BLACK HOLE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

BRIAN FRIEL’S
TRANSLATIONS
Translations
By Brian Friel

Director
Bill Kerr

Assistant Director
Paymun Nematollahi

Set Designer
Lauren Gowler

Costume Designer
Karen Schellenberg

Light Designer
Melissa Lopushniuk

Sound Designer
Ami Buhler

Stage Manager
Tess Zeiner

The University of Manitoba campuses are located on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. We respect the Treaties that were made on these territories, we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.
Cast

In alphabetical order, Vertically

Alistair Wright as Yolland
Becky Zacharias as Sarah
Benjamin Krawchuk as Lancey
Glorya Thompson as Maire
Ian Bastin as Hugh
Manuel Ortega as Owen
Melanee Deschambeault as Bridget
Patrick Bellemare as Doalty
Paul Duncan as Manus
Sherab Rabzyor Yolmo as Jimmy

There will be one 15 minute intermission

Time
Act 1: An afternoon in late August 1833
Act 2: A few days later
Act 3: The evening of the following day

Place
Baile Beag, Ireland
The Black Hole Theatre Company would like to thank:
Claire Sparling, Prairie Theatre Exchange, Garrett Rusnak, The Boughen Family, Elana Honcharuk
For the Theatre Program

Production Manager
Karen Schellenberg

Technical Director
Shane Stewart

Office Administrator
Ivan Henwood

Publicist
Margaret Fergusson

Teaching Assistant
Shaylyn Maharaj-Poliah

Teaching Staff
Program Coordinator Bill Kerr
Professor Margaret Groome
Professor Bob Smith
Instructor Karen Schellenberg

Senior Scholar
Chris Johnson

John J. Conklin at work at his Manitoba Free Press office desk, circa 1908.
“Widely acknowledged as a masterpiece since the moment of its first production, *Translations* is a play of pivotal importance to both Friel and the Field Day Theatre Company (which he co-founded). As many commentators have observed at length, the play is an intersection of Friel’s concerns with identity, history, myth, and, particularly, language. After the production of this play, critics began to see translation as a trope for Friel’s concerns with communication in this play, his entire body of work, and for Field Day’s concerns with the post-colonial. Others have noted how his use of staging devices, using an indistinguishable English for both Irish and English and having the most communicative scene in the play be between two lovers who don’t speak the same language, has most concisely expressed his views on the lack of communication in linguistic exchanges and the potential for communication non-verbally beyond the words.”

“The dramatist has . . . to forge . . . 300 imaginations into one perceiving entity, dominate and condition them so that they become attuned to the tonality of the transmission and consequently to its meaning”

(Friel, “Extracts From a Sporadic Diary: Aristocrats” 16 December 1977)

“Friel clearly believes in the necessity of playwright/audience communication, yet in the content of his plays he stresses the immense difficulty of any communication whatsoever. In plays like *Translations* he dramatically emphasizes the difficulty, and indeed near impossibility, of accurate translations between cultures, languages, and even individuals. He constantly manipulates language, personal and public history, and dramatic form in an effort to forge that perceiving entity at the same time that he remains sceptical of the possibility of successfully transmitting content to the audiences receiving it.”
Notes from the Director:

This is a play I have lived with for a long time and I have included material about hedge schools, mapping and Friel’s thoughts working on the play because I wanted to give some context for the history present in the play, the making of it, and the discourse it provoked. In particular, I wanted to note Friel’s elision of historical moments so that the introduction of the National School and the surveying of the country overlap. I believe that Friel makes this alteration in order to emphasize the underlying and profound force of these seemingly benign acts of schooling and mapping. Indeed, the play is a near perfect demonstration of Althusser’s notion of ideological state apparatuses supported by military ones combining to subject the subjects of the state. Yet, the act of working on the play had little to explicitly do with these thoughts. Friel was only able to bring his ideas together when he heard the story of a hedge school ancestor who was fond of a drop. He found a character who could be eloquently insightful yet always suspect at the same time. Indeed in this play (and the one he wrote to be seen with it in tandem) his characters at their most eloquent are constantly undermined, indeed self-undermining (my italics):

Translations:

HUGH. I look at James and three thoughts occur to me: A—that it is not the literal past, the ‘facts’ of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. James has ceased to make that discrimination. ... B—we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilise. Is there no soda bread?
Notes from the Director continued...

The Communication Cord:

TIM. This is where we all come from.
DONOVAN. Indeed.
TIM. This is our first cathedral.
DONOVAN. Amen to that.
TIM. This shaped all our souls. This determined our first pieties. This is a friend of mine.

And working on the play revealed that it lives not in the ideas but in the dramatic (and comic) moments, in the dark places of the individual soul. Together with a wonderful and hard working group of actors, designers and crew (I can’t thank you all enough), I have discovered the immense importance of the sound of the rain, the light on wood and stone, the dishevelled eloquence of some old clothing, the uses of a surveyor’s pole, the banter between students in the school room, the multiplying love triangles and, ultimately, the almost unbearable balance of comic and tragic forces.

“Uncertainty in meaning is incipient poetry.”

“Indeed.”

This is a map to assist you in locating the far flung washrooms of the new Taché Hall facility.

If you require further guidance, please do not hesitate to approach Front of House staff or the nearest Usher.
From Hedge School to National School

Extract from THE HEDGE SCHOOLS OF IRELAND by P.J. Dowling.

“The Hedge Schools owed their origin to the suppression of all the ordinary legitimate means of education, first during the Cromwellian regime and then under the Penal Code introduced in the reign of William III and operating from that time till within less than twenty years from the opening of the nineteenth century ...”

