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ESSAYS

Kevin Whelan 7  Between: The Politics of Culture in Friel'sTranslations

Michael Cronin 29  Kate O'Brien and the Erotics of Liberal Catholic Dissent

Emer Nolan 53  Sinéad O'Connor: The story of a voice

Paul A. Bové 71  Misprisions of Utopia: Messianism, Apocalypse, and Allegory

Luke Gibbons 95  The Addressivity of the Eye: James Coleman’s Connemara Landscape

Breandán Ó Buachalla

Alan Titley 105  Uamhnach Ultach ag moladh Muimhnigh

Cathal Goan 109  Fláith na nÉigeas

Thomas Bartlett 113  The Pursuit of Helen Landreth: Robert Emmet, Gender and Historical Scholarship in Mid-Twentieth-Century Ireland

Catherine Morris 133  Alice Milligan: Republican Tableaux and the Revival

Terry Eagleton 167  Culture, Atheism and the War on Terror

REVIEWS

Seamus Deane 179  'To See Again The Stars' Dictionary of Irish Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2002
Triangulation point and cairn.

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Between:
The Politics of Culture in Friel’s Translations
Kevin Whelan

_Curae leves loquuntur ingentes stupent._

[This is the second of two essays saluting Brian Friel on his 80th birthday and acknowledging the 30th anniversary of his play _Translactions_. The first essay, ‘Brian Friel’s _Translations_: The Origins of a Cultural Experiment’, by Ciarán Deane, appeared in _Field Day Review 5_.]

Brian Friel was born in 1929 at Kilclogher, near Omagh in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, the son of a Derry schoolmaster and a Donegal postmistress, a child of partitioned Ireland. He later moved just across the border into County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. He has lived for many years in Greencastle, opposite Magilligan in Derry, where the base camp of the Ordnance Survey was located, and where its triangulation began.

Partition created marooned minorities on both sides of the border: substantial poor Protestant communities were exiled in Monaghan, Cavan, and especially Donegal. They too were silenced post-partition. The favoured trope in fiction and drama for the plight of the Protestant landed class was the Big House as doomed remnant of culture and civility; the plight of poorer Protestants found no comparable representation. Friel has written ‘Big House’ plays, _Aristocrats_ (1979), with the twist that the proprietors are Catholics, and _The Home Place_ (2005).
opposition to it in the 1920s, Northern Irish Catholics were cowed into silence. Abandoned by both the British and Irish states, they became a subdued, silent, watchful generation, internalizing their sense of historic betrayal. Friel taught for many years in Derry, and he has described ‘the personal, traditional and acquired knowledge that cocooned me: an Irish Catholic teacher with a nationalist background, living in a schizophrenic community’.5 He diagnosed the Catholic population there as ‘a dispossessed people living in a state they never subscribed to, with Donegal lying just across the bay. Janus-like, they had one head looking to the north and one looking to the south.’6 Friel considered northern nationalists as being ‘at home but in exile’,7 and talked of them (and himself) feeling like ‘an exile in your home’, their birthright more a disinheritance than an inheritance.8 And yet lurking somewhere in the Northern Catholic imagination at this time was what Friel has called ‘the secret notion we nurtured that in some ridiculous way we were the true keepers of some true notion of what being Irish meant. The Free State squandered and abused that idea. We guarded it in suffering silence.’ 9

Translations was the foundational play of the Field Day Theatre Company,10 established in 1980 by Friel and Stephen Rea. Friel finished writing it at the height of the northern conflict on 5 November 1979, and it was first produced on 23 September 1980 in the Guildhall, Derry.11 The play can be read as both a parable about, and a diagnosis of, the conditions of the post-partition Catholic community in Northern Ireland. Field Day sought to deploy the communal effects of theatre to release Northern Ireland in particular from its numbing violence and stasis. Friel identified his involvement in the enterprise as stemming from dúchas/pietas—‘a sense of loyalty and dutifulness towards one’s own home’.

