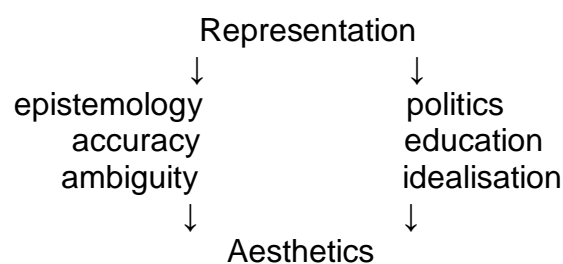
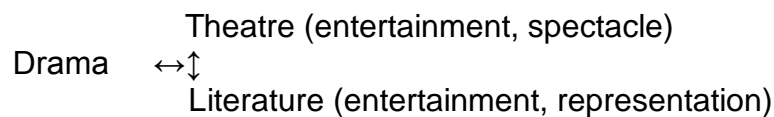
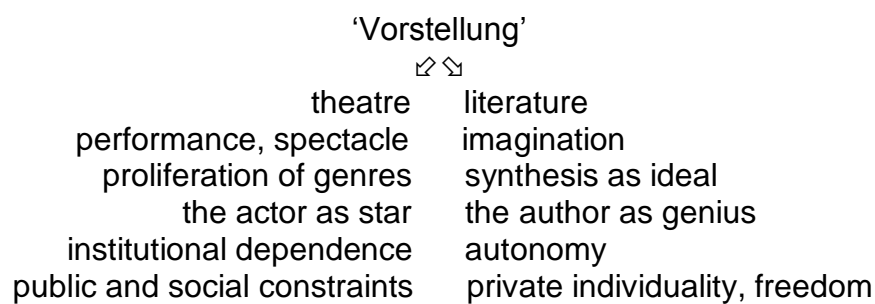


# Writing Ireland

## Lecture 8: Ends of (Post-)Modern Irish Drama

### The (Post-)Romantic Tension between Drama and Literature:



## 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Irish Drama:

- co-ordinates of shifting allegiances:  
self vs. place  
individual vs. collective obligation  
liberatory aesthetics vs. unifying themes  
tradition vs. counter-tradition  
(Harrington 2009, xvii)
- late-20<sup>th</sup>-century developments:  
new prosperity undermines national identity  
resurgence of class, gender, race  
plays crossing and redrawing boundaries  
(Lonergan 2008, vii-xv)

## Formal and Stylistic Features of Contemporary Irish Drama:

- oscillation between tradition and innovation, between realistic and experimental aesthetics
- shift away from text- and author-centredness (literariness) towards collective endeavours (site- and company-specific plays, increasing role of directors)
- prominent role of storytelling and self-reflexive elements  
(Middeke/Schnierer 2010, xiii-xvii)

## Brian Friel, *Translations* (1980)

PERSONS IN THE PLAY: MANUS  
SARAH  
JIMMY JACK  
MAIRE  
DOALTY  
BRIDGET  
HUGH  
OWEN  
CAPTAIN LANCEY  
LIEUTENANT YOLLAND

*The action takes place in a hedge-school in the townland of Baile Beag/Ballybeg, an Irish-speaking community in County Donegal.*

ACT 1: *An afternoon in late August 1833.*

ACT 2: *A few days later.*

ACT 3: *The evening of the following day.*

## From the Programme Flyer:

### The Play

Loves thwarted by understanding and those that thrive against all odds: In the middle of the last century, at the edge of Europe, a woman falls in love with the wrong man, crossing cultural boundaries to the zone where meaning and words do not meet.

### James Nelson, “Director’s Note - Colour Coded”

*Translations* is a play about language, and the cultural and linguistic barriers that it creates. In the play, the British speak English and the Irish speak Gaelic, but we hear both languages as English. This creates Brian Friel’s trademark device in *Translations*: both English and Gaelic are spoken in the same language, yet neither language can be understood by speakers of the other.

My work on this play began last year when I first began to visualize the design. I knew right away that I wanted something to visually represent the barrier that stood between the English and Irish characters, and to distinguish them from each other. And that came to me in the idea of colours specifically, using only two of them in the entire play. Green became the identity of the Irish, and we used it to create them and their world. And red was used for the English, to show their foreign nationality and help depict them as the visitors to this land.

