak English, he makes a great effort to thank him for clearing the long grass near his tent. However, the strongest relationship of all is the romance between himself and Maire Chatach. Their interactions are very brief initially, but it is clear from his conversations with Owen that Yolland is captivated by her. Before Act Two, Scene Two, they are forced to interact via Owen's translations, not able to understand one another. However, in the scene when they are finally alone, they break through the language barrier and commit to being together. Tragically, Yolland goes missing after this scene — possibly kidnapped or killed by the Donnelly twins — leaving the community in turmoil.

Aidan Moriarty (Yolland)

Interview with **Aidan Moriarty**

Could you briefly describe your character?

He's a Cartographer in Royal Engineers of the British Army, so his job is to make sure that the place names that have been Anglicised across the country are correct. However, one of the things I really love about George is that he doesn't define himself by his work. He's a person who has a curiosity about life, and a passion for all things to do with history and language and culture. He's a very open person, he's very adventurous and he allows himself to be taken over by whatever landscape he finds himself in: in this case, it's Ballybeg. I think he has a love of language and a love of poetry: he's described in the play as a romantic… I don't know if he'd think of himself as that, I just think he has a very open view of the world. He's described as a 'soldier by accident' and as he says himself, 'I never think of myself as Lieutenant', so he doesn't really think of himself as a soldier.

Manus tells Yolland, 'I understand the Lanceys but people like you puzzle me'. What do you think he means by that?

I think it's how disarming George is. Maybe Lancey, in Manus' mind, fits the stereotype of what a British soldier is, whereas George isn't like that. George doesn't really fit into that box. I'm sure there have been soldiers in the past who had a curiosity about the Irish language and culture, and maybe the people of Ballybeg just hadn't come across them before.

Perhaps a lot of soldiers came to Dublin, and thought of it as an extension of England. However, when George goes outside 'the Pale', he sees this whole other world: a place that is separate. He realises that, actually, this place has nothing to do with England. I think his ability to make that distinction makes him different from Lancey.

I think this puzzles Manus, it's aggravating, because he can't find a reason to dislike him — apart from the fact that he's a colonist. It's easy to hate a Lancey, it's not easy to hate George.

Yolland and Maire form an intimate relationship over the course of the play, especially in Act Two, Scene Two. Could you describe this scene, and what is significant about it for your character?

Aside from the political elements, I think the play is about communicating in your most honest, pure and truthful way, and having another person understand you without hesitation. What is so beautiful about that scene is that you have two people who don't speak the same language, who would give anything to try and understand each other. These days, so often, even if we are living in the same country and speak the same language, we miscommunicate all the time. We never fully get what the other person is trying to say.

George is told in the previous scene that he can't live in Baile Beag, that he 'wouldn't survive a mild winter'. But he abandons all of that doubt. And, at the end of the scene between him and Maire, there's a lovely moment where — for a second — they actually understand each other. I think it shows that understanding can go beyond language. When George understands that, he throws caution to the wind and makes a commitment to live there.

There's also a great tragedy to that though, because Maire is saying to him 'take me away with you', so fundamentally they don't get each other in that moment. But, in a way, they are also just committing to each other: so, whatever that means for them is worthwhile. Unfortunately, you never find out, because George goes missing.

THE CHARACTERS

OWEN

‘IT’S ONLY A NAME’

Owen O’Donnell is the youngest son of Hugh, the schoolmaster, who lives in Dublin as a successful business owner. He returns to Baile Beag as an employee of the Royal Engineers, acting as an interpreter and guide to Captain Lancey and Lt. Yolland. Owen is clearly very clever — raised by the learned teacher, his father — and is also hard working and ambitious. Unlike his brother, Manus, he has been able to get away from Baile Beag to pursue financial success, and to become part of modern society in the British Empire (Dublin, at that time, is the second city of the British Empire).

In his role working for Lancey, Owen acts as a middle man between the Royal Engineers and the community he comes from: as a result, he often finds himself having to awkwardly explain to customs and language of one group to the other group. He is proud of his success, and his acceptance into the community of the Royal Engineers; however, he also loves where he comes from, and is determined to ensure that the locals are respected. This causes some tension, especially when he is confronted by Manus, who fears that the soldiers might cause Baile Beag harm. Manus also points out that Yolland and Lancey have been calling Owen by the name ‘Roland’, and yet Owen does not correct them. It is clear that Owen is trying his best to keep everyone happy, and to reduce feelings of tension between the locals and the soldiers. And, while Owen does love his family, he sometimes seems embarrassed by Hugh, especially when his father speaks very philosophically and intellectually: ‘He’s bloody pompous’, Owen tells Yolland in Act Two, Scene One, ‘And he drinks too much’.

In Act Three, with Yolland missing, Manus fleeing and Lancey issuing threats to the people of Baile Beag, Owen is forced to make a choice: does he continue to broker peace between the soldiers and the locals, or does he join a resistance against the aggressive practices of the British Army. Having argued with Yolland in Act Two, Scene One, saying that making the map was a harmless exercise, he appears to see the problems in renaming their homeland into English. After Lancey’s threats, Doalty leaves the hedge school, and tells Owen to come to him when he has given up his job with the Royal Engineers. At the end of Act Three, Owen leaves to find Doalty, and presumably join him — along with the Donnelly twins — in their rebellion against the British soldiers.

Leonard Buckley (Owen)

Interview with **Leonard Buckley**

Could you briefly describe your character?

Owen is quite restless and ambitious, and because he was brought up in the hedge school, he has a natural capacity for education. He speaks English, which sets him apart from the rest of the community, like Manus. Unlike Manus, however, he driven by this ambition that leads him away from Baile Beag.

When Manus confronts Owen over the soldiers calling him 'Roland', Owen responds: 'what the hell. It's only a name.' Why does Owen say this?

I think Owen really loves where he comes from, so it takes a great effort for him to justify his work for the soldiers. By that same virtue, with his own name being changed, while it's a denial of his identity, it's also a mark of acceptance into British society. I think he has an instinctive fear of the English, but he also wants to be their equal. So, when they refer to him by what they think is his first name, he takes that as a sign of familiarity and respect. This is shown when Lancey comes in in Act Three about to make his threats, and he doesn't call Owen by his first name; he calls him 'O'Donnell'.

I think, in Owen, there's a fear of Lancey, but also an embarrassment over the fact that he speaks to the locals in a dehumanising way, with the slow speech. He initially gives him the benefit of the doubt. But then, in Act Three, the way Lancey speaks to them shows just how little he values the lives of the people in Baile Beag — it's a tipping point, and he can't ignore the behaviour any longer.

Owen tells Yolland that he 'got out [of Baile Beag] in time'. How would you describe Owen's relationship with his estranged family and community?

Ultimately, Owen does love where he comes from. I think the ambition he had to leave was important, but also the relationship he has with Manus: there is animosity and tension between them, and there's an age gap there. It is worth pointing out that their mother is not in the picture. Although it's not in the text, it is possible, given Hugh's reference to her, that she died giving birth to Owen. Whatever the case, she is definitely not present in Owen's life.

The biggest factor to Owen leaving is the relationship Manus has with Hugh as a caregiver — to try and stop him from drinking. Whereas Owen is free to leave, Manus is anchored by his physical disability. Manus feels that he cannot leave Hugh; Owen on the other hand, gives himself permission to leave, because he knows Manus will always be there.

In Act Three, when Manus say he has to go, it causes a rupture: I think it reveals how much love is actually underneath all of the tension between them. You see how much Owen loves his brother when he is trying to stop him from leaving. Apart from his delight when Manus is offered a job, you don't really see that love up until that point.

THE CHARACTERS

HUGH

‘I HAVE LIVED TOO LONG LIKE A JOURNEYMAN TAILOR’

Hugh O’Donnell is the schoolmaster of the Baile Beag hedge school, and father of Manus and Owen. He is a very intelligent man who speaks several languages fluently and has a deep knowledge of history and literature. With the help of his eldest son, Manus, he teaches the students at the hedge school maths, languages (Greek and Latin), and how to read and write. While Hugh is admired for his knowledge, he is also occasionally mocked for his pompous behaviour, and for his drunkenness. Indeed, his alcohol addiction is a concern for his sons — he is rarely seen entirely sober. In addition, he is bad with his money, often losing track of which students owe him money for tuition. While Hugh is intellectual and philosophical, showing an understanding of the world in general, he doesn’t pay too much attention to the specific details of day-to-day life. His thoughtlessness might be a result of his drinking; or it might be that he drinks intentionally to forget the unpleasant aspects of his day-to-day life.