The play is set in a Donegal hedge-school in 1833, before the devastating Famine of the 1840s, at a time when two controversial state projects were being introduced: the standardized mapping of the country by the Ordnance Survey, and the national system of education to replace the existing informal system of hedge-schools. Both had implications for the Irish language; the national schools were to be rigorously English-speaking, while the new maps would render the old place names in English orthography. Friel combines both of these anglicizing projects in the setting for his play. Colonialism is never just a political and economic condition but also a psychic one. Translations probes the psychodynamic effects of colonialism as they play out in the linguistic realm, where the private and the public spheres meet. Masquerading as a version of universalism, colonialism presented the acquisition of English as a liberation, the golden bridge that carried the native beyond localism into the world at large, rescuing him from provincialism by awarding full participation in British civic life. The toll required was the relinquishment of the native language, disavowal of native history, severance from native culture. Edward Said’s memoir Out of Place probes the meaning of a displaced linguistic identity:

The basic split in my life was the one between Arabic, my native language, and English, the language of my education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher, and so trying to produce a narrative of one in the language of the other — to say nothing of the numerous ways in which the languages were mixed up for me and crossed over from one realm to the other — has been a complicated task.12

The master text for Translations is George Steiner’s After Babel.13 Steiner emphasized that a language constitutes a community of shared history and aspirations, and that, accordingly, each language remains incommensurable and opaque to translation:

Cited from a 1973 interview by Friel, in Tony Corbett, Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe (Dublin, 2002), 107.
7 Murray, ed., Brian Friel, 106.
9 Paul Delaney, ed., Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe (Dublin, 2002), 107.
11 The most complete treatment of the context of the original production is Ciarán Deane, ‘Brian Friel’s Translations: The Origins of a Cultural Experiment’, Field Day Review, 5 (2009), 7–47.
They are the instruments of storage and transmission of legacies of experience and imaginative construction particular to a given community ... Languages communicate inwards to the native speaker with a density and pressure of shared intimation which are only partly, grudgingly yielded to the outsider. A major portion of language is enclosure and willed opaqueness.  

Friel’s borrowings from Steiner include some of the best-known lines in the play: ‘Uncertainty of meaning is incipient poetry’; ‘a syntax opulent with tomorrows’; ‘Often cultures seem to expend on their vocabularies and syntax acquisitive energies and ostentations entirely lacking in their material lives’; ‘All communication “interprets” between privacies’; ‘Confusion is not an ignoble condition’; ‘It is not the lived past, the
“facts” of history that shape us but images of the past embodied in language’; ‘The fixity of a linguistic contour ... which matches only at certain, ritual, arbitrary points the changing landscape of fact’.15 Friel’s adroit manipulation of quotation and of intertextual echo is a rhetorical strategy, enhancing the central action of the play in its rehearsal of the oscillation between the historical and the interpretative. Deliberate anachronisms, like the use of the word ‘cartographer’ (first used in 1839) or ‘contour’ (from c.1860), extend this strategy and allow for the interpolation of the contemporary conflict in Northern Ireland. The military aspects of the survey are emphasized: weapons-carrying sappers, army searches, ‘prodding every inch of the ground with bayonets’ and (in a significant pun) ‘levelling the whole land’. The stolen theodolite16 is wielded as if it were a weapon. Similarly, the ominous Donnelly twins carry the resonance and threat of the modern Provos. Friel therefore has argued that questions of historical accuracy are fundamentally beside the point. Translations is ultimately a language play not a history play, an emphasis that Friel himself constantly stressed: ‘The play has to do and only to do with language.’ 17 He wished to understand what it means to become a

15 These were first carefully tracked by F. C. McGrath, ‘Irish Babel: Brian Friel’s Translations and George Steiner’s After Babel’, Comparative Drama, 23, 1 (1989), 31–49.
16 Friel is drawn to visually striking instruments and the technical vocabularies that identify them and their functions. The Home Place (2005) makes extensive use of the exotic instrumentation of ethnographic calibration.
people having to use a language ‘that isn’t our own’ and how Irish people today respond to ‘having to handle a language that is not native to them’. Consider Friel’s own mastery of the language as in a deceptively simple phrase like ‘English cannot express us’: this has at least three mutually enriching meanings in this context — to hurry us up, to squeeze us out, to describe us.

The Language of Landscape

Friel’s programme notes list other sources that he used — John O’Donovan’s *Ordnance Survey Letters: Donegal*; Thomas Colby’s *Memoir*; J. H. Andrews’s, *A Paper Landscape*; Patrick J. Dowling’s *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*; and William Carleton’s vivid treatment in *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. A *Paper Landscape* provided Friel with ‘a perfect metaphor’ for the trauma of the linguistic lesion in nineteenth-century Ireland, although his expansive treatment moves far beyond that of the austere scholarly cartographic historian.

