

### *Translations* Blurb:

How important is language? The ability to communicate effectively with those you love, as well as to strangers? We probably take it for granted, but for some, the ability to speak the language we know and love is not always an option. Brian Friel's drama *Translations* strikes the heart of this concern head on as he looks back on 1833 Ireland and decisions the Irish were asked, and forced, to make under British Imperial rule. It tells the story of a small group of local tenant farmers who are unwittingly being forced to give up their land rights under the façade of "mapping" by the English government. His characters are as real as they are timeless, and their stories of struggling to survive in an oppressed state teach the true power, and price, of resistance.

### Directorial Vision:

"It can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of...fact" (Friel, 52).

Disillusionment is the primary term I would apply to Friel's "Translations" because it focuses on a group of small tenant farmers who want to be educated, but who are torn between maintaining a false bravado to the Romantic ideal of Irish history and accepting colonization as a natural process that moves people into the future. The Irish have a torrid history of not giving up without a fight, and many keep a stranglehold on those few leaders who have fought to the death to show that the Irish will not give up without a fight. Their mythological heroes show this, Jimmy Jack's reference to Thermopylae accents this, as well as Hugh's final speech about the young upstarts who attempt to prevent Juno from unifying all the earthly kingdoms.

On the one side you have the Doaltys and the Bridgets, who actively seek conflict between the English and the Irish as an opportunity to continue the legacy of obstinacy in accepting domination by a stronger country. With them, but not openly violent, appear to be Jimmy Jack and Hugh, who hold onto the past – "the classics" as well as their Irish folk heroes – and do not see the benefit of learning to speak English. Hugh comes around on this issue by the end, but Jimmy Jack, for all his genius, doesn't see the irony of preferring Athene over Grania, the beauty of a conquering class hero over the most beautiful of the conquered class. On the other side you have Maire and Owen, who recognize the importance of progress, and who actively seek to move forward – Maire to learn English and move to America, and Owen to pursue business in the city centre of Dublin, and who speaks English for purposes of commerce/business perfectly well. Then there are those who don't know *where* they stand: Sarah, Manus. None are fully capable of pursuing their desires, so each vacillates in a limbo of purpose, doing what they've always done in an attempt at progress, which is really only stagnancy.

Because the Yollands of the world have a tendency to throw a wrench in these simple dichotomies, we have conflict which intensifies the disillusionment and confusion: "The Lanceys of the world I understand perfectly but people like [Yolland] puzzle me," says

Manus. Whose side is he on? He's no more confident than Maire or Hugh, but at least he's open about his desires. Captain Lancey is two-dimensional, and represents the English perspective of domination. No character aside from Lancey is clearly defined, so the actors have the unique boon of being able to make decisions that will push his/her character in one direction or the other.