Hugh’s entrance in Act One shows the audience the way in which he runs the hedge school. He returns from celebrating a local baptism at the pub, and belatedly begins teaching his class for the evening. Manus, as usual, has taken the class in his absence. After testing their language and maths skills, Hugh makes one of his usual announcements that has three parts (although, as usual, he always forgets the third part of the announcement). The two announcements are: that Captain Lancey has asked to meet with the students at the hedge school; and that he (Hugh) has been asked to take the job as school master at the new national school. Hugh has continued to drink throughout these announcements: indeed, he takes a big drink when Maire interrupts to ask why they are not learning English, and he does not answer the question. He is about to leave them — again, for Manus to take the class — when Owen arrives.

Owen’s arrival also shows the audience how Hugh — who is so good at speaking publicly — can sometimes struggle to react to things that happen in the present moment. When Owen goes to embrace his, Hugh is clearly overwhelmed and cannot find the words to welcome his son:

(HUGH’s eyes are moist — partly joy, partly the drink.)
HUGH: I — I’m — I’m — pay no attention to —

Marty Rea (Manus), Brian Doherty (Hugh) and Zara Devlin (Maire)

Furthermore, this scene shows us that, despite his obvious intelligence, Hugh is ignorant (perhaps intentionally) of the potential trouble to come from the solders' presence in Baile Beag. Out of all the Baile Beag residents, only Manus and Hugh can understand exactly what Captain Lancey is saying (as opposed to the version given by Owen). Manus confronts Owen — 'it's a bloody military operation' — but Hugh sits happily with his drink, describing Lancey's plans as a 'worthy enterprise'. It may be the drink, or it may be that he is just happy to see Owen, but Hugh appears far less concerned than Manus with the issues that may come from the soldiers' renaming and mapping of Ireland.

As the play goes on, Hugh does offer his thoughts on the consequences of renaming the places around Baile Beag from their original Irish. While Owen and Yolland work on the name book, he tells them that Irish is a language which makes the world they live in seem better than it actually is; that it is a language full of 'fantasy and hope and self-deception', and this is important for the Irish people to cope with their lives, which can often be hard. It seems to the audience that Hugh is very much describing his own experience: his drinking numbs him from painful realties, and through poetry he is able to make things sound more positive or beautiful. He seems that he is worried that he will be left behind if he does not adapt to the changes that are coming, with the renaming of their homeland and the introduction of national schools where English is compulsory.

Hugh's determination to try and change with the times is clearly shown by the end of the play. Although he reveals that he was was passed over for the job at the new national school, he finally agrees to teach Maire how to speak English. It is also notable that he is far less concerned than Owen about the threats issued by Lancey. Although Doalty and Bridget report that he had stood up to the soldiers as they ransacked the village looking for Lancey, we get no sense of this resistance. Rather, he suggests to Owen that they should learn the new place names: 'We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must learn to make them our new home'. In this final Act, Hugh tells the story of how he and Jimmy went to fight in the 1798 Rebellion, but turned back home before they reached the battle. This story shows, again, how Hugh is drawn to romantic ideas — in this case, a brave fight for freedom — but is unable to follow through when confronted with hard realities. Perhaps, it also shows that Hugh does not believe that the Irish way of life that he was raised in can survive: that colonisation of their country and language by the British is inevitable. As he tells Maire, when she asks him what 'always' means: 'It's a silly word, girl'.

Brian Doherty (Hugh), Zara Devlin (Maire) and Ronan Leahy (Jimmy Jack)

THE CHARACTERS

JIMMY JACK

'I'M MEETING ZEUS TOMORROW'

Jimmy Jack Cassie, is another student at the hedge school. Ironically, his nickname is 'The Infant Prodigy', even though he is about the same age as Hugh (in his sixties). He has an amazing knowledge of classical texts, and is usually found reading and translating books like Homer's *Odyssey*. Jimmy is a bachelor who lives alone: his main source of company are his classmates and the mythical figures he reads about in his books. Indeed, as the play opens, he is reading passages from the *Odyssey* out to Manus, and telling him that he'd marry Athene if he had the choice of Zeus' three daughters. Jimmy speaks about these characters as if they are as real to him as the local people in Baile Beag. He often appears to be lost in the world of his books. Whenever the class are discussing current affairs — for example, the new national school system, or Daniel O'Connell's political campaign — Jimmy can never keep up: 'What's that? — what's that?'. He is much happier referencing one of his old books than paying attention to anything contemporary — even giving Doalty advice on farming from his copy of Virgil. Occasionally, however, Jimmy seems to know a lot more than he lets on. For example, when he tells Maire about the word 'exogamein', which means 'to marry outside the tribe'. This directly relates to Maire's romance with Yolland. Even though Jimmy claims to be talking about his own marriage to Athene, it seems too relevant to be a coincidence.

Jimmy plays to up his status as a bachelor, joking about his romance with Athene and telling Maire that the only English word he knows is 'bosom'. However, he uses these stories and jokes to deflect attention from the fact that he is very lonely. In Act Three, when drunk, he tells Hugh that he is now engaged to Athene, before admitting the purpose of this play-acting:

'You know what I'm looking for Hugh, don't you? I mean to say — you know — I — I — I joke like the rest of them — you know? — [. . .] But what I'm really looking for, Hugh — what I really want — companionship, Hugh — at my time of life, companionship, company, someone to talk to.'

It is a heartbreaking moment, as Jimmy bares his soul to his old friend. Later, Hugh uses Jimmy as a cautionary tale, telling Owen that if he holds on too much to the past, he will become stuck there. Jimmy is a tragic figure, someone whose love for ancient civilisations has made it impossible for him to live in the present.

Interview with Ronan Leahy

Could you briefly describe your character?

Jimmy Jack is a smelly old bachelor who lives alone and never ever washes. His skin is caked in mud and his silver hair and bushy beard are crusty and matted. He walks around barefoot in a long, torn, navy coat and trousers that stop at the knee. He is fluent in Latin and Greek and believes that the world of the gods is real and exists. He is obsessed with the Goddess, Athene. Jimmy's sense of reality can become confused at times.

Jimmy seems to be universally beloved among his peers. Why do you think this is?

I think this is because Jimmy Jack is good company and he genuinely cares for everyone. He likes to have the craic with the other students and is always around to offer advice or help them with their Latin and Greek. He is a great listener.

Jimmy Jack's speech in the Act Three is one of the more moving moments in the entire play. What does Jimmy Jack reveal in this moment?

Jimmy gets extremely drunk at the wake of Nellie Ruadh's baby. On the way home with his best friend, Hugh, he announces that he is going to get married to Athene, at Christmas. Jimmy confesses to Hugh that even though he jokes around like the others, in reality, he is profoundly lonely and what he really wants is companionship, a person he can talk to. I think in this moment of drunken sincerity, Jimmy reveals his need for human contact and also his feelings of isolation from his friend and from the community. The world around Jimmy is rapidly changing and his mental health is suffering because of it. In order to cope, Jimmy makes a decision to retreat into his imagination with Athene, because he feels safe there with her.

Ronan Leahy (Jimmy Jack)

THE CHARACTERS

DOALTY

'YOU'RE MISSING THE CRACK, BOYS!'

Doalty is another student at the hedge school, and a farmer in his twenties. He is described as 'open-minded, open-hearted and slightly thick' by Friel. Indeed, it seem that the main reason he attends the hedge school is not to learn, but to enjoy the company of his friends and neighbours: to make them laugh, and to laugh along with them. Doalty is a mischievous, fun-loving person who gets on especially well with Bridget. We are introduced to him when he enters the classroom in Act One, imitating Hugh — something he does very often — and brandishing a surveyor's pole. He laughs with the others at how he kept moving these, disrupting the work of the Royal Engineers; just a bit of fun for him, but something Manus calls a rebellious 'gesture'. Doalty is an energetic character, and is always trying to keep the mood positive in the classroom. We see this when there is discussion of a possible potato blight outbreak in Baile Beag, and Doalty deflects by making a joke about his poor grasp of maths: 'we're all right. Seven threes are twenty-one; seven fours are twenty-eight; seven fives are forth-nine'.

While Doalty is a fun and humorous presence throughout the play, a darker edge begins to develop in his attitude towards the soldiers. It is suggested that he has a close relationship to the mysterious Donnelly twins, even though he constantly denies knowing their whereabouts. Doalty is a well-informed, sociable presence in the community; generally, he knows a lot more about what is going on than he is willing to admit. In Act Three, when Lancey threatens the livelihood of the people in Baile Beag, Doalty responds by telling Lancey that the Royal Engineers' camp has been set on fire. As the play ends, Doalty is resolute in his opposition to Lancey and the other soldiers: 'I've damned little to defend but he'll not put me out without a fight. And there'll be others who think the same as me'. He encourages Owen to join him — and the Donnellys — in a fight again the soldiers. What had started as a bit of fun has now become a sincere conflict with the British soldiers.

Andy Doherty (Doalty)

Interview with **Andy Doherty**

Could you briefly describe your character?

