

DOKTORI (PhD) ÉRTEKEZÉS TÉZISEI

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Irish Voices of Chekhov: Translations and Adaptations of Chekhov by Contemporary Irish Playwrights

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Introduction

The aim of the present dissertation is to investigate the ways in which certain types of intercultural transfer, i.e. re-workings, retranslations and adaptations of foreign literary texts are achieved in the context of post-colonial, even post-national Ireland. To this aim, I study translations and adaptations of Chekhov's works (the major plays as well as a short story and a vaudeville) made by contemporary Irish playwrights from the 1980s to the present. I am interested in the various ways in which these Irish dramatists re-appropriate Chekhov's work for the Irish stage and the dramatic canon thereby opposing or displacing already existing Standard English translations. My theoretical point of departure is that the translation and adaptation strategies used by the dramatists are not random, accidental or simply reflecting personal preferences, but derive from and are influenced by the context the particular versions have been created in. Exploring the relevant contexts and the underlying ideological assumptions shed light on how Irish theatre culture reflects on itself. Changes in the patterns of translation/adaptation practice show the development in cultural and artistic self-perception. Also, the study of translations/adaptations for the stage can illustrate that the process of rewriting, such as translation and adaptation, is not a neutral, transparent and exclusively textual practice, but a complex one that can reflect as well as contribute to the transformation of national and cultural identities.

My hypothesis is that the Chekhov translations and adaptations carried out by four Irish playwrights during the last three decades demonstrate a changing pattern, which is largely due to the changes in the socio-cultural/socio-political environment locating the practice of rewriting. The playwrights' translational choices were not wholly made according to personal tastes and preferences, but were significantly influenced by the external conditions under which the translations were produced. In the 1980s when Brian Friel and Thomas Kilroy embarked on their first Chekhov rewritings they both reacted to and intervened in the process termed "decolonization" on the cultural level, by virtue of their translations' and adaptation's role in resisting the dominance of standard English and, consequently, in establishing the currency of English as it is spoken in Ireland for the transplantation of modern classics.

The pattern traceable in contemporary Irish playwrights' rewritings of Chekhov is that in the first phase, during the 1980s and 1990s they produced explicitly Hibernicised works (Brian Friel made free translations of *Three Sisters* (1981) and *Uncle Vanya* (1998), Thomas Kilroy an adaptation of *The Seagull* (1981) domesticated to a great extent in a way that suggests a certain political agenda underlying their choices: to further the final decolonisation of the Irish mind. Later translations and adaptations, even by the same author, or by members of the younger generation, show a conspicuous change in approach. These works include Friel's *The Bear* (2001), *The Yalta Game* (2001) and *Afterplay* (2002), Frank McGuinness' *Uncle Vanya* (1995) and Tom Murphy's *The Cherry Orchard* (2004). In the reworkings of these plays the public project of decolonization was abandoned and the translation techniques applied testify to either the foregrounding of more private considerations or the privileging of the source culture by way of foreignising the translations. The reason behind this change in approach to rewriting/translation, as I argue, is that the public project of decolonization has ceased to be the underlying ideological agenda because it has become outdated and irrelevant in an increasingly multicultural, economically as well as politically successful Ireland. The relatively newly gained confidence of the Irish is reflected in theatre as well and it conditions translations where the re-appropriative desire fostering the creation of Hibernicised translations is not so immediate anymore. There is no urgent need to stress the Irishness of the translations in opposition to the Britishness of earlier ones, and in turn, no motivation to thoroughly acculturate them. Instead, some of the more recent translations of Chekhov moved away from the public-oriented, decolonising project to focus on more intimate, private and aesthetic concerns, and use adaptation and translation strategies that serve such ends. Others are carried out by writers ready to employ techniques of foreignisation, which results in a distancing from the earlier trend. The foreignising translations signal an opening-up to voices that risk sounding somewhat foreign to their Irish audiences, allowing for a more complex cultural dialogue.

The material for the analysis consists of the original Russian texts of Chekhov's major plays, a vaudeville and one short story and their translations and adaptations by the above mentioned four Irish

playwrights, as well as Friel's quasi-original Chekhovian one-act play, *Afterplay*, which I treat as an extreme form of adaptation. With the exception of McGuinness' *Uncle Vanya*, these texts were all published. My analysis of the selected translated and adapted works considers them exclusively as literary works and not performance texts or actual theatrical adaptations. Therefore, my discussion of them includes literary analysis as well, but no consideration is given to the translation/adaptation techniques in terms of their potential theatrical realisation.

