



**Friel, Brian: *Traducciones*. Translated and edited by Mª Yolanda Fernández Suárez. Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 2016.**

The number of literary translations in modern languages is endless but appraisals of the art of the translator are far fewer. Perhaps we still bear in mind the echoes of *traduttore/traditore*, an expression so much quoted that we take it for granted that there is some truth in it. In order to remove any possible doubt, I state from the very beginning that I consider translation both an art and a science and that by no means do I approach it as a subsidiary work in relation with the original. Just the opposite, translating a text is an excellent way of exploring and discovering its literary space, the multiplicity of texts that it comprises. And regarding theatre, I hold that a text is not something passively accepted by the audience, but continuously activated by the viewers on the basis of their individual cultural background and life experiences. This gives the translator a degree of ownership somewhat different from that of the author but which undeniably exists. The translation belongs to the translator in a way that it does not belong to the author, creating a new proprietorship which gives great autonomy to his/her work.

It is generally agreed that linguistic knowledge is the starting point for a good translation but it would not by itself ensure the best result. A considerable degree of sympathy and familiarity with the subject is essential and, even further, a remarkable degree of courage. For, although there is always a debt with the original, there is also a great deal of creativity in the translator's contribution. On the other hand, I am aware of the controversial issue of translation faithfulness and its limits but I also consider that there is perhaps no worse evil than a translation which sounds like a translation. Therefore the chief goal every translator ought to aim at is to give readers the impression that what they are reading was originally written in the language into which it has been translated.

However, translating for the theatre requires a different technique since the translator must bear in mind how his/her version is going to sound on the stage. Turns of phrase which to an English ear sound like household words may appear stilted and the overall effect may be one of utter artificiality. Consequently the translator has to discover the customary language used by native Spanish speakers in similar circumstances and to create the same atmosphere with a natural and fluent speech. Drama texts are not only written to be read but to be performed on the stage, where the deficiencies of the translator will be more blatant.

The process of translating Friel's *Translations* in Spain has not been easy. Interestingly, it was translated into Catalan in 1984 and, though this text was never published, it was the source of two productions in the Basque country in 1988. Theatre

companies were looking for a play “meaningful within the Basque context” and one actress and the director were responsible for the translation into Spanish. The title was *Agur, Eire, agur, (Goodbye, Eire, Goodbye)* and it was performed in two different versions, one totally in Spanish and another one in which Basque language represented Gaelic and Spanish stood for English. In addition, some changes were made to adapt it to the political situation of the Basque country, where it toured for some time while it remained unknown in other parts of Spain. I wonder whether or not Friel would have approved of these performances if we take into account his own words: “What worries me about the play are the necessary peculiarities, especially the political elements. Because the play has to do with language and only language, and if it becomes overwhelmed by that political element, it is lost” (Murray 1999 :75).

We welcome *Traducciones* as the first published translation of Friel’s play in Spanish and we enthusiastically celebrate the fact that both the Spanish speaking readership and stage world (actors, companies, audiences) can enjoy it in their own language. In the excellent introduction of the book, Yolanda Fernández underlines the difficulties of her task, headed by the plurality of languages and cultures you come across in the play – Gaelic, English, Latin and Greek. In this aspect we should mention Yolanda’s extraordinary qualifications to undertake this translation since she has a degree in Classical Languages by the University of Salamanca, as well as her Ph.D in English. All this enables her to act not only as an excellent translator, but as an invaluable editor, providing key information about the complex background of the play. The cultural (un) translatability of terms such as hedge school – one of the axes of the play – and many others, is highlighted by useful footnotes and three invaluable indexes, the first one on classical culture, with translations and explanations of mythology and related issues. The same can be said of the appendix devoted to Irish culture, which pays special attention to the names of places and characters. Last but not least, there is a third one about the parallelisms between *Translations* and George Steiner’s *After Babel*, discussing the proposals of critic Richard Pine (1999: 359-363).

But much of the impact of *Translations* comes from Friel’s device of having all the characters speak the same language but with a translator interpreting what the English and the Irish are saying to each other. The theatrical trick of characters speaking Gaelic through English reaches its climax in the love scene between lovers who have no common language. However, the play is not about translation, as the very title might suggest, but it is a translation itself, or at least it must be perceived by the audience like that, and the audience’s collaboration in keeping Friel’s trick is what gives sense to the plot and the dialogues of the play. In fact the issue of linguistic alienation underlies the text, as Friel himself has explained. “The assumption, for instance, is that we speak the same language as England. And we don’t. The sad irony, of course, is that the whole play is written in English. It ought to be written in Irish” (Murray 1999:80).

According to Yolanda Fernández, the main difficulty is to “relocate” the text in another language so that the audience can revive the political and sociological atmosphere

of the original. Nonetheless, no solution is provided for a crucial matter: the distinction between the characters who speak Gaelic from the ones who speak English. When the play is performed in Ireland, the difference is frequently established by using both Hiberno English and British English and Yolanda Fernández suggests the use of Spanish dialects or languages in order to achieve equivalent effects. No doubt it is an interesting proposal for further performances, but I am not quite sure about the approval of the audience listening to Galician or Andalusian accents, just to give two examples, unless the play is put on in the places where the respective languages/ dialects are spoken. In fact the essential matter is to catch and keep the distinct linguistic features of the different characters, which range from colloquial to scholarly registers, something that the present edition has achieved with accuracy and fluency. It is evident that Yolanda Fernández has followed Friel's directions about the art of naming, and the final result is a text that explores and exploits all the resources of Spanish to convey feelings of love, hate, fear, violence or alienation. Perhaps the title is the only unsatisfactory aspect. The translator confesses that it may be misleading and that she would have liked to add a subtitle such as *Babel en Ballybeg*, *Adiós, Eire, Adiós*, or *Erase una vez Ballybeg*. But the copyright did not allow it.

I do not hesitate to define *Traducciones* as a seminal publication, not only for Irish Studies, but for millions of readers and theatre goers who will be able to enjoy it in Spanish. The play is aimed at an international audience with its interplay between the local and the universal and its capacity to speak to other identities and to situations in which the collision of story and History has occurred or is happening today (Pine 1999: 183). Yolanda Fernández has beautifully (re)mapped and (re)named the universe of Ballybeg in Spanish, allowing us to inhabit it with reliable knowledge, utter accuracy and great pleasure.

*Inés Praga Terente*

### **Works Cited**

- Murray, Christopher (ed.). *Brian Friel. Essays, Diaries, Interviews 1964-1999*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999.
- Pine, Richard. *The Diviner. The Art of Brian Friel*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1999.