Doalty is a lovable rogue. He's charismatic, energetic, always up for the craic. But he's easily led: even in the classroom, he's easily distracted. He's trying to get his work done, but at any hint of fun he's completely torn away from his work. That's part of the problem he has whenever he's in school. He's definitely just there for the people: he loves the school, he loves the people around him and he thrives off having fun with them, because that's all he has. The way we set up his character is that he doesn't have a family. He lives with Manus and Hugh, maybe he lives in their shed and helps out. He's got that bit of land and that's all he has, because he lost his parents. This gives him a dependency on on the school and on them as an inherited family. That's why he loves them so much. So, when everything turns it's more impactful: because if he loses them, it's all over, he's got nothing.

According to Friel, Doalty is 'slightly thick', yet he also appears to be more in-the-know than the other characters at times…

For me it's more to do with his attention-span: he's easily turned away from his work and then struggles to get back in. I also think 'slightly thick' might be in relation to book-smarts, because the play is set in a hedge school and he does struggle. That's down to him being distracted. Nowadays, it would probably be classified as ADD or something, and we probably all know someone who has that. It was just never diagnosed back then. He does really love some aspects of school work. For example, I try to show him making sure that his writing slate is clean, because that's the only bit of his life that he can micro-manage. And if he gets it wrong, he has to go up and clean the slate: everything has to be neat and tidy.

I think that in relation to the things happening outside of school he's easily led: with the Donnelly twins, the small things like stealing the soldiers' surveyors' pole, and so on. But I think it's all out of love, there no menace to it and I don't think he realises the scale of what he's doing. It's more for the craic! He loves the chase. You can just imagine him running down the hill with this 2-meter-long pole and laughing, him and Bridget. He loves doing these menial things, but he doesn't realise the grand scale of it until it's at his door.

I think he has great emotional intelligence, too. Sometimes, he realises that morale is dropping: for instance, whenever Maire is giving out about the blight and about Manus… Doalty senses the room dipping, so he changes the energy in that space. Whether he's having the craic, or being the brunt of his own joke, it's about getting the morale back up. He doesn't like anything dropping underneath that surface. I think that's because it sort of makes him more internal, and he doesn't like being in that world. He just keeps the ball in the air! So, as regards his emotional intelligence, he's very smart.

There is a change in Doalty towards the end of the play, following his confrontation with Captain Lancey. Can you speak about this change and what it means for him going forward?

I think that the change in Doalty is like "full-moon, half-moon, total-eclipse". At the start, everything is the way it should be. Then at half-moon, as the soldiers come in, it's like an encroaching. At the end, it's an overwhelming feeling of nothingness, darkness, and the only option is to fight. And so, what started with the menial gestures of moving the poles, progresses to something else. Like with marking Yolland's tent by cutting a ring around it in the grass: Yolland thinks he's just trying to be nice, but Doalty is actually marking the spot as to where Yolland is, maybe so the Donnelly twins can find him. Maybe Doalty thought that was just a bit of action, to throw something at his tent or steal his stuff. But it ends up with Yolland making the ultimate sacrifice.

Then, when he realises that there's hundreds of soldiers, destroying everything in front of them, becomes a realisation that it's do or die, quite literally. His life is his land, his animals and his friends; Lancey is destroying his animals, he's destroying his land, and next he's going to destroy his people. That sense of eclipsing means that a decision to fight has to be made.

The way he is recruited by the Donnelly twins is very applicable to Ireland and the world nowadays, with the rise of extremists. Extremists are going to push things a bit further in younger people who have no one, or who are a bit wild. That's very much the case now, with people who have nothing and for someone to come in and take what little they have… they'd be very easily led. I think the Donnellys are the first extremists or the first radicalised republicans of this community at this time. They're the ones making the moves and there's an intrigue in that, especially for someone like Doalty, who has nothing. Remember, they all went to the same hedge school and were in the same class. In classes nowadays, everyone would be the same age. But it's not like that here: anyone who wanted to learn would come. It would be a lot easier to be radicalised by someone five years older than you, sitting in the same class room. The twins are intelligent, and maybe they were just drip feeding Doalty information and he was lapping it up. You could imagine that everything the Donnellys have said to him is starting to come true: that the soldiers going to come here and start laying out their roadmaps, changing the names of places, and the next thing they'll start dividing up the land… Each incremental step would radicalise Doalty even more, to the point that he's trying to coerce Owen into joining him.

THE CHARACTERS

BRIDGET

'I THOUGHT WE WERE DESTROYED ALTOGETHER'

Bridget is another student in the hedge school, also in her twenties. She is often seen having fun with Doalty, and joining in on the banter they have at Hugh's expense. Bridget is a person who seems to be very well-informed as to the goings-on around town, and she gathers a lot of information from her brother, who works in the local port. As a character, Bridget provides the class (and the audience) with a lot of important information. She is up to date on the new national school and all of its rules. She also rather nervously reports a 'sweet smell' coming from the potato crop, possibly indicating the presence of a blight. However, the others assure her that the blight will never come to Baile Beag.

Crucially, she seems to know more than most about the Donnelly twins. When they are asked about by Manus, she mentions that two of the soldiers' horses were found away from their camp — before suddenly cutting herself off mid-story. Later in Act One, Hugh mentions that Lancey is looking for two horses. It is likely that the Donnelly twins have stolen these, and that Bridget was about to gossip about this, before thinking better of it. Later, in Act Three, when Owen trying to find out what happened to Yolland, Bridget lets slip a crucial clue: 'If you want to know about Yolland, ask the Donnelly twins'.

Bridget is, ultimately, a very determined character. We see this at the end of the play, after Lancey has threatened to kill the livestock unless Yolland is found. Being so well-informed, Bridget likely knows already that he will not be found; but, rather than despair, she immediately sets out to find hiding places for the animals.

Ruby Campbel (Bridget)

Interview with **Holly Hannaway**

Holly Hannaway originated the role of Bridget. Due to unforeseen circumstances, she was replaced by actress Ruby Campbell for the show in the Lyric Theatre, the Abbey Theatre and on tour.

Could you briefly describe your character?

Bridget is interesting because a lot of what she knows is unsaid. She may seem as though she is accidentally relaying information, or that she is flighty — because she does have that energy! But there is always more going on under the surface with Bridget: and the only time she misspeaks is when she thinks everybody in the room will agree with her. She is highly political and completely in love with the town she is from. She is fiercely protective of everyone in the village.

For example, she occasionally lets something slip about the Donnelly twins: they are these figures who cast a shadow over the whole play. Bridget's brother, Seamus, works down at the Port, which is where the Donnelly twins have been hiding. So, she definitely knows what the Donnellys are up to. And while it's not in the text, it's quite likely that she would help the Donnelly's in their hiding. I think she is a bit of a dark horse in that regard!

I also think there's so much joy to her. She is so familiar with Baile Beag, and it's that love that comes out in everything she does. Even when it seems like she is insulting Hugh, for example — it's more like a playfulness that you would have with someone in your family. None of it is barbed, it's more that she is so familiar with his habits!

A lot of the joy and humour in the play comes from Bridget and Doalty. Could you speak a bit about their friendship and their role in the play?

Bridget and Doalty are like two sides of the same coin. While they don't have the same personality, they have the same love for Baile Beag. They definitely act as a foil to the darkness that appears in some scenes. The choices that they make are always done with love, and with the greater good in mind.

Bridget is also the only local in the play that has a bit of money, and so she has a certain lightness and ease that allows her to find the fun in most things. She is described as 'ready to laugh', and I think she and Doalty have found each other — it's not a romantic love, but one of familiarity. They both seek joy in their day-to-day lives, because they have so little else supporting them. They come to the school to learn, but also to see each other, to be part of the village and to enjoy what it is to be young and growing up. It's about finding the things they are passionate about, which for them is the political element of things.

Of all the characters, Bridget seems to have the most awareness of a potential blight affecting the potato crop. What is it about Bridget that makes her so in tune with this issue?

I think it's two-fold. She's described as having 'a countrywoman's instinctive cunning', which I take as perhaps not being academically smart but she is incredibly attuned to the reactions of everyone in the class. She really picks up on any stresses that are being felt in that space. Being so in love with where she is from, I think that her protectiveness becomes a form of anxiety. Luckily, as Maire says, Baile Beag hadn't been struck by the potato blight at that time. But it is such a real and present fear, and the idea that anything could affect the people that she loves and the town that she loves triggers this anxiety to the point that she thinks there is this 'sweet smell' that is supposed to accompany blight. I think it's Doalty's ability to calm her back down these moments of anxiety — it brings her back to her usual, intelligent and planning self.

Her final line — 'I thought we were destroyed altogether' — is really beautiful, because while things are falling to ruin, it's really hopeful as well. She believes they will survive this, and is immediately focused on saving the animals. I think it shows how strong she is, especially for a female character from a small town in the 1830s.