“The Hedge Schools were the most vital force in popular education in Ireland during the eighteenth century. They emerged in the nineteenth century more vigorous still, outnumbering all other schools, and so profoundly national as to haste the introduction of a State system of education in 1831...”

Extract from A HISTORY OF IRELAND by Edmund Curtis

“In 1831 Chief Secretary Stanley introduced a system of National Education . . . The system became a great success as an educational one but it had fatal effects on the Irish language and the old Gaelic tradition. According to Thomas Davis, at this time the vast majority of the people living west of a line drawn from Derry to Cork spoke nothing but Irish daily and east of it a considerable minority. It seems certain that at least two millions used it as their fireside speech . . . But the institution of universal elementary schools where English was the sole medium of instruction, combined with the influence of O’Connell, many of the priests, and other leaders who looked on Irish as a barrier to progress, soon made rapid inroads on the native speech . . .”

Coming Soon:

*Empathy*

*By John Patrick*

**Date:** February 14-16

**Location:** John J. Conklin Theatre in the Gail Asper Performing Arts Hall
Friela on the genesis of the play

Extract from *Making a Reply to the Criticisms of Translations by J. H. Andrews*

At any given time every playwright has half a dozen ideas that drift in and out of his awareness. For about five years before I wrote Translations there were various nebulous notions that kept visiting me and leaving me: a play set in the nineteenth century, somewhere between the Act of Union [1801] and the Great Famine [1845-47]; a play about Daniel O’Connell and Catholic emancipation; a play about colonialism; and the one constant - a play about the death of the Irish language and the acquisition of English and the profound effects that that change-over would have on a people . . . During that same period . . . I learned that a great-great-grandfather of mine, a man called McCabe from County Mayo, had been a hedge-schoolmaster, had left Mayo and had come up to Donegal where he settled; and it was whispered in the family that he was fond of a drop.

From *Extracts from a Sporadic Diary kept while working on Translations*

29 May 1979

Reading and rereading Colby and Andrews and O’Donovan and Steiner and Dowling. Over the same territories again and again and again. I am now at the point when the play must be begun and yet all I know about it is this:

I don’t want to write a play about Irish peasants being suppressed by English sappers.
I don’t want to write a threnody on the death of the Irish language.
I don’t want to write a play about land-surveying.
Indeed I don’t want to write a play about naming places.

And yet portions of all these are relevant. Each is part of the atmosphere in which the real play lurks.

6 July 1979

One of the mistakes of the direction in which the play is presently pulling is the almost wholly public concern of the theme: how does the eradication of the Irish language and the substitution of English affect this particular society? How long can a society live without its tongue? Public questions; issues for politicians; and that’s what is wrong with the play now. The play must concern itself only with the exploration of the dark and private places of individual souls.
Map making

Extracts From the letters of John O’Donovan, a civilian employee with the Ordnance Survey

Dun Fionnchada? Dun Fionnchon? Dunfanaghy

9 September 1835

“I am sick to death’s door of the names on the coast, because the name I get from one is denied by another of equal intelligence and authority to be correct. The only way to settle these names would be to summon a Jury and order them to say and present ‘uppon their Oathes’ what these names are ought to be. But there are several of them such trifling places that it seems to me that it matters not which of two or three appellations we give them. For example, the name Timlin’s Hole is not of thirty years standing and will give way to another name as soon as that dangerous hole shall have swallowed a fisherman of more illustrious name than Tim Lyn.”

Extract from the Spring Rice Report (advocating a general survey of Ireland) to the British Government; 21 June 1824:

“The general tranquility of Europe, enables the state to devote the abilities and exertions of a most valuable corps of officers to an undertaking, which, though not unimportant in a military point of view, recommends itself more directly as a civil measure. Your committee trust that the survey will be carried on with energy, as well as with skill, and that it will, when completed, be creditable to the nation, and to the scientific acquirements of the present age. In that portion of the Empire to which it more particularly applies, it cannot but be received as a proof of the disposition of the legislature to adopt all measures calculated to advance the interests of Ireland.”

(all extracts for Hedge Schools and Mapmaking qtd. in Field Day Theatre Program for the original production of Translations)

Coming soon:

**The Rover**

**By Aphra Behn**

**Date:** March 15-25

**Location:** John J. Conklin Theatre

in the

Gail Asper Performing Arts Hall
PURCHASE A SEAT AND BE A PART OF
BLACK HOLE THEATRE HISTORY

Help the Black Hole Theatre Company launch
a new era of theatre education and exploration.

The University of Manitoba is offering
an exclusive opportunity to name a
seat in the new home of the Black
Hole Theater Company: the John J.
Conklin Theater, within the Gail Asper
Performing Arts Hall.

With a donation of $1,000, you can
have a commemorative plaque
installed on one of the new theater
seats. Group, class, reunion and
commemorative donations are
welcome and pledge payments can
be arranged. A limited number of
seats are available for naming.
All proceeds support our theatre,
and play a part in the University of
Manitoba’s $500 million Front and
Centre campaign.

Purchase your seat today through
our online donation form. Visit
give.umanitoba.ca, select “Enter
a fund name” from the drop down
menu and type in “Black Hole
Theatre seat sale.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
PLEASE CONTACT LORRAINE
DECOCK AT 204-474-7314 OR
LORRAINE.DECOCK@UMANITOBA.CA.
OR VISIT US ONLINE AT
GIVE.UMANITOBA.CA

FRONT AND CENTRE
THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA