

The significance of  
heritage in friel's  
'translations' and  
heaney's collection  
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Heritage appears as a central theme both to 'Translations' and 'District and Circle'. Heritage can be described within the context of these texts as a set of ideas, traditions or explicit values that gives a sense of identity or belonging to a community. Friel's play is set in Ireland, 1833, which is changing from a predominantly rural, Catholic, Gaelic speaking country to an increasingly modern, British-influenced country under colonial rule. Similarly, Heaney's upbringing sets him at the heart of this change, presented with a father from rural, Catholic Irish countryside and a mother from industrial, Protestant Ulster. Both Heaney and Friel present the danger of forced assimilation, which leads to alienation, and the loss of identity through the transformation of language and a lack of communication. Friel looks on the changes in Irish heritage with a cool perspective whereas Heaney looks with a more nostalgic sense. What they both exhibit to us is that every culture has heritage, and it is about accommodating both in the best possible manner.

Language is a fundamental part of what constitutes a nation to be unique. Heaney displays the importance of language by using classical and Irish language references in his poetry, such as "Jupiter...hurls his lightning" and "snedder". These instances of elevated and colloquial language help to construct the identity of the nation in which they were used: one of kudos and one of a familial centre. Heaney's desire to preserve these languages stemmed from the fact that, he was taught Latin and Gaelic, and thus wants to preserve these languages, incarnating them in his poetry due to his nostalgia. Heaney admitted himself that "I learned that my local county Derry experience, which I had considered archaic and irrelevant to 'the

modern world' was to be trusted"[1] which suggests why he focuses his writing on preserving these cultures. In 'Translations', language is used to exhibit the obvious tensions between British men, conducting the Ordnance survey in the 1830s[2], and native Irish in how they felt towards the removal of the Gaelic language. Yolland, a British officer, displays a sensitivity for Irish culture by saying "I hope we're not too - too crude an intrusion on your lives". This polite tone covers a more sincere meaning, and the nervy stutter makes vivid the idea of uncomfortable change, but a beneficial one. The two antithetical pronouns 'we' and 'you' is an effective way of illustrating a segregation through the language and the use of periphrasis is to prevent tension. Heaney, in The 'Turnip Snedder', conveys a similar lamentation of the change and a nostalgia for the traditional rustic Ireland: "barrel-chested breast-plate/ standing guard/ on four braced greaves". The prevalent plosive 'b' sounds sound assertive and strong, and the enjambed "standing guard" in its own clause is mimetic of a prideful object; as if it is proud of all the traditional values it represents.

Communication is so important for social discourse, and Friel makes evident the fact that it is essential that when translating, one must reinterpret the meaning to align with the original culture. Indeed, Steiner, a particular influence on Friel, said "the untranslatability of one language to another is difficult as something is always lost in translation as there is no equivalence between languages"[3]. Owen becomes confused with his loyalties, and this stems from the fact he is facilitating the loss of the Gaelic language: "Owen - Roland - what the hell. It's only a name. It's the same me, isn't it? Well, isn't it?" and this synecdoche for this loss and the searching, aposiopetic

register shows his need of reassurance and his difficulty in alliance to modernism or traditionalism. The heavy 'o' assonantal resemblance between the English name, Yolland, and the misinterpreted Irish, Roland, is perhaps suggestive of the innate desire by these soldiers to anglicise unknown entities so they seem easier to relate to. Indeed, the irony in this quote that the British have misinterpreted his name through miscommunication and this comes to stand for the whole of the British operation. Heaney illustrates the consequences of misused power, stemming from a lack of communication, in his poem 'A Shiver': "Posture required to swing this heavy tool: your two knees locked, your lower back/ shock-fast". This disruptive capacity of power, Heaney exhibits as deriving from a lack of understanding between the communities, and the heavy assonance sounds abrupt and out of control here. Friel, however, has a more positive outlook than Heaney and sets his play in English yet we understand that both Gaelic and English are being spoken at times, perhaps is a hint at the idea that both languages can be spoken in harmony and that suitable translation can be made if they accommodate both.

