

**HYBRIDITY AND COLONIAL DESIRE: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON  
TRANSLATIONS BY BRIAN FRIEL**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the postmodern world there is a need to address how European nations managed to subdue and reign over the cultures, also the consequences of colonialism on cultures and societies. So this paper will analyze Brian Friel's Translations through a postcolonial outlook. The present study posits postcolonial perspective on Translations through characters and themes. The destructive nature of Western imperialism is highlighted through the characters of Lieutenant Yolland, Maire, Owen and Captain Lancey. The paper will exclusively look on the postcolonial concepts as employed in the play through the key terms of appropriation, hybridity, mimicry, hegemony, and exoticism as put forward by Homi K. Bhabha and Gramsci.*

**KEYWORDS:** Postcolonialism, appropriation, hybridity, mimicry, hegemony, exoticism

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## INTRODUCTION

The violent subjugation and oppression of the British colonizer have affected the colonized gravely. Loomba (2007) unfolds that 84.6% of the covered surface of the earth became the colony or ex-colony due to colonialism (04). Postcolonialism operates with several factors such as culture, society, history and economics. Colonized are the silent and deprived Individuals at the mercy of colonizers as victims of Western imperialism.

Brian Friel is one of the most accomplished Irish playwrights. His poetic vision revolves around a language of theatre which involves communication of difficult ideas. His poetic sensibilities work on a wider level. Friel was born in Northern Ireland when Ireland was fighting for the home rule from the British. Friel himself was the son of a Derry schoolmaster. Friel was a part of the "generation of northern nationalists". The socio-political atmosphere of Ireland, and English rule over Ireland deeply affected him so he explored the socio-political context of Ireland, and Irish nationality in his works. These experiences of Friel became the subject matter of his controversial play *Translations*.

*Translations* was produced in 1980. Field Day Theatre Company was established by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea in 1980 and *Translations* was the primary play of this company. According to Kevin Whelan, Friel wrote *Translations* on 5 November 1979 which was considered "the height of the Northern conflict." The play can be scrutinized as "both a parable about, and a diagnosis of, the conditions of the post-partition Catholic community in Northern Ireland" (Whelan 4). The

arrangement of the dramatic action takes place in a school of Baile Beag, having a boundary formed by a row of bushes in an Irish speaking community at an afternoon in late August 1833. It was before the disastrous Famine of the 1840's. It was also the time when two proactive state ventures were being initiated in Ireland. One was the Ordnance Survey, which involved the standardized mapping of the country and the translation of Gaelic place names into English, and the introduction of national school systems in order to restore the informal system of hedge-schools that were already subsisting. Both these projects involved the replacement of Irish language with English; the national school system was to be strenuously in English language, while the old place names were to be replaced by the new maps in English. So Friel incorporates both of these controversial Englished projects in the backdrop for his play (Whelan 4). Thereby it provides an imagery for the historical relationship that exists between Ireland and England. The play highlights the Irish life in the 1970s and 1980s that was all about cultural identity and historical revisionism. According to *Irish Times*, Seamus Deane commented on it as "a sequence of events in history which are transformed by his writing into a parable of events in the present day" (Obituary: Brian Friel). According to Christopher Murray, Brian Friel is brilliant in *Translations* as he blends personal perception with cultural history and to tell an account which is straightforward and "an objective correlative for a nation's tragedy. *Translations* is, surely, Brian Friel's masterpiece" (3). The play traces the effects of British colonialism on the lives of the Irish people. Friel artfully presents the wide-ranging personal and cultural effects of a colonial operation. Friel reveals the declaration of imperial control through language, culture, and politics over Ireland. Whelan explains that colonization can never be just a political and community based situation but also "a psychic one" So *Translations* investigates the "psychodynamic effects of colonialism as they play out in the linguistic realm, where the private and the public spheres meet" (4). Colonialism represented English as emancipation, as the "golden bridge" that transferred the inhabitant beyond regional into the far reaching world, releasing the natives from localism by giving them inclusion in British life. But all this happened at the expense of the native language, by disregarding the native history and culture (Whelan 4). The critic James Fenton admired the play's depiction of colonialism and said, "Vigorous example of corrective propaganda". Friel himself said, the play is associated with "language and only language" (Obituary: Brian Friel). The act of re-mapping Ireland not only empowers its imperialist makers but it contributes to the loss of Irish culture and Irish language.