THE CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN LANCEY

'I KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE'

Captain Lancey is the leader of the Royal Engineers who are posted in Baile Beag: it is Lancey's job to oversee the creation of a standardised, English-language map of Ireland, for use by the British Military. Lancey is described by Friel as a man whose 'skill is with deeds, not words', and who is 'uneasy with people [. . .] especially these foreign civilians' — referring to the people of Baile Beag. We see this unease immediately as he is introduced, in Act One, to the class at the hedge school by Owen. When asked to say a few words about his work in Baile Beag, he speaks slowly and using basic English — 'as if he were addressing children'— only speaking normally when Owen assures him he will accurately translate whatever he says. It is a humorous moment, and causes much amusement in the class.

Lancey is different in his mood when he returns in Act Three. With Yolland missing, Lancey feels as though the locals have threatened both his comrades and the success of their mission in Ireland. He issues an ultimatum to the class, saying he will kill livestock and destroy houses until Yolland is found. As Yolland tells Owen in Act Two, Scene One, describing the time pressure the Royal Engineers are under to complete their map: 'London screams at Lancey and Lancey screams at me'. Lancey's warning to the people of Baile Beag shows that he is a ruthless and desperate man, completely determined to carry out his orders from London.

Interview with **Howard Teale**

Could you briefly describe your character?

He's a cartographer, but a captain by title. What I want to show in playing this character, is somebody who simply wants to carry out his duties, but comes across as 'a ramrod'. He's placed in a somewhat restrictive position in this community, and you can see his awkwardness when he appears in Act One. He's not so smooth when trying to communicate with people — which is highlighted quite comically in that first scene. This is in tune with the theme of language throughout the script, and language's inability to communicate on occasion.

Friel describes Lancey as a person whose 'skill is with deeds and not words'. What do you think this means? And what are the consequences of this?

His mindset is probably more in tune with fact and figures, making sure he's doing correct calculations and so on. So, when he's dealing with the community, you can see the difficulty he has. I think he wants to assure them that the soldiers are no threat, but he's unable to express himself smoothly. He is also dependent on Owen's translation, and he has no real sense of what he is saying.

The first quote he gives — that 'former surveys of Ireland originated in forfeiture and violent transfer of property' — is telling. He is trying to show that, whereas in the past such projects were about conquest, the survey he is undertaking is for the benefit of the community. The two primary reasons for the mapping were military and land valuation. For the military to have up-to-date and accurate information on "every corner of this part of the empire" (invasion was still a concern with the French). Also, and perhaps more importantly, for tax purposes; the English didn't have accurate information especially on the size and boundaries of Townlands "..for purposes of more equitable taxation". I think the fact that he is unable to communicate this is what allows things to progress in their usual way: equipment goes missing, a couple of horses go missing, and then people go missing.

I think Friel uses Lancey as a representation of Great Britain as a whole. He is a very dominant person, and he doesn't have a lot of empathy for the land or its people. I think it stems from the fact that he can't communicate with or understand the people. Leading up to the events of the play, there has already been a period of political unrest, and he's aware of that — which is why he refers to the quote I mentioned earlier. But I don't think that is enough to convince people he is not a threat.

He just sees his duty as completing this mapping — ultimately, at all costs. When George goes missing, it's such a hindrance to the completion of the map, and Lancey unleashes terrible measures. I think he's blinkered: he only sees things in one way, and he struggles to see outside of that perspective.

Yolland says that Lancey reminds him of his father, but what is Lancey's feeling towards Yolland?

Well, Yolland's father was in charge of building roads, and expanding the Empire in this way. I think Lancey sees the world in a similar way: that there are no boundaries to progress. You can go in a change the names of places that have existed for centuries.

George doesn't live up to his father's expectations, nor does he really live up to Lancey's, as a representative of the British Army and what they're looking to achieve. I think he senses a waywardness in George. He doesn't see the Englishness: the quality of being excellent in his duties. He might not be aware of George's relationship with Maire, but he can tell that George is not toeing the line. There is reference to the fact that George is spat on by a local girl: if this got back to Lancey, then he might think he has not done his duty is preparing George for their campaign.

KEY THEMES AND ISSUES

The key to answering this Leaving Certificate question is being able to identify specific themes/issues across comparative texts, and to be able to discuss how these themes are expressed and explored in specific moments, and in the way in which the text is written.

LOVE & FAMILY

MAIRE, YOLLAND AND MANUS

The love story between Maire and Yolland is central to this play, not only in terms of how it affects the plot but also in what it represents thematically. Maire and Yolland come from different backgrounds, speak different languages and — as we discover — want very different things. In spite of these differences, they form a powerful romantic connection: one that transcends nationality and social expectations.

This romance creates a great deal of conflict, which changes the course of the characters' lives and drives the plot.

This conflict is due, in part, because of the existing courtship between Manus and Maire. Manus' failure to achieve financial independence gives Maire reservations about the prospect of marrying him. As she tells him in Act 1: 'You talk to me about getting married — with neither a roof over your head, nor a sod of ground under your foot'. Indeed, Maire is concerned that she will never have security or prosperity if she stays in Baile Beag, and is determined to leave Ireland for America. The arrival of Yolland in her life represents the possibility of a life outside of Baile Beag. Yolland is adventurous and, unlike Manus, has been able to escape the life set out before him by his father. He falls in love with Baile Beag immediately, and with Maire, perhaps by extension. During their romantic encounter in Act 2 Scene 2, Yolland tells Maire that he wishes to stay in Baile Beag with her. Ironically, she is simultaneously telling him that she wishes for him to take her away with him.

When Manus learns that Marie and Yolland are together, he goes after them, intending to attack Yolland. Although he does not go through with this, Yolland has gone missing the next day. There is a suggestion that the mysterious Donnelly twins — a pair of local fishermen, and former students of Hugh's — are somehow involved. Whatever the reason for Yolland's disappearance, it is understood that neither the local community nor the British Army would approve of Maire and Yolland's love; as Jimmy Jack tells Maire in Act 3, 'the word exogamein means to marry outside the tribe. And you don't cross those borders casually — both sides get very angry'.

The love triangle between Maire, Yolland and Manus ends tragically, with Manus exiled, Yolland missing and Maire alone. The barriers created by language, identity, duty and social class have ultimately prevented these characters from finding a happy ending. Nevertheless, Maire and Yolland's connection indicates that love can transcend these barriers, however briefly.

Aidan Moriarty (Yolland)

Marty Rea (Manus) and Zara Devlin (Maire)

LOVE & FAMILY

SARAH AND MANUS

Although it is not always validated by Manus, there is clearly a loving connection between him and Sarah. Sarah and Manus share a special bond and understanding, and Manus makes an extra effort to help Sarah overcome her reluctance to speak. In spite of this connection, Manus often behaves distantly towards Sarah whenever in the presence of Maire (whom he wishes to marry). We can see this through his awkward reaction to being 'caught' by Maire holding the flowers Sarah gifts him in Act 1, and having kissed Sarah's head in response. Later, he confronts Maire about her plans to emigrate, and what that might mean for their future. He appears to be worried Sarah will overhear this: 'He breaks off because he sees Sarah, obviously listening, at his shoulder. She moves away again.' Clearly, Manus feel uncomfortable, or perhaps guilty, about showing affection or intimacy towards Sarah or Maire in front of the other. For Sarah's part, her verbal responses to Manus are somewhat limited by her reluctance to speak. However, these can be seen in her behaviour on stage as interpreted by the director. For example, in 2022 production directed by Caitríona McLaughlin, Sarah furiously tears up the bouquet of flowers she had given Manus while he spends time chatting with Maire.

Despite this treatment, Sarah remains loyal to Manus. When Sarah sees Maire and Yolland together in Act 2 Scene 2, she doesn't hesitate to inform Manus of this. However, in the events that follow, Manus implicates himself in Yolland's disappearance, and leaves Baile Beag — and Sarah — perhaps forever. She feels responsible for this, and her apology to him — 'I'm so sorry, Manus…' — is the last thing she says in the play. It is a cruel irony that the lessons — and confidence — Manus gave her to find her voice also result in her losing him forever.

Thematically, the tragic results for Sarah in finding her voice demonstrates the power language has: it is a powerful tool that can both bring people together and tear them apart.

Suzie Seweify (Sarah)

Marty Rea (Manus) and Suzie Seweify (Sarah)

JIMMY JACK AND ATHENE

Though it does not drive the events of the play, Jimmy Jack's obsession with the Greek goddess Athene does tell us about the power historic and legendary figures have to capture our imagination and hearts. At the beginning of the play, Jimmy tells Manus and Sarah that, given the choice of Zeus' three daughters, he'd 'go bull straight for Athene' (Act One). By the end of the play, he claims to be engaged to the goddess, telling Hugh 'She asked me - I assented' (Act Three). It is obvious to the others that these are just playful claims, comforting fantasies that distract Jimmy from an otherwise lonely existence. To Jimmy, Athene represents these stories of heroes, magic and adventure. His love for her comes from his feeling of connection towards the world of myths and legends she inhabits.