1. Theoretical background

In the first chapter of my dissertation I review the different fields of study I have drawn on in my analysis of contemporary drama translation and adaptation by Irish playwrights. The fact that drama belongs to two systems simultaneously, the literary and the theatrical systems, i.e. "there is a coexistence of both literary and performance text" (Schultze 178), complicates its analysis not to mention creating theories of drama translation. Most scholars privilege one or the other approach to drama in their work. Following Bassnett's, Schultze's and Veltrusky's arguments for "drama as literature in the first instance" (Bassnett, "Still Trapped" 99), the present dissertation privileges the literary aspects of drama and considers the Irish Chekhov versions as literary texts and not as performance texts where a potential theatrical realisation would bear relevance to the analysis. The tenability of this approach is supported by the nature of the specific Irish context where plays are definitely seen as part of the literary system. Kilroy, the dramatist as well as scholar, describes the literary tradition of Irish drama where the abiding value is "the pre-eminence of the written text above all other aspects of theatre" (8). In addition, another fact that signals the pre-eminence of the literary aspect of drama is that in Ireland drama texts become published and therefore are available for the general public (as opposed to countries like Finland, where drama is hardly ever published and "is [...] not considered literature" Aaltonen 57).

To justify my positioning of the drama texts under discussion in the frame of translation studies despite the fact that none of them is a translation proper, I outline the developments in translation studies during the last few decades that have made such a positioning possible. The shift from a normative approach towards the parameters of descriptive translation studies has turned attention to the target texts and has facilitated a re-evaluation of the notions of equivalence and faithfulness acknowledging the translator's creativity. The re-evaluation of basic issues of translation generated a widening of the definition of translation to include various types of rewriting practices. The cultural turn in translation studies brought about a view of translation not merely as a linguistic exercise but as a textual practice deeply rooted in social, political and cultural systems.

The intention to account for translational choices in terms of their relation to relevant cultural-political context became an important focus of analysis within postcolonial translation studies, which explores the role of translation primarily in terms of creating, sustaining and dismantling hegemonic structures. The theoretical framework of postcolonial translation studies is indispensable in connection with textual practices in Ireland, a country with a long colonial experience. In fact, the earlier examples of Chekhov reworkings clearly fall into the category of resistant translation carried out by a formerly dominated culture. They are created with the distinct political aim of displacing the Standard English translations of the same works in order to further the intellectual decolonisation process and to enhance Irish cultural assertiveness.

The rewritings under discussion, however, do not conform to the general pattern described in postcolonial translation as here translation is not an exchange between the dominant and the dominated culture. Postcolonial theories of translation tend to focus on either the dominant culture's manipulation of the representation of the dominated culture through translation, or on translational practices employed by the dominated culture to "write back" to the empire, i.e. to resist such manipulation and create a fairer representation of itself. In the case of the translations/adaptations under discussion there is a three-way relationship. They are rewritings of texts belonging to a culture (Russia) outside the dichotomy of dominant/subordinate carried out by a formerly dominated (Irish) culture's representatives with the distinct

aim to displace the dominating (English) culture's own, earlier translation of the Russian texts imposed on the dominated culture. In other words, what I examine here is the Irish English translations of Russian classics whose ambition is to create an Irish English canon of those classics' in the place of earlier Standard English translations.

From a postcolonial perspective, which more often than not has the vantage point of the colonized, the different modes of translation seem to have different effects. It is often argued that the traditional domesticating, or assimilating strategies should be looked at with suspicion and should be displaced because they are potentially harmful as they help maintain hegemonic dominance, as well as contribute to the erasure of cultural diversity and lack of tolerance. To counteract imperial dominance and the erasure of cultural diversity, postcolonial translation theorists call for new modes and ethics of translation, which have the potential to achieve cultural decolonisation and maintain cultural variety. In an opposition to domestication, one of the most favoured modes of translation is neoliteralism, or foreignisation.

The Hibernicisation, that is, domestication, of Chekhov, however, serves not the interests of the (former) colonizer, but the former colonized in their struggle for cultural assertion. In this case, it is precisely domestication and not foreignisation that functions as a strategy of resistance, and consequently decolonisation.

Finally, to account for the strategies used in those work that are considered adaptation, an overview of the ideas recently developed in the field of adaptation theory is provided. This survey will show that adaptation has been increasingly recognised as an activity central to human creativity, which has entailed the enhanced status of this particular creative practice within critical thinking.

2. Chekhov on the British Isles: English Difficulties, Irish Affinities

Virginia Woolf, one of the earliest critics of Russian writers, when analysing the spirit of Russia and her literature, attempted to account for what she saw as the inability of the English despite all their enthusiasm to understand Russian literature, especially Chekhov. She believed that it was due to the difference between the two civilisations, namely, that their civilisation bred into the English "the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than suffer and understand" (633), suffering and understanding used to sum up the features of the Russian psyche. Albeit a summary observation, it may prompt one to ponder whether the English, in their attempt to understand Chekhov and to bridge the cultural divide have fashioned Chekhov thoroughly in their own image. Conversely, it raises the idea whether the Irish, having to deal with the legacy of colonisation, seem to have more in common with the Russian character implied above, which might count as a partial explanation for the huge popularity of Chekhov among contemporary Irish dramatists.