As the play progresses, Friel reveals Irish cultural extinction through his characters. Jimmy Jack lives in a delusional state-the world of Gaelic and classical myths. He blurs myth and reality which inhibits him to change and adapt. He lives in an imaginative world. He has lost all capacity to act physically. Maire's plan to escape Ireland and the potato blight can be seen as an urge to flee the critical situation of Ireland. Captain Yolland's attraction towards the Irish language and Ireland and then his sudden disappearance highlights the fact that the language barrier is difficult to surpass. Owen's role as a translator for the British makes him an ambivalent figure. Hugh is determined to teach in Irish when he knows that it will be replaced with English language and at the end of the play, he himself gets ready to teach English when he finally sees that English has taken place of the Irish language. So the play explores the side effects of linguistic, political and cultural changes on the Irish people and their feelings. Thus the key terms of the post colonialism can be applied to *Translations*.

**Literature Review:**

*Translations* has been examined through multiple perspectives. Some of them will be discussed in this section. Adineh Khojastehpour and Behnam Mirzababazadeh Fomeshi (2016) explored the idea of words as signals in *Translations*. Their research depicted Friel's view on Irish cultural nationalism and how Friel looked at the function of language and how the act of translation plays a critical role. They also analyzed the connection between language and culture by discussing the need that colonizers feel colonized to adopt the new culture. Edmund F. Dehoratius (2001) analyzed *Translations* by applying intertextuality. Dehoratius explores the play as "modernodyssey" by creating intertextuality between *Translations* and its classical texts. Friel tries to resolve the cultural adversity. Maria Laura Barberan Reinares's (2007) research discusses remapping and renaming Ireland. The research explores the relationship between language and culture by applying Ngugi's ideas. It also employs Declan Kiberd's ideas towards language, culture and identity.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research is qualitative and exploratory in nature. Through critical reading of *Translations*, data is collected and analyzed. This paper involves textual analysis. Textual analysis highlights hybridity, mimicry, appropriation, hegemony, exoticism and much more.

**Discussion and Analysis:**

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *Post-Colonial Studies*, describe 'appropriation' as an expression used to trace the manner in which diaspora communities adopt and embrace those features of the imperial culture which are useful to them in illuminating their own social and cultural identities such as language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument. This process is sometimes used to describe the strategy by which the dominant imperial power incorporates as its own the territory or culture that it surveys and invades. The dominant language and its discursive forms are appropriated to express widely differing cultural experiences (15). Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe notes that the language which is used can "bear the burden of another experience" and this is actually the most prominent statement in post-colonial discourse as the power of appropriation (16). So appropriation means when you take something from someone else without their consent and you use it for your own sake.

Appropriation is a significant idea in *Translations*. The plot of the play revolves around British domination which takes into account the process of manipulation of communication that is language and culture. The British take over Irish language and Irish land as these aspects are of great use to them in order to introduce their own culture and its assumptions. Place names are of great importance as they have a certain personal quality to them. Their place names are in Irish so by replacing these names with a foreign language whole land will become a foreign land for them. Roland Rollins suggests, to give a name to something has always been enchanting and magnetic because it's a declaration of power. There is always some kind of custom and practice associated with the naming of a person. Naming has become a critical and characteristic power. Our presence, our magic is attached to the things we name (1). The British anglicize the names of places, turn into something which is suitable to them and easy for them to understand and pronounce. They

take over Irish language and introduce their own as it is suitable to them and easy for them to pronounce those names in their own language. Brian Friel makes use of the play's title-the prospect of the abuse of the power that is significant in the translation of one language into another. It is the exploration of the manners in which intrusion can be carried out without using any physical force. It also highlights the fact that how a culture can be transformed through translation. *Translations* probes the worthlessness of trying to translate a culture through the process of replacing the native language and how that process results in "culture Clash". This highlights the troubles between the Irish and the British. Moreover, the power of language is a pivotal point in the play. The process of translation is always related to the power of language and the power that comes with controlling language. If one wants to destroy a culture and a whole nation, then the first thing one can do is to take away their language. Because language is the shared mode of communication. Language is significant in a nation's civilization and the destruction of language is the destruction of the civilization of that nation. Friel establishes the idea that language and communication are significantly related to power and identity. Also, Friel focuses on the process of translation which is not a simple act in which a new name is given to an object. The true essence of the object gets lost in the act of translation as it creates a new meaning. It becomes the reinterpretation of the object and the new name aligns with the cultural into which the object gets translated. So the essence of the original and the purity of the meaning are never maintained in the new language. According to Roland Rollins, it is tragic that the translating process replaced all the Irish names with new, standardized English names. Consequently cutting them off from their identity-their culture, their living and their language-leaving them helpless and sidelined in an unfamiliar new world with unusual language symbols (2). So English language's invasion robs Ireland of its roots, culture, and etymological meanings of the names of the places are being carried away. All these aspects are lost forever as an unwelcome culture takes over the native culture which becomes the cause of the collapse of the Irish language. Sarah, who is a mute, she "has a speech defect...considered locally to be dumb and she has accepted this" (1). Friel utilizes her character to show the importance of verbal communication. Sarah faces extreme difficulty in expressing her opinions and views. Friel represents the idea that if Ireland becomes an English speaking country then all the people would become as clueless to communicate as Sarah is, as it is hard for the native people to pronounce English language. Sarah's character symbolizes Ireland which is not able to speak English and become as dumb in the eyes of the British as Sarah is when she tries to express herself.

Roland Rollins argues that this two-pronged English assault on this island colony, it was basically a trading project created to ease and advance to highest the move of Irish merchandise and services in Ireland with new and easily identifiable English labels. It was arranged to realize two intentions. One was to separate Irish from their past and from their values to be in charge of their future, a control that was intentionally associated with alteration and modification of Irish geography and national school system, especially the use of language. First, the British imperialists will perform a frontal lobotomy upon the village of Ballybeg and the rest of the country, immediately diminishing the Irish to cultural illiterates, to speechless and dumbstruck children undecided about their identities and the new road signs appearing everywhere. Then the British, controlling the school system, will write a new script upon the Irish tabula rasa, changing the disoriented Irish into bewildered, inarticulate workers surviving and moiling in still another of colonial England's

market places (3). Maire, the "strong-bodied" milkmaid who brings cans of milk to "Big Hughie" and his crippled son Manus who live in the loft of this school-barn, explains how different life will be for her Irish-speaking associates at the new national school. She is of the view that from the very first day at the new school, no one will hear any word spoken in Irish language as they will be taught English and to speak English because every subject will be taught through English. Everything will be in English so she thinks that they will end up "as cute as the Bunrana people" (5).

According to Suzy Clarkson Holstein, the goals that the British want to achieve here are quite crystal clear: Captain Lancey's first speeches make clear to everyone who can understand English that the Ordnance Survey will allow both taxation and military activities. Conjugation leads to subjugation (3). As critic George O'Brien observes, "to change names thus is to replace . . . assumptions and, in the case in point, to speak of the townland of Bally- beg not merely in terms of hill and stream, but in terms of control, such as law property, taxation and the like" (106).

Another important concept is 'hybridity'. Hybridity happens when a colonized person acquires some of colonizer's ways and practices and develops a 'subjectivity' that blends the colonizer with the colonized. Homi K. Bhabha's name has been associated with this term. New transcultural forms are created within the zone developed by colonization (108). The concept of hybridity can be seen in the characters of Maire and Owen. Maire wishes to go live in Brooklyn or somewhere other than Ireland. But she is unable to truly connect with the Ireland or with the British. Although she wants to go somewhere else, she keeps coming back to the hedge school, representing the Irish who are never able to fit into the culture or find their identity. Maire thinks "nobody's going to pay to go to a hedge school" (16). But she herself attends that hedge school. Maire believes "we should all be learning to speak English" (24). She also believes that the old language is a barrier to modern progress. That's why she wants English. On the other hand, Owen has transformed himself according to the British ways yet he still remembers things from his land. For instance the story about the well's name 'Tobair Vree' (53). He still remembers that connection to his land yet he wants to change that connection according to the British ways. He thinks there is nothing 'sinister' in anglicizing the names of the places (52). Owen's role as a translator makes him an ambivalent figure which in itself is a prison as he realizes when he is forced to translate the violent threats of Lancey when Yolland disappears in Act 3.

'Hegemony' is the domination by consent. Gramsci investigated the ruling class as it contributes to its own interests in society. Ruling class has the power to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is not acquired forcibly but by using a more convincing and indirect power over language, culture, education and economy (106). *Translations* revolves around the concept of hegemony as the British enter in Baile Beag with their 'Theodolite' and the locals do not even question them. British are there to replace Irish language with English which contributes to identity loss and loss of Irish language and culture. The act of re-mapping Ireland not only empowered its imperialist makers but it contributes to the loss of Irish culture and language. Nobody questions the authority of the British that why are they measuring their land. They are very welcoming that it seems everything is happening with their consent. The act of standardization is dehumanization of the Ireland. The play highlights the power of language and

power that comes with controlling the language. The British give the impression for the hegemony that “Ireland is privileged” (34). Kelvin Whelan says, the military characteristics and armed details of the survey are given special importance: “weapons- carrying sappers, army searches, 'prodding every inch of the ground with bayonets' and (in a significant pun) 'levelling the whole land'.” The stolen theodolite is displayed as if it were a weapon. Similarly, the ominous Donnelly twins convey the significance and threat of the modern Provos (6). The native people ignore every sign of the British invasion.

