

In Other Words. Coming to Terms with Irish Identities through Translation: Readings of the Twelve Plays Produced by the Field Day Theatre Company, 1980-1991

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ABSTRACT

This thesis gauges the cultural intervention of the Field Day enterprise into the fraught politics of the Northern Irish 'Troubles' in the 1980s by uncovering the diverse ways in which notions of Irish identities were problematised in the dramatic productions of this group. It does this by concentrating on the predominance of the idea and act of translation in Field Day's output. Translation, it is argued, performs the contradictions that are inherent in the self's interactions with the other, and hence the contradictions that are inherent in constructions of identity.

Each play is read separately, but rather than being considered in chronological order, the dramas are thematically grouped together. The chapter themes are all aspects of the act and idea of translation: mapping and naming; home, domestication, hospitality and hostility; fidelity to the spirit and/or the letter; the (im)possibility of reciprocation and resolution; duplicity and treason; and the ways in which history can be considered as an act of translation. These themes are all suggested in Field Day's first production, Friel's *Translations*, which is the subject of the first chapter. The subsequent chapters not only further explore these issues through the other plays, but they also expose that play's hermeneutic view of translation (based as it is on Steiner's *After Babel*) to a more poststructuralist strain of thought, in particular to Derrida's suggestion that translation is impossible and necessary. This approach allows for a deeper investigation into the contradictions involved in the act of translation and, at the same time, outlines what might be termed a possible ethics of translation: the need to translate in the face of, or precisely because of, the impossibility of ever achieving a conclusive translation. An ethics of this sort, the thesis argues, informed Field Day's intervention into Northern Ireland.

Through this theoretical focus on the idea of translation, the thesis rethinks the relationship between history and literature and the ways in which their interactions are involved in the creation of, in particular, postcolonial identities.

KEYWORDS: Field Day Theatre Company, Irish historiography, Irish identities, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, translation theory.

Completion of thesis

Place: European University Institute, Florence, Italy

Year: 2004

Supervisor: Luisa Passerini, Richard Kearney (Boston College)