To delineate the background that largely motivated the emergence of re-visiting Chekhov by Irish playwrights in the form of retranslations and adaptations, I consider some of the early Chekhov productions and translations in Britain. They contributed significantly to the creation of a certain Anglicised image for the Russian writer, which was passed on to the Irish through the intermediary role English culture traditionally played in transmitting translated literature to the country. The Standard English translations (especially that of Constance Garnett), as well as the English productions of Chekhov's plays thoroughly Anglicised the works and established the image of a "British Chekhov". These translations generally ignored the plays' political, historical and cultural context, creating an apolitical, sentimental "sorrowing evocation of valuable way of life gone forever" (151) as Vera Gottlieb points out. The Irish reception of Chekhov's plays is also described, together with the early recognition of affinities between the two cultures rooted in certain areas of similarity in terms of history and society, and even the 'spirit' of the two nations.

I argue that the Irish English translations of Chekhov, especially in the early phase, constitute a reaction to the Anglicised versions and their uncontested representation of classics within the Irish literary

canon. This reaction can be accounted for in terms of resistance to cultural dominance within the context of cultural and intellectual decolonisation. Deploying translation as a tool of such resistance is accounted for in the frame of Ireland as a translating nation. As Irish history has always positioned the Irish at a crossroads of cultures and languages which had to negotiate meaning, it became a translating nation in the widest sense of the word. As Robert Welch puts it, “for certain cultures, the Irish amongst them, translation is a crucial activity. [...]Irish culture, for two hundred years, has in this very obvious sense, been in the business of translating itself to itself and to the outside world” (Welch xi). It should be added that Ireland has been also busy translating the outside world to itself and, notably, into its own language, Hiberno-English as Kilroy’s and Friel’s Hiberno-English versions demonstrate.

Along with their successful restoration of a more political image of Chekhov, the Irish versions have had another achievement in the wider context of English language theatre. As playwright Michael West observes “Irishness has come to signify authenticity on the stage,” and that “the Irishness makes the Russian more real: this is Chekhov in English, but not an English Chekhov” (West 18). His claim dovetails with the idea that Irish theatre practitioners had a traditional role in effecting renewal in English theatre. The perceived “authenticity” of Irish Chekhov’s also signals the general dissatisfaction with the English Chekhov felt even in English theatrical and literary circles. It appears that the potential new dimensions that an Irish version may bring to a Chekhov play can provide a fresh look at the Russian author, too fossilised in his Anglicised image for even English audiences and critics themselves.

3. Public Projects: Irish voices of Chekhov, Decolonising the Imagination

Kilroy’s adaptation of *The Seagull* and Friel’s *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* can be seen as an integral part of the artistic and intellectual decolonising endeavour in the 1980s and part of 1990s in Ireland, an endeavour that, in Irish theatre history, is embodied in the Field Day Theatre Company’s project, of which Friel was a founding member, and which Kilroy later joined too.

Stephen Rea, a key figure in the Field Day enterprise, expressed the importance of *Three Sisters* in this respect when he said “it was politically very important, it’s an important assertion” (Pelletier, “Creating” 57). Indeed, an Irish playwright’s privileging Hiberno-English over Standard English has a definite political edge and can function as cultural self-assertion. As Christopher Murray observes “language can never be a neutral force or medium in Ireland,” and he goes on to note that “the language question, historically bound up in the suppression of Irish (i.e. Gaelic), and the consequent insecurity in Standard English by a colonised people, is invariably politicised, even in postcolonial Ireland” (Murray, “Two Languages” 97).

Rea’s assessment of the political importance of *Three Sisters* could be extended to the other two plays to be discussed in this chapter, Friel’s *Uncle Vanya* and Kilroy’s *The Seagull*. These rewritings of modern Russian classics, either in the form of retranslation or adaptation, share certain important characteristics. They demonstrate the perceived importance for Irish playwrights of the period to seize modern classics and re-appropriate them for Irish theatre. The ways in which re-appropriation is carried out disclose the underlying (not necessarily conscious) agenda, which is to a great extent cultural-political. Both Friel’s and Kilroy’s versions opt for infusing the plays with Irish structure and idiom as opposed to using Standard English and thus the resulting works display the features of resistant textual practices. Although the strategies employed when rewriting the source texts are different, they produce a rather similar result: domestication, or acculturation, of the original.