It was also last year that I decided to cover the eyes of the actors with a kind of blindfold (which later evolved into the cloth eyeglasses that you see tonight). These aren’t meant to block eyesight, but rather color it – the characters all see through their own eyes, but the way they see things is heavily influenced by their nationality and cultural perspective. Nationality and cultural background has such a huge impact on every part of the way a person perceives things, and that is what the eyepieces symbolize.

## Brian Friel, *Translations*, Act II, Scene II

(From: *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*. Ed. John P. Harrington. New York: Norton & Company, 2009: 291-95)

*The following night.*

*This scene may be played in the schoolroom, but it would be preferable to lose—by lighting—as much of the schoolroom as possible, and to play the scene down front in a vaguely ‘outside’ area.*

*The music rises to a crescendo. Then in a distance we hear MAIRE and YOLLAND approach—laughing and running. They run on, hand-in-hand. They have just left the dance. Fade the music to distant background. Then after a time it is lost and replaced by Guitar music. MAIRE and YOLLAND are now down front, still holding hands and excited by their sudden and impetuous escape from the dance.*

MAIRE. O my God, that leap across the ditch nearly killed me.

YOLLAND. I could scarcely keep up with you.

MAIRE. Wait till I get my breath back.

YOLLAND. We must have looked as if we were being chased.

*[They now realize they are alone and holding hands—the beginnings of embarrassment. The hands disengage. They begin to drift apart. Pause.]*

MAIRE. Manus’ll wonder where I’ve got to.

YOLLAND. I wonder did anyone notice us leave.

*[Pause. Slightly further apart.]*

MAIRE. The grass must be wet. My feet are soaking.

YOLLAND. Your feet must be wet. The grass is soaking.

*[Another pause. Another few paces apart. They are now a long distance from one another.]*

YOLLAND *[indicating himself]*. George.

*[MAIRE nods: Yes-yes. Then:—]*

MAIRE. Lieutenant George.

YOLLAND. Don’t call me that. I never think of myself as Lieutenant.

MAIRE. What-what?

YOLLAND. Sorry-sorry. *[He points to himself again.]* George.

[MAIRE *nods*: Yes-yes. *Then points to herself*.]

MAIRE. Maire.

YOLLAND. Yes, I know you're Maire. Of course I know you're Maire. I mean I've been watching you night and day for the past—

MAIRE [*eagerly*]. What-what?

YOLLAND [*points*]. Maire. [*Points*.] George. [*Points both*.] Maire and George.

[MAIRE *nods*: Yes-yes-yes.]

|—|—|

MAIRE. Say anything at all. I love the sound of your speech.

YOLLAND [*eagerly*]. Sorry-sorry? [*In acute frustration he looks around, hoping for some inspiration that will provide him with communicative means. Now he has a thought: he tries raising his voice and articulating in a staccato style and with equal and absurd emphasis on each word.*]

Every-morning-I-see-you-feeding-brown-hens-and-giving-meal-to-  
black-calf— [*the futility of it.*]  
—O my God.

[MAIRE *smiles*. *She moves towards him. She will try to communicate in Latin.*]

MAIRE. *Tu es centurio in—in—in exercitu Britannico—*

YOLLAND. Yes-yes? Go on—go on—say anything at all—I love the sound of your speech.

MAIRE. —*et es in castris quae—quae—quae sunt in agro—* [*the futility of it.*] —  
O my God.

[YOLLAND *smiles*. *He moves towards her. Now for her English words.*]

George—water.

YOLLAND. 'Water'? Water! Oh yes—water—water—very good—  
water—good—good.

MAIRE. Fire.

YOLLAND. Fire—indeed—wonderful—fire, fire, fire—splendid—splendid!

MAIRE. Ah .... ah ...

YOLLAND. Yes? Go on.

MAIRE. Earth.

YOLLAND. 'Earth'?

MAIRE. Earth. Earth.

[YOLLAND *still does not understand. MAIRE stoops down and picks up a handful of clay. Holding it out.*]

Earth.

YOLLAND. Earth! Of course—earth! Earth. Earth. Good Lord, Maire, your English is perfect

MAIRE [*eagerly*]. What-what?

YOLLAND. Perfect English. English perfect.

MAIRE. George—

YOLLAND. That's beautiful—oh, that's really beautiful.

MAIRE. George—

YOLLAND. Say it again—say it again—

MAIRE. Shhh. [*She holds her hand up for silence—she is trying to remember her one line of English. Now she remembers it and she delivers the line as if English were her language—easily, fluidly, conversationally.*]

George, 'In Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypole.'

YOLLAND. Good God, do you? That's where my mother comes from— Norfolk. Norwich actually. Not exactly Norwich town but a small village called Little Walsingham close beside it. But in our own village of Winfarthing we have a maypole too and every year on the first of May— [*He stops abruptly, only now realizing. He stares at her. She in turn misunderstands his excitement.*]

MAIRE [*to herself*]. Mother of God, my Aunt Mary wouldn't have taught me something dirty, would she?

[*Pause. YOLLAND extends his hand to MAIRE. She turns away from him and moves slowly across the stage.*]

YOLLAND. Maire.

[*She still moves away.*]

Maire Chatach.

[*She still moves away.*]

Bun na hAbhann?

[*He says the name softly, almost privately, very tentatively, as if he were searching for a sound she might respond to. He tries again.*]

Druim Dubh?

[*MAIRE stops. She is listening. YOLLAND is encouraged.*]

Poll na gCaorach. Lis Maol.

[MAIRE *turns towards him.*]

Lis na nGall.

MAIRE. Lis na nGradh.

[*They are now facing each other and begin moving—almost imperceptibly—towards one another.*]

MAIRE. Carraig an Phoill.

YOLLAND. Carraig an Ri. Loch na nEan.

MAIRE. Loch an Iubhair. Machaire Buidhe.

YOLLAND. Machaire Mor. Cnoc na Mona.

MAIRE. Cnoc na nGabhar.

YOLLAND. Mullach.

MAIRE. Port.

YOLLAND. Tor.

MAIRE. Lag.

[*She hold out her hands to YOLLAND. He takes them. Each now speaks almost to himself/herself.*]

YOLLAND. I wish to God you could understand me.

MAIRE. Soft hands; a gentleman's hands.

YOLLAND. Because if you could understand me I could tell you how I spend my days either thinking of you or gazing up at your house in the hope that you'll appear even for a second.

MAIRE. Every evening you walk by yourself along the Tra Bhan and every morning you wash yourself in front of your tent.

YOLLAND. I would tell you how beautiful you are, curly-headed Maire. I would so like to tell you how beautiful you are.

MAIRE. Your arms are long and thin and the skin on your shoulders is very white.

YOLLAND. I would tell you . . .

MAIRE. Don't stop—I know what you're saying.

YOLLAND. I would tell you how I want to be here—to live here—always— with you—always, always.

MAIRE. 'Always'? What is that word—'always'?

YOLLAND. Yes-yes; always.

MAIRE. You're trembling.

YOLLAND. Yes, I'm trembling because of you.

[*She holds his face in her hand.*]

YOLLAND. I've made up my mind . . .  
MAIRE. Shhhh.  
YOLLAND. I'm not going to leave here . . .  
MAIRE. Shhh—listen to me. I want you, too, soldier.  
YOLLAND. Don't stop—I know what you're saying.  
MAIRE. I want to live with you—anywhere—anywhere at all—always—always.  
YOLLAND. 'Always'? What is that word—'always'?  
MAIRE. Take me away with you, George.

[Pause. Suddenly they kiss. SARAH enters. She sees them. She stands shocked, staring at them. Her mouth works. Then almost to herself.]

SARAH. Manus . . . Manus!

[SARAH runs off. Music to crescendo.]

### **Examples for Alternative Orientations in Contemporary Irish Drama:**

Tom Murphy, *Bailegangaire* (1985)  
Christina Reid, *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1989)  
Sebastian Barry, *The Steward of Christendom* (1995)  
Martin McDonagh, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996)

(cf. Lonergan 2008)

Conor McPherson, *The Weir* (1997)  
Marina Carr, *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998)

(cf. Harrington 2009)



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