The mapping of Ireland had been a long-standing colonial ambition. The native Irish tradition of *dind seanchas* (place lore) relied on a narrative rather than a technical mode of surveying the landscape. It produced a cultural landscape that coded a reciprocal, vernacular relationship between a community and its environment, not imposed from outside or above but developed cumulatively, spontaneously, organically. The material practices and associated symbolic forms that comprised this cultural landscape had a dual function. The first was secular, pragmatic, social; the second was symbolic, cultural, associational. The lived landscape provided a locus for human affection, imprinted as remembered forms, ways of being, ways of living, ways of seeing, ways of knowing. This version of landscape connected its outer contours with an inner vision: in place names the landscape and the imagination meet. Place names are an accumulated repertoire of historical knowing, a narrative sediment deposited by the continuous flow of history. The sense of place fuses a material environment, a historical experience and a lived reality, and is encapsulated in the Irish word *dúchas*. This version of landscape is embedded in the Irish tradition — the place lore of the *dind seanchas*, a *liber locorum, lieux de mémoire*, in which each place name bears a specific density of meaning. In *Translations*, Friel draws on this tradition. As the phrase *la France profonde* is widely used to indicate, even evoke, deeply enduring (or still surviving) aspects of French culture,
so a ‘Deep Ireland’ is evoked by place names, a pre-colonial history still legible in them. Friel’s contemporary, the poet John Montague, makes the point:

The Irish landscape is a kind of primal Gaeltacht ... anyone brought up in it has already absorbed a great deal of the language. And to return to my Knockmany poem; when I wrote those lines about the hills burning with ‘golden light’, did I realize that I was crossing the

Mick O’Dea, b. 1958
Portrait of Brian Friel, 2009
Oil on canvas
Unframed: 60.5 × 50.5cm
Photo © National Gallery of Ireland
In historical geography, the term ‘cultural landscape’ denotes the landscape as it is altered by human occupation: fields, farms, roads, towns, houses, place names; see F. H. A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout, eds., *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Cork, 1997).

See the pioneering treatment of the concept of *duchas* by Peter McQuillan in his *Key Words of the Irish Language: Essays in the Irish Ideas of Identity and Freedom* (Cork, 2002).

John Montague, ‘A Primal Gaeltacht’, in his *The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays* (Dublin, 1989), 42–44, 44. Montague was born in 1929, the same year as Friel, in Brooklyn. In 1933 he was sent to live with his aunts at Garvaghey, County Tyrone, the same county where Friel was born. His *The Rough Field* (Dublin, 1972) is structured around an extended meditation on the meaning of Garvaghey/Garbh Achaithd/ache/rough Field, as a metaphor for understanding the modern conflict.


Bealtaine, the ridge of the god of fire? The racial aspect of a poet’s inheritance should be unconscious as breathing. Where I was brought up, Irish is no longer a spoken language, but it is still very much alive in the place-names and the local idiom ... I must tap tradition where I find it, in my part of the landscape.

The Ordnance Survey project became for Friel a dramatic metaphor of both colonialism and the linguistic issue in Ireland. The 1830s mapping sought to give definitive shape to a long-standing project that went back to the seventeenth century. This cartographic transition from the Irish *dind seancha* to the new colonial language and landscape of fact reached an early culmination in the pioneering work of William Petty (1623–87). Petty’s ‘political arithmetic’ (the origin of the discipline of economics) was itself a response to the upheavals consequent on the Reformation: he sought to rescue ‘facts’ from the murderous anarchy of theological disputation, which threatened to tear Britain apart in the mid-seventeenth century. By rescuing ‘facts’ (generated by mathematical and technical protocols) from the partisan wrangling of theologians and politicians, Petty sought a common ground of reason. Rhetorically, he promoted the ‘plain’ style, shorn of baroque excess, inviting the consent of common experience and of a rationality based on observation and measurement. Facts in such a discursive regime were as far as possible divested of historical memory; indeed, their claim to obdurate, scientific reality depended on their repudiation of cultural ramification as a significant dimension of knowledge. Petty’s Down Survey (so-called because the results for the first time were systematically set down on paper) was based on innovations in mathematical mensuration, precise instrumentation and bureaucratic efficiency. It should also be regarded as an effort to strip the inherited Irish landscape of meaning and narrative. This great humanist scientist, like his predecessor, the great poet Edmund Spenser, advocated genocide as a necessary prelude to a new beginning in Ireland. Maps did not only record, they also obliterated.