Marty Rea (Manus), Brian Doherty (Hugh), Ronan Leahy (Jimmy Jack) and Leonard Buckley (Owen)

OWEN, MANUS AND HUGH

The familial love shared between brothers Owen and Manus, and their devotion to their father, Hugh, is an integral element of the story, but also speaks thematically to the way in which people are shaped by their shared experiences.

Manus shows only love and devotion towards Hugh, and is constantly concerned about his wellbeing. Despite causing the accident that left Manus with a permanent injury, he does not seem to resent his father: instead, he dedicates himself to helping Hugh and keeping him safe. When he learns that his father has applied for a job at the national school, he refuses to go for the same job. Even as he is fleeing Baile Beag in Act Three, he delays, asking Owen to get a handrail put up, so that Hugh can safely climb the stairs on his return from the pub.

Owen, who left his family in order to experience professional success in Dublin and to move past the simple life in Baile Beag, is genuinely delighted to return and see Hugh and Manus. Indeed, by the end of the play he has renounced this life of cosmopolitanism and wealth, as shown when he tries to give his money away to Manus: 'Do you know what they pay me? Two shillings a day for this - this - this -'. Despite his and Manus' differences, he is heartbroken when Manus is forced to flee. By the end of the play, he has replaced Manus as the carer of their father, a duty he takes on without question or complaint. The power of familial love is clearly seen through both sons' devotion to their father.

The family bonds are complicated, however, by differing word views and political opinions: as is the case in many families. At the beginning of the play, Owen dismisses Manus' concerns about the soldiers' purpose in Baile Beag, and gives out to Manus for his rudeness towards Yolland. Over the course of the play, Manus' attitude towards Yolland softens, while Owen becomes more and more concerned about Captain Lancey's intentions. Manus and Owen's conflict has ultimately changed each of them, and strengthened their brotherly bond.

LANGUAGE: MISCOMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY

THE ANCIENT VS. THE MODERN / IDEALISM VS. PRAGMATISM

A major theme of *Translations* is the replacement of the Ancient with the Modern. This can be seen in the Royal Engineers' project to replace the Irish place names with standard English ones. While Irish is the traditional language of the county, it is being replaced by English: a language spoken internationally, one of commerce and progress. The Irish language represents Ireland's ancient past, while English represents the riddance of this in favour of something more modern. Maire speaks to this in Act One, when arguing they should all learn English. She quotes Daniel O'Connell, a.k.a. The Liberator, an influential Irish politician of the 1800s: 'The old language is a barrier to modern progress'. However, not all the residents of Baile Beag are so keen to adapt to these modern ways.

For much of the play, Hugh advocates the use of the Irish language, saying that 'English [...] couldn't really express' the Irish people (Act One). Hugh and students instead speak Irish, as well as Greek and Latin, which he teaches at the hedge school. When Yolland marvels at their everyday use of these ancient languages, Hugh explains that the Irish people feel more part of antiquity than modernity: 'We like to think we endure around truths immemorially posited'. Hugh also suggests that these languages are more poetic, more romantic than other modern languages. He says that this is important because life in Ireland can be hard, and describing things beautifully can help them to remain happy and optimistic:

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

So, while Irish is an ancient language, it is also an idealistic language.

On the other side of this, English is a language of modernity and pragmatism. This is reflected in its speakers. Captain Lancey, for example, only speaks English. He has been tasked with creating a map of Ireland, with English place-names, so that Ireland can be more easily navigated by the British Army, and that land taxes can be more easily charged. These objectives are connected to the British agenda to colonise and modernise the comparatively ancient civilisation of Ireland. Lancey, who has been sent by commanders in London to carry out this project, is described by Yolland in Act Two, Scene one as 'the perfect colonial servant'. Yolland marvels at this hard-working, industrious attitude: 'not only must the job be done — it must be done with excellence'. Yolland compares Lancey to his father, who was born the same day the Bastille fell, calling this 'The Year One':

YOLLAND: [...] Ancient time was at an end. The world had cast off its old skin. There were no longer any frontiers to man's potential. Possibilities were endless and exciting.

Although very unlike his father, Yolland is a product of this modern, English-speaking world. He is a gentleman, with soft hands that have not had to do manual labour. Owen, who encourages the others to speak English, also reflects this world: he has many businesses in Dublin, and is paid well as a translator for the British soldiers. The industrious and modern values of the English-speaking characters clash with those of Hugh or Jimmy, who would rather drink and discuss ancient poets.

Throughout the play, the conflict between the ancient and modern worlds, and between idealism and pragmatism, is reflected through the theme of language. Yolland wishes to be part of the more ancient Irish civilisation, and so tries to learn Irish; Maire, on the other hand, wants to become part of modern society, and so feels she must learn English. When Owen translates for Captain Lancey in Act One, he gives a kinder version of what Lancey says, hoping to build bridges. In Act Three, when he realises that this relationship cannot be fixed, he gives an accurate translation of the merciless measures Lancey is about to inflict on the people of Baile Beag. And although Hugh is opposed to teaching or speaking English at the beginning of the play, by the end he has realised that this is an inevitable step in the transformation of the country. And so, he agrees to teach Maire English, and commits to learning the new place names.

LANGUAGE: MISCOMMUNICATION AND IDENTITY

LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

Many characters in *Translations* are affected by loneliness and feel isolated from others around them. Even when in the company of others, it is possible to feel alone: to feel as though no one is going through what you are going through. Jimmy Jack Cassie summarises this idea when he quotes: 'I am a barbarian in this place because I am not understood by anyone'. The theme of language is central to this play, and when people feel that they are not being heard — that the way they speak to one another is not understood — they feel as if they are alone. Sarah is a good example of this: because of her speech defect, her ability to communicate with others is reduced. Although she is part of the classroom, she often depends on Manus, who makes a greater effort than others to help her overcome this communication barrier.

Yolland feels isolated in a similar way when he arrives at Baile Beag, depending on Owen to translate for him. He never fit in at home in England — he was a disappointment to his father — and he doesn't appear to fit in as a member of the British Army. He falls in love with Baile Beag immediately. However, he is saddened by the idea that he will never be part of the community, since he doesn't speak the language. Even as he begins to pick up a few words of Irish, he is pessimistic: 'Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here, wouldn't I?'.

Jimmy Jack is the clearest example of someone suffering from loneliness, however. As his speech in Act Three indicates, he longs for companionship, but must make do with the company of the mythological figures described in his books.

Suzie Seweify (Sarah)

Aidan Moriarty (Yolland) and Leonard Buckley (Owen)

Ronan Leahy (Jimmy Jack)

WAR, COLONISATION AND REBELLION

THE CLASSICS: (ODYSSEY, AENEID)

Though not directly related to the conflict occurring in Ireland at the time of the play, the content reference to classical texts reflects the theme of War, Colonisation and Rebellion in *Translations*. Hugh and Jimmy often make reference to texts such as Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*: these are stories about warriors like Odysseus and Aeneas, who travel to different lands either in conquest or in order to build a new home. These types of books are influential in the creation of modern society, as they hold up these warriors as heroes, celebrating their victories and conquests.

In Act Three, Hugh reminisces about the 1798 Rebellion, when he and Jimmy made their way to battle: 'Two young gallants with pikes across their shoulders and the Aeneid in the pockets'. He directly references here how their love of these texts had caused them to romanticise the idea of going to war. However, they both turned back and went home before reaching the battle: 'we got homesick for Athens, just like Ulysses'. Again, Hugh compares himself and Jimmy, to Ulysses (or Odysseus), a great warrior — showing the audience how influential such texts are on the identity of these men.

Hugh's recitation of the *Aeneid* at the end of the play makes a comparison between the situation in Ireland to that of Carthage — an ancient city that was destroyed by the Roman Empire. According to Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas fled from Troy and went on to found Rome: '… a race was springing from Trojan blood to overthrow someday these Tyrian towers — a people kings of broad realms and proud in war, who would come forth for Lybia's downfall'. With this reference, Hugh suggests that — just as Rome conquered and destroyed Carthage — Britain has come to destroy and conquer Ireland.

CAPTAIN LANCEY AND THE ROYAL ENGINEERS

The theme of War, Colonisation and Rebellion is most clearly represented through the arrival and presence of the Royal Engineers in Baile Beag, led by Captain Lancey. The first indication of tension between the soldiers and locals in seen in Act One, when Doalty describes the tricks he has been playing on them, moving their map making equipment. Manus approves of this, saying it indicates 'a presence' — a message that there are people in Ireland who do not approve of them, and who will resist them. Owen, acting as the middle man between the Royal Engineers and the locals, introduces the class to Captain Lancey and Yolland, who explain their plans to make a six-inch map of the country. While it is initially thought that peace can be maintained between the Royal Engineers and the locals, Manus is less sure, calling their map-making project 'military operation'.

