

Translations essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The play “Translations” written by Brian Friel takes place in a small town in Ireland called Baile Beag in the year 1833. In act one, a hedge-school, located in an old barn, is the place in which the story commences.

Everything seems to go as usual, with Manus and his father Hugh teaching the class in somewhat a comical manner and with general town gossip being discussed in class. However, then Manus’ brother Owen arrives from Dublin and in his company two British soldiers turn up, Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland, who have come in order to map the land and to anglicize the Irish place names.

One rapidly notices that these soldiers have brought a high conflict potential into this peaceful town. Nonetheless, they are not the only source of possible disputes in Baile Beag, since Manus is also a character who has numerous conflicts laying ahead, for example with his father about the position at the new school, with Owen and his dubious doings in Baile Beag or with Sarah who wants more than just extra attention from Manus.

The conflicts which Friel insinuates in this first act do not only appear to be of a purely personal nature but all represent universal problems, which many have had to face. As many other authors have before him and after him, Brian Friel has integrated the theme of love into his play and going along with it are intricate problems, which arise between the characters, which in “Translations” namely are Manus, Maire and Sarah. Manus and Maire are in a relationship and they have even been talking “about getting married” (p. 31).

Sarah, a young woman with a speech defect, on the other hand is also in love with Manus, since he is the only one who is giving her attention. However, Manus does not share these feelings with Sarah and treats her more like a father would treat his child. The first conflict concerning love arises right at the beginning, when Maire questions Manus, about if he has applied “ for that job in the new national school” (p. 16). Manus replies that he has not because his father has already applied and he does not want to “ go in against him” (p. 17).

This results in Maire being disappointed and upset about the situation and Manus, because she had hoped that through this new position Manus would be able to earn more money, so that they would be able to at least afford their own house when they married. However, under these circumstances Maire seems to be separating from the idea of getting married, which is underlined when Maire “ moves away from Manus” (p. 31). Besides this, Maire is also very sure about leaving Ireland and going to America, after discovering that Manus would not get the position.

She also shows an extensive interest in the British soldiers and in Owen when they arrive in the hedge-school, and when she hears about what Owen owns in Dublin she is truly amazed. The reader quickly notices that Maire wants her social status and her standards of living to rise and she sees that this will not be possible while being together with Manus. Therefore, she finds that the only chance to achieve her goals is by either going away or finding another man.

While Maire sees no future with Manus, Manus seems to be the only person who means something to Sarah, since he gives her the attention she needs and wants. Manus certainly cares about her and he gives her fatherly love for example when he “ hugs Sarah” (p. 3) or when he “ kisses the top of Sarah’s head” (p. 7), but for Manus Sarah is no more than a sympathetic student, which is shown when she proudly tells Manus that she was able to say her name, but Manus just does not pay any attention to her.

Sarah on the contrary has fallen in love with Manus, which is seen by the pleasure she feels when Manus hugs her or by her giving Manus flowers. This could lead to a conflict later on in the play because Sarah might want more from Manus than what he wants to give to her. The two conflicts of love Manus has with Maire and Sarah are not only personal problems of the characters in the play, but they are also universal problems which many people have to deal with every day. In our society today the social status and financial security play a huge role in relationships.

Today, the wish for financial security even causes women marrying men that are sometimes 40 to 50 years older. The conflict between Maire and Manus is universal because many have to decide between being together with the one they love or with the one that can guarantee them social acceptance and a financially safe situation. As is this conflict, unrequited love, like Sarah’s, is also a problem in all countries on the globe. There will always be people who do not get the love returned to them that they give to others and requited love will just remain a dream for these people.

Especially those like Sarah will often not get the love they desire and so only a bit of attention can easily be misinterpreted by them. The second set of problems that arise in this play are the conflicts within Manus' family, namely that Hugh does not see Manus as an equal and admires Owen to a larger extent and the problematic relationship between the brothers Owen and Manus is also an issue, which, like the first conflict, is also a representation of real world conflicts. Hugh is the head teacher in the hedge-school and Manus is somewhat of an assistant for him.

Even though, Manus seems to be doing the most work in this school, Hugh does not respect him. For Hugh, Manus is just good enough to hang away his coat and hat, as if Manus is “ a footman”. Hugh shows no sort of love or actual respect towards Manus in this first Act and most of the time Hugh is ignoring him completely. Manus notices how unimportant he is for his father but he seems to accept this. However, Hugh is not the only member of the family ignoring Manus, since Manus' brother Owen also does not care much about him.

This is underlined by Friel when Owen enters and says something friendly to every person in the hedge-school, except for Manus to whom he has nothing to say. Besides this Owen also has the respect of his father, unlike Manus. Owen has been able to obtain it through the things he has achieved in Dublin. The problems that are mentioned within this play about Manus' family are all universal, due to the fact that these conflicts arise in many families. There will always be parents who do not recognise their children as respectable people even when they have grown up.

The title of Brian Friel's piece "translations" allows the reader to already foresee the greatest conflict the characters will have to face within this play, which in this first act is already indicated to be the battle between the languages English and Irish. One is able to see how the English soldiers want to increase their control over the Irish colony and how an expansion of the English influence in Ireland is made, by the British introducing their language to the mostly Gaelic speaking population of this part of the empire.

The English are making different attempts to establish their language in Ireland by firstly building a new national school and secondly by translating or even changing the Irish place names into the English. The reactions to these plans are rather different within Baile Beag because there is Maire for example who is longing to learn English or Hugh who sees English only to be useful "for the purposes of commerce" (p. 23) but on the other hand there is also a resistance rising against the British and their language.

This resistance is first touched on in the play when the talk about the Donnelly Twins begins. It turns out that they are probably responsible for the deaths of two horses of British soldiers, who fell off a cliff. With this the twins want to show that the plans of the Englishmen are not welcome here. This is the only element of open resistance in the first act but Owen's wrong translations also let the reader conclude that they are awaiting more to come.

This is because Owen does not want the inhabitants of Baile Beag to worry about the changes that will occur, being why he translates the things that Captain Lancey is saying, so that they sound harmless and as if they were

not of a great importance. Owen wants to keep the inhabitants in the dark. Nowadays, this conflict arising in this first act of the play still has a great importance because this sort of problem still exists today, just in another form. In our modern society today this problem is called globalization.

For many it is a great concept because it brings people all around the world closer together because economical, social, cultural and political systems are changed in order to be more alike. However, for others it is a curse because it forces them to give up their traditional religions, languages, cultures etc. in order for them to be integrated into the global society. This is exactly what is represented in Friel's play, since the British believe that it is good to have all the people in the empire speaking the same language, but they are just not imagining what has to be sacrificed for this change.

This is how modern politicians and diplomats still act today, because they usually only see the positive aspects of globalization and often ignore the cultural goods that are being lost. Friel has integrated intricate conflicts into his play which reflect problems with which people in the real world have to deal with all the time. All the problems that are touched on in the first act are problems that many people have to face and problems that occur in nearly everybody's lifetime. Many have experienced unrequited love like Sarah's, relationships that have been very upsetting and disappointing like Maire's.

Besides this many have seen or experience conflict with in the family like those Manus has had to face and large groups of people especially in underdeveloped countries have been confronted with a situations in which

they and their cultures were integrated in such a way so that they would fit into the global society. Therefore, one can say that Friel's book is not only a great reflection of conflicts in the 19th Century, but that it is still able to represent conflicts occurring today.