According to *Postcolonial Studies the Key Concepts*, ‘Mimicry’ is a significant and an increasingly important term in post-colonialism, because it manifests the relationship between colonizer and colonized and the relationship is ambivalent in nature. Colonialism urges the colonized to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by taking on manners, cultural habits, assumptions, and values of the colonizer (125). The concept of Mimicry is introduced through the character of Owen. Owen thinks that the idea of New Ireland, dominated by the British is a good thing. Owen is described as a young man “dressed smartly” “a city man” (26). Owen is an example of mimicry in *Translations*. He mimics the English, their manners and their culture throughout the play. Owen speaks the language of the colonizers and he is there to facilitate the colonizers. He does not really feel connected to his own land. It seems he is in desperate need to adopt everything which the colonizers are offering and constantly tries to be one of them. He is happy with the role colonizers are playing in his native land so he does not question them. Owen introduces Captain Lancey and Yolland as “friends of mine” (28) but in reality, Lancey’s character is dominating. When Captain Lancey comes and announces the Ordnance survey, Owen sugarcoats what Lancey says in a harsh, non-considerate way. Rollins argues, after Lancey's performance, the two brothers - the stylish Owen and the crippled Manus - meet downstage to evaluate the English officers and to discuss Owen's translations in one of the most significant scenes in this play about the use and abuse of language (5). Boldly accusing Owen of not "saying what Lancey was saying", Manus provides his own translation of Lancey's remarks, adding that the map-making project is nothing but "a bloody military operation" (36). Owen does not feel anything wrong whatever the British are doing in Ireland. Owen translates wrongly the whole conversation including the moment when Maire speaks and Owen translates as “she says she is dying to hear you” (35). Owen looks down upon his own people in trying to imitate the British ways. When Manus questions him about the wrong translation, Owen acts as if he has not done anything wrong. He does not feel anything disturbing in Irish language being anglicized. He does not question why they call him ‘Roland’ instead of calling him Owen because he wants to mimic their manners. He thinks “it’s only a name” (37). While working on the six inch map of the country, Owen believes they are only changing the names of the places because those names are “riddled with confusion and...” (52). He thinks they are standardizing those names “as accurately and as sensitively as we can” (52) He does not consider the fact that in translating those names the original names and their essence will get lost. So Owen completely adopts colonial assumptions.

Exoticism refers to the idea in which colonized culture appears stimulating and exciting because it is different from the colonizer’s culture. So the colonized culture appears foreign and alien to colonizers because it is different from the normal culture of the colonized. Exoticism is present through the character of Yolland in *Translations*. Yolland is attracted by the Irish land because

Ireland and Irish language is the 'exotic other'. Yolland wants to live in Ireland as he tells Owen, "Do you think I could live here?" "Settle down here—live here" "It's really heavenly" (45). Yolland who falls for Maire, expresses his grief over the gap which is present between two cultures and laments in front of Owen that even if he learns the native language he would still be an outsider in this community: "Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be ... hermetic"(48). Owen says "You can learn to decode us" (48). But Friel suggests that such 'decoding' is not possible. As Suzy Clarkson Holstein suggests, there is a fundamental misunderstanding that happens between Maire and Yolland as they see each other as a door which open into a new world. Maire is of the opinion that Yolland will take her away from her overpopulated home and her overburdened land. On the other hand, we have Yolland who considers Baile Beag as a Gaelic paradise where he will "always" live with Marie. Only because they do not speak each other's language, so they can fall in love with each other (7).

In addition, the play also highlights the fact that forcibly assimilation through the loss of language and culture generates alienation which further contributes to the idea of the dominating intruder. Alienation can be seen in the character of Sarah. Her character withdraws from regular social discourse. She loses her whole personality to such a degree that she faces difficulties in merely speaking out her own name. Vocalizing her own name becomes almost a mystical experience for her. So forced assimilation creates alienation.

To sum up, post-colonial terms appropriation, hegemony, mimicry, hybridity and exoticism are vital and significant throughout the play. *Translations* gives expression to all the characters living in colonized space.

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