When Yolland goes missing, the presence of the British Army intensifies. Act Three, Doalty and Bridget report that fifty more soldier have arrived, and that they are sweeping through the farmland, destroying fences and fields in their search for the Lieutenant. Captain Lancey returns to the hedge school, issuing a ruthless threat to the classroom: that if Yolland is not found, he will order the killing of livestock and the destruction of homes in Baile Beag. Through acts of vandalism by the likes of Doalty, and the presumed killing of Yolland, the Royal Engineers become the violent military force that Manus feared they were all along.

WAR, COLONISATION AND REBELLION

THE DONNELLY TWINS

Though never seen onstage, the Donnelly twins are a mysterious presence throughout the play. They are local fishermen and former students at the hedge school. Whenever they are mentioned, Bridget and Doalty — who know more about the goings-on in Baile Beag than any other characters — become quiet and nervous: clearly, the Donnellys are up to something that Bridget and Doalty feel should not be discussed. Indeed, in Act Two, Scene One, Yolland tells Owen they are wanted for questioning by Lancey. Clearly, Lancey suspects that they are up to something, too.

These suspicions are confirmed in Act Three, when Bridget suggests the twins were involved in Yolland's disappearance. Furthermore, Doalty tells Owen that the Donnellys would know to defend against the British soldiers, and their plans to destroy the livestock and homes in Baile Beag. Indeed, shortly after Lancey issues these threats, Doalty points out that tents at the army's camp have been set on fire: perhaps the work of the twins.

The Donnellys represent a nationalist, anti-Imperial, and rebellious presence in Ireland. They, and others who share their views, will use violent means to resist British rule, and to protest against the presence of British military forces in Ireland.

Aidan Moriarty (Doalty) and Ruby Campbell (Bridget)

CULTURAL CONTEXT

BRITISH COLONIALISM IN IRELAND

Though British involvement in Ireland dates back almost a millennium, to the 12th century, a key year from modern time to remember is 1798 — the year of the United Irishmen's rebellion, when republican forces rose up against British rule in Ireland. This rebellion ended in British victory, and soon after the 1800 Act of Union was passed: from January 1st, 1801, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was established. Essentially, Ireland and Britain were unified into one country.

Translations takes place within this political context. However, as we can see throughout the play, the Irish customs held in Baile Beag — at the edge of this Kingdom — are very different to those in Britain. This is, perhaps, why the Royal Engineers have been sent to create a map of the country. As Lancey puts it in Act One, their map will ensure that 'military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire'. It is not surprising that their plans are met with resistance, given the historic animosity between Britain and Ireland at this time. Doalty makes reference to this in Act Three, after Lancey has threatened to destroy their livestock and homes: 'When my grandfather was a boy they did the same thing'. Indeed, in the same act, Hugh reminisces fondly with Jimmy about their own involvement in the 1798 rebellion: 'The road to Sligo. A spring morning. 1798. Going into battle.'

Although the literal setting of *Translations* is Ireland in the 1830s, it is perhaps just as important to think about when this play was first produced: in Derry, 1980, during the Troubles. Coming after years of protest, killings and terrorism in Northern Ireland, Friel's play examines — from a distance — the tensions that arise when British soldiers occupy Irish lands.

THE FAMINE

Translations takes place in 1833, just a few years before Ireland would become affected by the Great Famine of 1845-1852, an event that would shape Ireland for years to come. The spread of a blight to the potato crop (the staple crop of many parts of rural Ireland), along with failures by the Government (situated in London) to respond to this contributed to this crisis. It is commonly believed that 1 million people died and 1 million more emigrated as a result — a loss in population that has never been recovered in Ireland since. Indeed, the 2022 census reported that the population had reached 5 million for the first time since 1851.

The potato blight is mentioned throughout *Translations* by the locals, especially Bridget, who is worried about reports of a 'sweet smell' coming from the land — a supposed indicator of this disease. As the play is set in a rural area before the Great Famine, the audience is aware that these people and others like them will be affected by this disaster in the years to come. This cultural context adds to a sense of pessimism around the play: that many of these people will die or emigrate in the years to come, and that their way of life is coming to an end.

The looming presence of famine also highlights the difficult relationship between Britain and Ireland that is explored in the play. As Ireland was governed from Westminster, London, it has been said that the British government failed to adequately address this crisis from this remove, causing more deaths as a result.

GENERAL VIEWPOINT AND VISION

Company of Translations

As the audience members/readers of this play, we are shown a community of people who come together — to the hedge-school — to share stories, to learn from one another and to help one another in their day to day lives. We are presented with a community whose love of and interest in language has brought them together. There are problems, concerns and challenges faced by each character: Manus and Sarah have impairments, Hugh is dependent on alcohol, Manus & Maire are frustrated by barriers to their personal ambitions. There are also issues lurking in the background: doubts have emerged around the viability of the potato crop; there is a sense of unrest around the presence of British soldiers; the new national school will further diminish attendance at the hedge-school. In spite of these issues, we are presented with a generally contented community.

Problems emerge when their traditions are challenged by modernity and colonialism. Owen, Hugh's youngest son and Manus' brother, returns to Baile Beag as an employee of the Royal Engineer's: a faction of the British military charged with creating a standard map of Ireland with English place names. Although the members of the hedge school are delighted to see Owen again, there is some uncertainty as to the intentions of the British soldiers toward the locals, and vice versa. Throughout the events of the play, we observe the struggle each character faces in either holding on to their way of life, or creating a new one.

KEY MOMENTS

OWEN'S RETURN

Owen's return to Baile Beag is among the first key moments of the play, primarily because it is Owen who brings the soldiers — Lancey and Yolland — in direct contact with the hedge-school and its students. Within this encounter, the members of each community (Baile Beag and the Royal Engineers) are confronted with each other's differences: the clothes they wear, the language they speak and so on. Owen acts as a go-between: he has left Baile Beag behind, but clearly still loves this community, and wants for them to welcome these soldiers, who are his new friends and colleagues.

The reaction of Manus is telling. He doesn't trust the soldiers, and accuses Owen of sugar-coating Lancey's plans of renaming the places around their community: 'it's a bloody military operation, Owen!'. Owen's creates different possible scenarios and questions. Will the community of Baile Beag accept the project of the soldiers, and adapt to the changes that they bring? Or will conflict arise from this intrusion upon their way of life?

Manus' concern about the soldiers represents a pessimistic outlook: that they wish to impose a new culture on Baile Beag, and change their way of life. Owen's attempts to bring these two communities together, on the other hand, represent the belief that people can overcome their cultural differences and form strong relationships. This is seen most clearly at the end of Act One, when he is '*taking* MAIRE *by the hand and introducing her to* YOLLAND'. At this point of the play, there is still hope that the communities will be able to co-exist peacefully.

MANUS'S JOB OFFER

During Act Two, Scene One, there is much debate about the nature of the Royal Engineer's project. Yolland, who feels increasingly at home in Baile Beag, is afraid that renaming the places into standard English in not the right thing to do, telling Owen: 'Something is being eroded'. These concerns hang over the scene, and are made worse by Manus' rude behaviour towards Yolland. It seems that Yolland's fear that he will always be considered an outsider is well-founded.

The news that Manus has received an offer to run a hedge school in Inis Meadhon comes out of the blue, and lifts the mood of the play dramatically. Owen is delighted for his brother, whom he previously lamented for having no independence from their father. The offer appears to soften Manus' disposition towards Yolland, who congratulates him genuinely: '(YOLLAND *holds out his hand.* MANUS *takes it. They shake warmly*.)'. For Manus, the news is life-changing. He is no longer dependent on his father for money, and he will have the means to start his own family — perhaps with Maire. More broadly, the job offer represents hope for his way of life: the opportunity to start fresh in a different hedge school will allow him to pass on the education and love of languages that he inherited from his father to another community.

While this moment creates a lot of optimism, what comes next is probably more significant. Manus assumes that Maire will now want to marry him: however, the budding relationship between her and Yolland will change these plans.

KEY MOMENTS

MAIRE AND YOLLAND'S KISS

In Act Two, Scene Two, Maire and Yolland have run from the dance in order to be alone together. In the play's most iconic scene, they attempt to communicate with one another, first through the limited amount of the other's native language that they know, and eventually just by speaking earnestly and naturally:

MAIRE: You're trembling
YOLLAND: Yes, I'm trembling because of you
MAIRE: I'm trembling, too.

At the end of the scene, they embrace and kiss; it is a moment that marks their commitment to be together. It is an emotional and beautiful scene, and one that given the audience hope that, and despite the language and cultural barrier, love truly can unite people from different backgrounds.