The Hedge-School Setting

The patriot Henry Grattan brusquely observed in 1811:

One great object of national education should be to unite the inhabitants of the island and such an event cannot be well accomplished except they are taught one common language. I think that the diversity of language, and not the diversity of religion, constitutes a diversity of people. I should be very sorry that the Irish language should be forgotten but glad that the English language would be generally understood ... A real political division is founded on the diversity of language.

His utilitarian-Benthamite stance was matched by Daniel O’Connell in 1833:

I am sufficiently utilitarian not to regret its [the Irish language’s] gradual abandonment. A diversity of tongues is no benefit; it was first imposed on mankind as a curse, at the building of Babel. It would be a vast advantage to mankind if all the inhabitants of the earth spoke the same language. Therefore, although the Irish language is connected with many recollections that twine around the hearts of Irishmen, yet the superior utility of the English tongue, as the medium of all modern communication, is so great, that I can witness without a sigh the gradual disuse of the Irish.

The determined effort by state and Church to regain control of popular education via a national system stemmed from the conviction that the 1790s had exposed the
political danger of allowing an informal education sector (the ‘hedge-schools’) to flourish with minimal supervision by Church and state. For conservatives, the dominant role of schoolmasters in the United Irish organization at local level had been one of the most disturbing aspects of that decade. Masterless men, hedge-school teachers were to be feared as agents of sedition. Outside the reach of Church and state, they had a foot — and a tongue — in both worlds: ‘From this it follows then that education is your only resource; ‘tis this alone can open to you all channels of instruction, and this will enable you to meet the enemy, who has secretly got possession, not only on equal terms, but with superior advantage.’

Richard Lovell Edgeworth (father of the novelist Maria) observed: ‘It is fresh in our memories that in the progress of the last rebellion in this country, those who could read or write were at first disapproved of the mixed education of the informal schools: ‘the children are piled on each other and the sexes promiscuously jumble together’. Educational historians have been hasty in endorsing these partisan attacks. Yet the most striking feature of the hedge-schools was their pragmatism and success. How, for instance, was the astonishing language transition in Ireland in the hedge-school period achieved or how did Ireland become English-speaking, if not through the medium of the hedge-school? The most effective anglicizing influence in eighteenth-century Ireland, the hedge-schools were not an archaizing, but a modernizing force. Their wholesale absorption into the new system shows that what occurred was a takeover, not a radical reform, by the state.

The very term ‘hedge-school’ was a semantic deformation. It originated in the common English usage of ‘hedge’ as ‘an attribute expressing contempt’ (OED), for example, hedge-doctor, hedge-lawyer, hedge-alehouse, etc. Because of the informal nature of popular, especially Catholic, education and the lack of accredited training for schoolteachers under the Penal Laws, the term ‘hedge-school’ was increasingly applied in this pejorative sense as the education debate intensified in the early nineteenth century when the word was popularized. The application of the term to mean schools held in the open air, or in the side of a ditch, is adventitious: the original derivation has simply been occluded. The English traveller Arthur Young was one of the first to use the term ‘hedge school’. The first literary use occurs in John O’Keefe’s play The Wicklow.
Flanagan’s close friend Seamus Heaney was the model for the poet/teacher Cormac McCarthy. Matt Frayne, the hedge-schoolmaster in Carleton’s popular *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830–33), became the model for future literary versions, in which the ‘master’ was regularly represented as the epitome of Gaelic Ireland, and his school as a site for a picturesque ‘Gaelic’ cultural dilapidation. Thomas Flanagan’s novel *The Year of the French* (1979) offers a modern example. The overblown romanticization of this figure conceals the English-speaking mundanity.
Thaddaeus [Thady] Connellan (1780–1854), a native of Skreen in County Sligo, received a ‘fair classical education’, started his own small school and became ‘a thorough Irish scholar’. He converted to Protestantism c.1808, and like many other ‘manuscript men’, he ran an evangelical Bible school dedicated to converting the native Irish through the medium of the Irish language. His *An Irish and English Spelling Book* reached a nineteenth edition by 1848, and he also produced *An English–Irish dictionary, Intended for the Use of Schools* (1814) and *The Proverbs of Solomon* (1823), containing English, Irish, and Hebrew versions. He died in great poverty in Sligo, and his funeral provoked bitter sectarian scenes. All previous accounts are superseded by the magisterial treatment in Pádraig de Brún, *Scriptural Instruction in the Vernacular: The Irish Society and Its Teachers 1818–1827* (Dublin, 2009), 14–39.