Forced assimilation and the removal of things which people have always known, results in alienation. Heaney was well known for preserving his political views from the public eye, and the critic Morrison stated that "Heaney would never reduce political situations to false simple clarity, and never thought his role should be as a political spokesman"[4] which is what the likes of Rilke and Seferis, who heavily influenced his writing, believed in. They withheld political opinion in public yet, as a result, they as the poets become alienated. In 'George Seferis in the Underworld', Heaney writes "a

last word meant to break/ your much contested silence” and this highlights the dramatic, consequential impact poets can have on situations and for this reason, he reserves judgement. The line break enacts the sharp snapping of the silence and the monosyllables emphasise a certain awareness of a poet's influence. The increasing influence of British colonial rule on Ireland with the imposition of language, removal of Gaelic speaking schools and the introduction of the first National schools in 1831, presents a rapid cultural change in Ireland. Indeed, this influx of change affects many different characters in 'Translations' over the course of the play, some resulting with an internal reaction, others with an external, bolder reaction. Maire, who represents the latter, alienates herself from her original culture, saying that “ I don't want Latin. I don't want Greek...I want to be able to speak English... Maire remains standing” which through the pithy sentences and the anaphora, sounds assertive, with the stage direction giving a visual impact of her being strong in wanting to seek a prosperous future. Heaney's influence by people like Ted Hughes, who created poetry out of local and native backgrounds[5], aided him in writing sensitive poetry, like in 'Rilke: After the Fire'. It refers bleakly to the concept of a man's past being destroyed, and is suddenly alienated after a fire: “ emptiness behind him/ scorched linden trees...he was changed: a foreigner among them”. Heaney here is trying to emphasise the significance of the past in shaping us, the connections we make with society and the memories, which are enhanced through the metonymy of the 'linden trees' which represent his past. The unembellished tone of the description of the man highlights the bleak reality of his situation.

Friel makes it feel odd that two cultures are suddenly brought together and are expected to work in harmony immediately – this adaptation must be gradual for things to work out effectively. Friel admits he believes the British implemented things too quickly and, as a result, many Irish felt isolated from their own culture, and some, like the Donnelly twins, took up arms against British rule by joining the Fenian uprising in 1867[6]. Owen, after Lancey has patronisingly spoken to the Hedge school “as if they were children”, in a comic, bathetic contrast, says “It might be better if you assume they understand you” and, in this juxtaposition, Friel is presenting the difference in understanding of culture, and making explicit the way in which the forced assimilation causes alienation. Heaney’s poem, ‘Anything Can Happen’, which reflects on the atrocities of 9/11 and wider current conflict with terrorism and in the Middle East[7], comments on the ‘coming-to-terms’ with the abruptness of such events: “He galloped his thunder cart and his horses/ Across a clear blue sky. It shook the earth/ The clogged underearth, the River Styx, / The winding streams, the Atlantic shore itself”. The enumeratio in asyndeton sounds breathless and panicked, increasing the impact of large devastation that can be caused, which here is the destruction of lives and a city, but in ‘Translations’ is the removal of community which leads to isolation. Throughout the play, Friel consciously undermines the pompous military characters with colloquial, comical contrasts which increase the distance between the two cultures. Indeed, Yolland explicitly says in a moment of realisation “Even if I did speak Irish I’d always be an outsider here, wouldn’t I?” which hints at the idea that heritage is never removed, because outsiders always feel conspicuous. His interrogating tone evokes a kind of pathos for the ‘outsider’, and the searching question feels

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like he is probing for reassurance, which we pity. Similarly, the protagonist in 'The Tollund Man in Springtime', who feels he is in "another world, unlearnable and so", depressed and isolated from the contemporary workings of the earth because he is from an ancient era, emphasised here by the caesura which splices, yet also pairs, the 'world' with the fact it is 'unlearnable'. Sarah is an example of an introverted reaction to change. At the start of the play, she is learning to convey meaning through speech, towards the end, when things begin to go wrong, she finds it difficult to even verbalise her name "I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I'm so sorry...Manus", and the elliptic anaphora here, and the repetition of apology, is poignant and emotional, allowing the reader to reflect on what is happening.

The inevitability of change and the loss of identity, play a vital role in both 'District and Circle' and 'Translations' concerning heritage. O'Toole once said the "Greatest achievement of play is the message to 20th century Ireland that confused identities were worth the price if peace was the result"[8]. Indeed, Friel presents us with the similar idea that if the anxieties of this period resulted in a better Ireland, it would be worthwhile. Owen, early on, describes how he "can't believe it! [he] comes back after six years and everything is as it was!...'civilised' people" which probes at the idea of a need for this development, emphasised by the incredulous tone adopted here and the exclamatory remarks. Heaney similarly acknowledges a need for progression, perhaps helped by his rural-based father and Ulster-revolutionary mother which kept him aware of the necessary balance between maintenance of the past and the welcoming of the future. Andrew Motion said in a review that "Heaney has remained closer to home and the

familiar"[9] which perhaps obliquely refers to the fact that he has rationally looked at what is best for Ireland, and embraced it. In his poem 'A Clip', a barber's shop, which has character, yet is desolate and run down, comes to stand for Ireland as a whole. The images of " Harry Boyle's one chair, one chimney...the strong-armed chair" are surrounded by " loose hair in windfalls blown across the floor", and the anaphora of ' one' with the colloquial Irish name and the personified compound adjective, makes the whole scene seem familiar. Yet the melancholy tone at the end of the poem sounds empty, as if Heaney is admitting to the need to progress. Hugh shows his worldly ignorance when he questions " Wordsworth? ...no. I'm afraid we're not familiar with your literature" which exhibits a blatant isolation from exterior influence and is meant to sound comical to a worldly, modern audience.

The fact that, again, the pronoun is split from the possessive pronoun makes vivid through the language, a distance in understanding of the two cultures. O'Toole says that there is " Underlying feeling for the tragedy of people who get caught up in myths and mindsets that cannot adapt to change"[10] and this relates to Manus, who cannot comprehend this change, this loss of what has always been, and thus contests it. Similarly, Heaney's Tollund Man is trying to comprehend " what has happened and what was meant to be", portraying a sentimental outlook on this loss of what he knew. He comes to stand for the tensions between unspoilt purity and destructiveness of modernisation, as does Heaney himself. The Tollund Man's " absorbed face/ coming and going, neither God nor ghost,/ not at odds or at one, but simply lost/ to you and yours" which experiences " the early bird still singing" but now is now surrounded by " exhaust fumes, silage reek". The isocolon and



mirroring created in the description of his face and then which is mimicked in a separate clause by the people who should be observing him is an effective way of showing how people disregard nature now and identity but rather are fixated by the "thickened traffic/ swarming" which through the enjambment and harsh consonants, feels animated, almost alive, as if this industry has replaced the animals of nature. The fact the poem is written in a series of six sonnets, traditionally associated with love poetry, perhaps Heaney is hinting at the idea that if you treasure heritage within and what is unique about you within yourself, beneficial modernisation will be more bearable. "As a man would cutting turf...[The Tollund Man] spirited himself into the street", which is what Heaney believes Ireland has to do: embrace the change, by treasuring the memories of the past as well as the benefits of the future.

Symbolically, this is what Hugh does by the end of the play, saying "We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must learn to make them our new home" and in saying this, he accepts the whole idea that the antiquated, patriotic approach to Ireland's future was flawed. The anaphora and the short, assured sentences, with the melancholy but acknowledging 'w' alliteration in the first clause, help develop an emotion of acceptance and how heritage can be conserved if people accommodate the change into their lives- every culture is going to have separate values, even if one is influenced by the other.

Both Friel and Heaney take images of Irish culture and question and interrogate their meaning, and celebrate a fantastic uniqueness of these meanings. The fact that both Heaney and Friel were involved in the Field Day

Theatre company, set up in 1980[11], which angled at traditional  
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productions, manifests their similar desires to preserve heritage. However, to an extent, they show how crucial it is to accept change and to keep up with the time, if you are to uphold any form of heritage - because it is down to the people who live there and how they identify, as to whether the heritage belonging to that place is upheld.

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