However, the positivity of this scene is complicated by a couple of factors. Firstly, despite the fact that they seem to understand what the other person is saying, the do not understand each other perfectly. They do both wish to be together, but while Yolland wants to stay with Maire in Baile Beag, Maire thinks Yolland is actually going to take her away from Ireland. Secondly, they are spotted by Sarah as they kiss, who then goes to tell Manus. The consequences of their love being discovered plays out during the concluding act: Yolland goes missing, and Maire is left alone, hoping he will return. This can be interpreted as a tragic, pessimistic end for the two characters. However, even though it seems unlikely that they will live happily ever after, the fact they were able to share that moment together can be appreciated as a rare and beautiful thing. They both say — in their own languages — that they wish to be together 'always'. However, "always" — as Hugh teaches Maire at the end of Act Three — 'is a silly word'.

Aidan Moriarty (Yolland) and Zara Devlin (Maire)

KEY MOMENTS

LANCEY'S ULTIMATUM

Perhaps the darkest moment in the play is when Captain Lancey returns to the hedge school in Act Three. With Yolland missing, he has taken it upon himself to discover what has happened to his Lieutenant, and appears he will stop at nothing to do so. He is no longer the man from Act One, trying to assure the locals that their work posed no threat; as Friel describes, he is 'now the commanding officer'. He instructs Owen to translate, and warns those in the hedge school of what will happen if Yolland is not found:

LANCEY: Commencing twenty-four hours from now we will shoot all livestock in Ballybeg.
(OWEN stares at LANCEY)
At once.
OWEN: Beginning this time tomorrow they'll kill every animal in Baile Beag — unless they're told where George is.
LANCEY: If that doesn't bear results, commencing forty-eight hours from now we will embark on a series of evictions and levelling of every abode in the following selected areas —
OWEN: You're not —!
LANCEY: Do your job. Translate.

Lancey goes on to list a series of place-names: the names that Owen helped Yolland create for the purpose of the Name Book, the anglicised version of Baile Beag's neighbouring townlands. This moment of the play demonstrates the real threat posed by the British Army, once provoked. Given the likelihood that Yolland has been killed, and will not return, the measures described by Lancey are likely to be carried out. It is in this moment that Owen, hearing the new place names being used by a man who might destroy his home, begins to regret working with the Royal Engineers. Determined to make amends, Owen goes to find Doalty — and, perhaps, the Donnelly twins — in order to join a rebellion against the British army.

The play ends with the very real prospect that Lancey will make good on his threats, and of a growing conflict between the British Army and rebel forces. However, there is some positivity to be taken from this ending. As soon as Lancey has left, Bridget snaps into action: 'We'll have to hide the beasts somewhere'. Similarly, Doalty leaves, telling Owen that Lancey won't 'put [him] out without a fight'. Obviously, while a violent confrontation is not a positive outcome, we can admire how determined Bridget and Doalty are to defend their home. And, while Owen has wrestles with his identity throughout the play — an outsider in Baile Beag as well as in British society — he now knows where his loyalties lie. As he tells Hugh: 'I know where I live'.

LITERARY GENRE

THE STAGE

The stage provides a setting for the play: it represents the physical world in which the characters live and where the story takes place. Unlike the set of a film, which can jump from location to location, the set of a theatre's stage has to be able to bring this world to life in one space. Therefore, the job of the set designer and props designer are very important: they must build a space where the actors can convincingly tell the story of the play, while also creatively changing that space to reflect changes to that world.

The set designer of the 2022 production of *Translations* is Joanna Parker. Before rehearsals began, she and the director (Caitríona McLaughlin) took a trip to Donegal for design inspiration. They were influenced by the peaks and hills of the landscape, which have made their way into the set with the different angles and levels. This is achieved with a ramped — or raked — floor, which creates multiple images. The characters often climb upstage, to the top of this ramp, as if climbing up a hill to look over the horizon. The ramp literally resembles both the slanted roof of a barn — the hedge school is set in a barn — but also the spine of an upturned book, like the dozens of old books that occupy the stage during lessons. There is also a faint outline of the Donegal coastline on the stage floor, in an orange-red colour.

While most of the play takes place indoors, in Hugh's hedge-school, there is one scene set outdoors: Act Two, Scene Two, when Maire and Yolland run through the fields after leaving the dance. To show this change in location, yellow gorse flowers — commonly found in rural Irish landscapes — appear at the bottom of this ramp, suggesting a hedge of gorse around the field they have arrived in.

DRAMATIC IRONY

Dramatic irony is a common device used in theatre to create tension and humour. It is achieved when the audience of a play has more information than the characters; as a result, we can predict more accurately the outcomes of their actions, or just watch them from a distance as they "catch up" to our understanding of the situation. This kind of irony is used in *Translations* through the conversations between characters speaking different languages. Even though it is performed to us through English, within the reality of the play the characters are speaking Irish as well as English.

The best example of this comes in Act Two, Scene Two, when Maire and Yolland are attempting to communicate without the help of a translator. The result is a conversation where neither realises exactly what the other is saying, and only the audience is aware of just how close they are to understanding one another:

MAIRE: The grass must be wet. My feet are soaking.
YOLLAND: Your feet must be wet. The grass is soaking

Later, Maire says the only full sentence she knows in English, even though she doesn't know what it means in her own language: 'In Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoll'. This excites Yolland, thinking she means exactly what she says: 'Good God, do you? That's where my mother comes from'. Again, this is entertaining for the audience: we know exactly where they are misunderstanding each other, and also how close they are to having a real conversation.

The tension that comes from this series of misunderstandings builds up to their kiss, where they claim to understand each other. They both say: 'Don't stop — I know what you're saying'. However, the irony in this moment comes from the fact that Yolland is promising to stay, while Maire is asking him to take her away with him.

LITERARY GENRE

CHARACTERISATION (COSTUME & STAGE DIRECTIONS)

The audience can learn so much about the characters in a play through their actions, words and how they appear on stage.

Costume is an integral element to dramatic performance: it can tell the audience so much about a character before they say and do anything. A good example of characterisation through costume design in this production of *Translations* is the type of shoes a character wears, if they wear them at all. Captain Lancey and Lt. Yolland both wear long, black leather boots as part of their uniform. Owen, though he is not a soldier, wears similar boots: these act as a sign that he has taken to the more modern and formal attire of the British establishment. Manus, Sarah, Jimmy, Maire, Doalty and Bridget are all barefoot throughout, with muddied feet. Interestingly, out of all the residents of Baile Beag, only Hugh wears shoes: this is a hint that he is — or he thinks is — more civilised and high-ranking than his friends and neighbours. As the school-master of the hedge-school, Hugh sees himself as a leader of the community, and he acts as a representative of Baile Beag when Captain Lancey makes his announcements in Act One. By wearing shoes, Hugh shows off his higher social status.

Watching how characters behave physically is another way in which the audience can learn about them. The most important actions of characters are often found in stage directions: these are notes, included by the playwright in the script, that describe non-verbal actions and also how things are said and done. Just as the lines in script tells us what the characters say, the stage directions tell us what they do. A good example of characterisation through stage directions in *Translations* can be found with the character Doalty. Doalty is a very outgoing and talkative character; however, whenever the Donnelly twins are mentioned, he becomes nervous, withdraws from the conversation and pretends to be busy. Look at this passage from Act One, when Manus is taking attendance for the lessons:

MANUS: What about the Donnelly twins? (To DOALTY) Are the Donnelly twins not coming any more?
(DOALTY shrugs and turns away.)
Did you ask them?
DOALTY: Haven't seen them. Not about these days.
(DOALTY begins whistling through his teeth. Suddenly the atmosphere is tense and alert.)

A similar interaction happens in Act Three, this time when Owen suspects the Donnellys are involved in Yolland's disappearance:

(OWEN goes to DOALTY who looks resolutely out the window.)
OWEN: What's this about the Donnellys? (Pause.) Were they about last night?
DOALTY: Didn't see them if they were.
(Begins whistling through his teeth.)

The stage directions tell the reader about things in a play other than what is said; it allows the reader to imagine how a character behaves, moves and speaks.

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

*By Assistant Director **Laura Sheeran** (one of the Abbey Theatre's four Resident Directors 2022)*

INTRODUCTION

I was delighted to be offered the opportunity to expand on my knowledge of directing text heavy work with a large cast by taking on the role of assistant director for this production. It allowed me to witness Caitríona McLaughin's directing process from start to finish, watching her masterfully unfurl Friel's emotionally complex text with a cast of ten gifted actors. It was fascinating and something I would not have had a clue where to start with before then!

Rehearsals took place in the Abbey rehearsal room. The schedule was a six day week, Monday to Saturday, but rehearsals ran from 10am-4pm (instead of the usual 6pm) for the first few weeks. Caitríona introduced this new schedule to give the actors time in the evenings to process what had been worked on and to do any extra research into their characters or the world of the play. Caitríona also introduced a system whereby day one of rehearsals focused on everyone meeting and getting to know each other. The cast were also introduced to representatives from each department of the Abbey and got to meet the faces they would be passing by in the hallways during their time there. She dedicated the afternoon to discussing dignity in the workplace and laying the foundations for a healthy and respectful working environment.