McGlinchey (1861–1954), a weaver and tailor of Meentiagh glen in the Inishowen peninsula of County Donegal (the setting of *Translations*). Friel edited and introduced the book *The Last of the Name*. He presents the old man, as he does Hugh in the play, as a Janus figure, inhabiting both ‘a rural community in the process of shedding the last vestiges of a Gaelic past and of an old Christianity that still cohabited with an older paganism’, and an emerging community coming to an uneasy accommodation with the modern world, ‘the buses, the cars, the silk stockings’. In forming this figure, Friel also had in mind his Irish-speaking and illiterate grandparents, and a great-great-grandfather McCabe, a hedge-schoolmaster from Mayo who settled in Donegal and who was remembered as being ‘fond of a drop’. This world was not at all remote in any sense — ‘It’s very close, you know’.

**John O’Donovan**

Friel has confirmed that the character Owen in the play is a version of John O’Donovan. O’Donovan, the indispensable Irish-language adviser to the Ordnance Survey, was appointed ‘orthographer and etymologist’ to the survey in 1830. He quickly acquired a pivotal role in the new topographical department, investigating the derivation of Irish place names. In 1834, he commenced on his heroic fieldwork, travelling on foot across Ireland to study the vast array of place names, sending back an inexhaustible flow of correspondence, at once witty, irascible and erudite (the justly celebrated ‘Ordnance Survey Letters’ from 1834 to 1841. He personally sourced 140,000 Irish place names in the field, and established the authorized versions in anglicized orthography, chosen to mimic the sound of the Irish-language names, which were subsequently inscribed on the Ordnance Survey maps, and which are still the legally binding versions of place names in the modern Republic of Ireland.

This little man (five feet, two inches) was a giant of nineteenth-century scholarship, the greatest-ever scholar of the Irish language. His exemplary edition, including text, translation and notes, of *Annála Rioghachta Éireann/Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland*, appearing in six volumes from 1848 to 1851, established new and formidably high scholarly standards for Irish-language material. His translations opened to English speakers the hitherto sealed casket of the Irish literary tradition. In that sense, O’Donovan was an indispensable precursor of the Literary Revival, which sought, in the aftermath of the linguistic shift from an Irish-speaking to an English-speaking Ireland, to establish a version of English sufficiently distinctive to anchor an Irish aesthetic. The Revival could be regarded as an extravagant discourse in the English language about dumbness in the Irish language. It craved access to the world of a vanished or vanishing Gaelic civilization, whose ambiguous absence must be brought to renewed presence in English-language forms. Hence the Revival featured strenuous efforts to invent a new English-based but distinctive language capable of that task. The experiments include W. B. Yeats’s occult dialect in *A Vision*, James Joyce’s molten English in *Finnegans Wake*, Lady Gregory’s Kiltartanese, heavily influenced by the sounds and grammatical forms of Hiberno-English, J. M. Synge’s variations on folk-dialect, and Samuel Beckett’s experiments in escaping ‘the Anglo-Irish exuberance and automatisms’ by writing in French and then back- translating into an almost comically austere English.

Yet despite O’Donovan’s eminence as an Irish-language scholar, none of his six surviving sons was an Irish speaker. He himself believed that the language did not merit a future role in the public sphere:

> I respect it as a great influence that has
been and no longer is or can be. It fed the poetical flame within the people’s mind, and was the parent of true poetry in the more cultivated: it nourished the latent, instinctive aspirations of the Irish race, gave them aliment, and directed their movements, and rescued their ancestors from the dominion of brutish ignorance, stirred them with insatiable thirst for true knowledge, which, when established on a right basis, will raise this ancient and imaginative people to a truly noble standard among the civilised nations of modern Europe: but its office has been fulfilled: it is no longer necessary to the exigencies of modern society, with which the Irish race must either amalgamate or perish. The only interest it can have is a historical or poetical one.  