MOVEMENT WORK AND VOCAL WARM UPS

Most mornings began with movement work or vocal warm-ups. They were conducted by our movement director, Sue Mythen, and our voice coach, Andrea Ainsworth. These sessions helped the actors get into their bodies and connect each breath and movement to an intention or thought.

A lot of the fleshing out of the world of the play happened during these. Sue would build from gentle stretching, which lasted around 20 minutes, into more targeted movement exercises to help the cast embody their characters. Sue would prompt them with different trigger words relating to the text, and the cast would use those words as a launchpad to shift the intention in their movement. These exercises would create phenomenal change in the dynamic of the group. It was truly fascinating to watch!
Sometimes the cast were also asked to write down some of the textures, words, emotions or thoughts that came up for them. It was beautiful to see the world of Ballybeg emerge through them like that.

Vocal warm-ups were fun too. Andrea would also start with gentle body stretches and slowly start to incorporate sound into the breathing. She did a lot of targeted work on where the voice is coming from in the body, the breath and the intention behind each sound we make. She got the actors to stretch sound through every part of the body and activate the full range of their voices from low to high and soft to loud.

Laura Sheeran (Photo by Ros Kavanagh)

These sessions played a huge part in the development of the play but were more pronounced and frequent during the first few weeks. When Caitríona started getting things up on the floor, less sessions with the full company got to happen as the rehearsal calls became more specific to small numbers of cast members each day who would be working on a particular scene.

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

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TABLE WORK WITH THE TEXT

The process with the text involved a lot of deep diving, particularly during week one and week two.

The first read through involved the full cast, but instead of getting each actor to read the lines of their own character, Caitríona requested that the reading travelled clockwise around the table so that everyone read different character's lines. This ensured the actors stayed focused and didn't drift off when they weren't speaking. This took a full day from start to finish.

Next, Caitríona initiated another full read through of the play, this time with the actors reading their own lines. She asked before it started that everyone pay attention to every time something in the text would prompt a 'shift' in the characters on stage, specifically it had to effect everybody. This included any time anyone entered or exited, or when someone delivered new information that effected those in the scene. This took three days. It was a great way of getting the actors to connect with each other's characters in a deeper way, by negotiating around the table just when the key moment were. At times they disagreed on whether something did or did not cause a shift. This created an opportunity for everyone to talk it out until everyone came to an agreement about the deep, deep nuts and bolts of the play.

The third and final read through was conducted with the intention that anyone with questions at all about the play or the text speak up and ask for clarification. This could be the meaning of a word, or what the intention of another character is in a certain scene. Anything at all they were confused about or still questioning. This last read through took another two or three days.

After all that in-depth table work, Caitríona moved into the next phase by bringing the work to the floor and getting the cast on their feet.

STARTING TO BUILD THE SCENES

This was a fascinating to observe for me, personally. We got to see how all the in-depth table work really paid off as each actor had internalised the characters and their world. So much had gone in on a subconscious level that the scenes started building themselves!

Caitríona's system for this first stage of the scene building was to get each actor to read the script to themselves. Then she asked them to improvise the scene based on their memory of what happens in it, to make up the scripts themselves as they go through and not to worry about remembering any lines.

This was incredible to watch in real time. Immediately we saw beautiful compositions emerging with characters naturally adopting certain positions on the stage, a certain pacing would establish itself and new meaning would be found, the essence of what the scene really stands for would reveal itself. After a couple of passes, the actors would take their scripts back and start integrating the true script into the scene shape they had just created. This initial improvisation stage took about a week and a half. After that, each scene was built upon and built upon until all the scenes of the play had become linked together into the full Act in which they belonged.

PREPARING THE PLAY FOR TECH

During the last week of rehearsals there were a number of run throughs organised for people such as the producer, technical crew, lighting, sound, costume and props, set, as well as representatives from the Lyric Theatre and Brian Friel's estate, so they could sit in and see the work in progress in the rehearsal room. This helped the cast to get used to having an audience and gave the technical team the chance to ask questions, voice concerns or flag any issues that might cause problems. These run throughs also gave Caitríona opportunities to get feedback from colleagues and peers whose opinion she values at a crucial stage of the process.

COMPARE & CONTRAST *TRANSLATIONS* VERSUS *DUNE*

*By **Grace McKiernan**, Community and Education Administrator*

Humans have always told stories – from the ancient Greeks myths to the latest Sally Rooney novel, across film, theatre, books, tv, poetry. If we start digging a bit deeper into different stories, we find that they often share similarities – in themes, characters, their relationships, and motivations.

For this comparison piece, I will compare *Translations* with the 2021 film *Dune*, directed by the acclaimed filmmaker Denis Villeneuve. It is adapted from the epic novel of the same name by Frank Herbert. *Dune* follows Paul of the noble House Atreides, and son of Duke Leto. His family are sent to rule the desert planet Arrakis, and Paul is soon thrown into a war over the planet's much sought after spice.

How can we compare two stories of such contrasting difference? For starters one is a play, the other a film. One is written about the Donegal countryside in the 1800s and one about outer space and planets in 10,191 AG?

And yet – both feature young men in confusing situations who face shifting loyalties from the world they thought they knew, to a new world developing before their eyes. Both speak to us of power and loyalty, of culture and communication. Though set (literally) lightyears apart, we can identify similarities between the two. We can see their differences also – we have similar characters in similar situations and yet they can take completely different actions – why do we think this is?

The best thing about all stories is that they are open to interpretation. Use the following as a starting point to further develop your understanding of these two stories.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST *TRANSLATIONS* VERSUS *DUNE*

*By **Grace McKiernan**, Community and Education Administrator*

POWER

SAME

House Atreides in *Dune* and the British soldiers in *Translations* are both colonisers of a land that is not their own and they don't understand. Both face resistance to this power from the native people of these lands ("Who will be our next oppressor" - Chani, Dune)

DIFFERENT

While the British soldiers in *Translations* remain colonisers of the land, House Atreides lose their power and are then themselves oppressed by the Harkonnen who are working with the Emperor.

CULTURE

SAME

The culture of both the native Irish and Fremen are perceived as simple or backwards by those who are occupying their land but this is not the case – Hugh, Jimmy Jack and the hedge school students have knowledge of ancient classical texts and languages, while the Fremen have knowledge of the local environment and spice.

DIFFERENT

Despite the difference between the two cultures, Paul and Jessica adapt and are accepted into the Fremen. Despite his best efforts, Yolland is not accepted into the culture of Baile Beag.

MOTIVATION

SAME

House Atreides and the British soldiers are both initially motivated by commands from a higher power – the Emperor or the British government.

DIFFERENT

Duke Leto's motivation for their time on Arrakis is to work with the Fremen, not against. He wishes to find a coalition and harness their "desert power" for both their benefits. However, the British in *Translations* are motivated by intent to control the native Irish people – through the impositions of English place names and education system.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST *TRANSLATIONS* VERSUS *DUNE*

*By **Grace McKiernan**, Community and Education Administrator*

LOYALTY

SAME

In both *Translations* and *Dune* we see loyalties shifting as the story plays out – Jessica: between her love for her son and the Duke, to her duty to the Bene Gesserit.
Paul: between his loyalty to his father and his House, to his role as Kwisatz Haderach, to his new role with the Fremen which he sees in his visions.
Owen: between his loyalty to Yolland their work, to his home and Ireland as it comes under attack at the end of the play
Yolland: between his duty to his work as a British soldier, to his new love for Maire and of the native culture in Baile Beag.
Both House Atreides and the English soldiers are betrayed – Atreides by their doctor Yeuh, and Yolland by the Donnelly twins (he is suspected of being kidnapped or murdered by them).

DIFFERENT

Paul's shifting loyalty is pre-determined by forces outside of his own – his predetermined role of Kwisatz Haderach created by the Bene Gesserit before he was born, and his life with the Fremen that he is shown in visions.
Whereas Yolland and Owen's loyalties change in response to situations and actions that are happening at the current moment.

STORY TELLING

SAME

Storytelling plays an important role in both *Translations* and *Dune*.
Paul has visions – stories of his potential future or guidance to help him in his present.
In *Translations* the stories of the culture and history of the land are contained in the Irish place names – stories Owen tells Yolland.

DIFFERENT

While the stories in Paul's vision are of the future or present, the stories contained in each townland's Irish name are of the past.

LANGUAGE/ COMMUNI-CATION

SAME

In both we see conversations happening in languages that are known only to specific people – Paul and Jessica can converse in hand signals, unknown to others around them, much the same as Sarah in *Translations*. Many in the hedge school have no knowledge of what the British soldiers are saying – and vice versa.
Both Owen in *Translations*, and Duncan and Dr. Liet-Kynes in *Dune* act as translators to explain the differences in communication.

DIFFERENT

In *Dune*, Paul and Chani are able to speak to each other when they meet.
In *Translations*, Yolland and Maire are unable to speak to each other which leads to much confusion.

TRANSLATIONS
RESOURCE PACK
2022

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