Owen in Translations is ‘a city man’, ‘wealthy’, who ‘got out in time’: he shrugs
off his dual identity as Owen/Roland — ‘it’s the same me’, ‘a mistake’. He works for the benefit of the colonists, he is on their payroll, he is a go-between, and he is faintly soiled by the taint of being an informer. In the context of Northern Ireland in 1980, at the height of its dirty war, the long-standing Irish paranoia about informers had reached another culmination, driven to it by the new British tactic of employing ‘supergrass’ — informers whose uncorroborated testimony jailed large numbers of their former colleagues. Friel’s own comments are that O’Donovan could be seen both to have performed ‘the actions and the perfidy of a quisling’ but also to have embarked on a ‘task of honour’.52 (We are reminded of the long-standing joke among translators: traduttore/traditore, translator/traitor, as in the mocking nickname ‘the Translator’ given by Barcelona fans to José Mourinho.)53 William Hazlitt claimed in 1814 that ‘He who speaks two languages has no country’ — but adds: ‘The French, when they made their language the common language of the courts of Europe, gained more than by all their other conquests put together.’54 Here again in Translations a question is posed but not resolved: should we admire or condemn Owen/O’Donovan? And here, too, we can see a recurrent pattern in Friel’s work; his plays often feature an outsider figure whose comments on the action of the drama constitute a translation that is both a rational account of it and yet is suspect in virtue of its detachment, a distance that seems scandalous, as, for example, Tom Hoffnung in Aristocrats or Mabel Bagenal in Making History. Their ancestry ultimately extends to Thornton Wilder’s play Our Town (1938), whose Grover’s Corner is an obvious antecedent of Friel’s Ballybeg.

The Irish Language: ‘The Modern Babel’

We cannot properly weigh the language issue in Friel’s play unless we understand the contempt in which the Irish language was held at the end of the nineteenth century. Consider the contribution of John Pentland Mahaffy (1839–1919),55 provost of Trinity College, prolific, if erratic, classical scholar, leading Anglo-Irishman, and brilliant conversationalist.56 Mahaffy, a quintessential Trinity man, gave six decades of service as student, tutor, professor, senior fellow, vice-provost and provost: he was accordingly taken to speak as the official voice of Anglo-Ireland. He dismissed cultural nationalism as a diseased version of provincialism, and vigorously resisted efforts to have Irish taught as a subject at any level in the Irish education system. He disparaged Gaelic literature on the grounds that it was impossible to find a text in the language that was not ‘either religious, silly or indecent’.57 In his 1896 essay ‘A Modern Babel’, directed at a British audience, Mahaffy distinguished between advancing and receding civilizations: one spoke a universal imperial language; the other a local ‘tongue’. A common language like Latin or its modern successor English was ‘a lever of civilisation’: ‘The British tongue, like British gold, will probably pervade the world’ — ‘the great object which every promoter of imperial Britain interests should have in view’. He dismissed Irish as a ‘miserable remnant of barbarism’, ‘a most difficult and useless tongue, not only useless, but a mischievous obstacle to civilisation’ and sneered that Irish-language enthusiasts ‘might also turn their attention to the dying language of the Maories [sic] and the natives of Australia’.58 Thus the entire Revival project was a retrograde step, a retreat to the Dark Ages, a futile scrabbling in the ruins of Babel.

The Hidden Ireland

The most considered riposte to such dismissals came from Daniel Corkery.59 His cultural criticism was established on a Ruskinian basis of contempt for neo-classical ‘egotism’. From John Ruskin, he learned to value the integration of art and
Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) repudiated the use of violence as a political weapon and pursued moderate constitutional nationalist goals. Hard-line republicans regarded the party as too craven (the ‘Stoop Down Low Party’) in its response to the British presence. Its leader, and later Nobel Peace Prize winner, John Hume, was a Derry man, so an overtly political reading of the play would have resonated with the play’s first audience in the Guildhall in Derry, including Hume himself.

53 Mourinho worked at the Camp Nou, the Barcelona football stadium, in the 1990s translating for the English manager Bobby Robson—thus earning him the taunting nickname from Barcelona fans.


56 Mahaffy was a sparkling if malicious conversationalist and epigrammatist: ‘An Irish bull, Madam, is always pregnant.’ His The Principles of the Art of Conversation (1887) was reviewed by his pupil Oscar Wilde,

life as an expression of cultural unity that sustained social harmony. Yet it took him some time to realize that he was himself living in such a polity. When he had first seen Gaelic script in Cork shop signs, he thought that it was Chinese. Although the Cork city hinterland had vibrant Irish-speaking communities, he was incredulous that people still lived their lives through the language. Gradually, as his awareness of the language deepened, he came to regard living Irish-language communities as an antidote to the pallor and disconnectedness of modern urban life. Because these communities had never been severed from their ancient attachments, they did not suffer the dissociation of sensibility that Ruskin before him and T. S. Eliot after him diagnosed as a morbid symptom of modernity. In an Irish context, Yeats had striven, unconvincingly, to promote the Anglo-Irish Big House as an achieved culture, a serene remnant of the ancient unity: now Corkery transposed the