The domestication of the source plays is carried out to a different extent in each case. Kilroy’s adaptation of *The Seagull* is a whole-scale acculturation of the Russian original by virtue of its being transposed to a completely new setting, that is, nineteenth century Ireland, with the substantial alterations involved in representing the Irish Ascendancy milieu in the Chekhovian framework. The Irish version’s household of the Big House in the West of Ireland are divided along the Anglo-Irish/Native Irish line, which inevitably makes the play more political than the original. Due to the introduction of the colonial dimension, the tensions originating from oppression come closer to the surface in the Irish version. In

addition, the fact that the older writer, Aston, who is Constantine's rival, is English is significant: it strengthens the accord of the theme of dispossession in a way that it must strike sensitive notes for the Irish, and disturbing ones for the English audiences, and thus also tones up the politics of the play.

The adaptation foregrounds some Irish political issues and figures of the period: the Land Wars of 1879-82, Parnell and the Land League, and the "new coercion acts to stop the Troubles" (32). What is more central to the play, however, is its use of the Russian work as a powerful analogy for the artistic concerns of the Irish Literary Revival. Chekhov's play-in-the-play is an imitation of Yeats' exquisite mythological dramas, and the issues raised by Constantine are those of the Anglo-Irish members of the Revival Movement. Constantine's Celtic play is pitted against the well-made play of the London stage represented by his mother, the actress Isobel Desmond.

Unlike *The Seagull*, Friel's retranslations of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* remain set in Russia. Nevertheless, the translation strategies Friel employs create significantly domesticated, Hibernicised plays. His very method of "translating" *Three Sisters* reveals the underlying, largely political motivations of his re-appropriating endeavour. Instead of employing a word-for-word translation done by a proficient translator, the writer uses the texts of a number of existing Standard English translations as a basis of his own play. Apart from structural alterations and updating of the language, Friel carries out a thorough domestication by infusing the play with Irish, or Hiberno-English, idiom, which help to fade the cultural origin of the play and make it part of the Irish literary canon. Friel in his free, second-hand translation adds to the original text words and lines of his own that convey the sense of the given speech with specifically Irish resonances. Friel's audience of "the land of saints and scholars", for instance, hear Andrey complain that their provincial town "has not produced one person of any distinction – not one saint, not one scholar, not one artist" (111). It is in *Uncle Vanya*, which displays similar translation strategies, that the added lines allude to the stagnating political situation in Northern Ireland before the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. When the word *pustosh* (=uncultivated patch of land) is rendered as "that old squabble about the common ground", followed by a remark about a "discussion document" (20), it may serve as a reference "to the endless, fruitless discussion and procrastination associated with the Northern crisis" (Fusco 43). A most striking alteration that potentially generates echoes for an Irish audience concerns the ending of the play where Sonya pleads not for "rest" as in the original, but repeatedly says: "Endure and peace will come to us" (86).

4. Private Projects and Foreign Voices

Since Friel's and Kilroy's first translations and adaptations, a shift seem to have occurred in terms of the underlying motivations of Chekhov rewritings in Ireland. The adaptation and translation techniques used in the Chekhov versions of McGuinness and Murphy, as well as Friel's recent Chekhov plays indicate a move away from the public concerns towards less politically oriented rewritings. The most conspicuous feature of the translations created by McGuinness and Murphy is that they are foreignised to a certain extent in contrast to earlier translations where the emphasis was on thorough domestication. Foreignising translation employs various techniques that introduce obstruction of, or at least interference with, fluency and transparency of language so as to prohibit the illusion that the foreign text in front of the reader is not a translated one, but is "natural," as if it was an "original" in the target language. No matter how important it is for the translator to register the otherness of the source text, "otherness can never be manifested in its own terms, only in those of the target language" (Venuti 20). The specific target language discourse constructed by a translator can, however, function as a site of refusing complete domestication, and become infused, to varying degrees, with foreign effects.

Superimposed on the basis of English as it is spoken in Ireland (which is necessary for intelligibility), a significant measure of foreignisation is detected in terms of language use and rendering of culture-specific elements in both cases. McGuinness' *Uncle Vanya*, especially in comparison with Friel's version of the same play, demonstrates the way a certain measure of the strangeness, otherness of the source text can be preserved and respected through closely following the structure, and most

importantly, through rendering such important elements as idiomatic language and terms of address and endearment in almost literal translation. Using such techniques, McGuinness negotiates a foreignness, oscillating between a sense of the native, the familiar and the foreign. He does not conceal the labour of transference from source to target culture. At points, his Chekhov has a voice that sounds alien, unfamiliar to the receiving language, thus it is not so much the authorship of the translator that becomes visible as in Friel's case, but the act and the fact of translation.

Murphy's translation also leaves *The Cherry Orchard* in Russia. His Chekhov play is a very close translation of the original, which, however, does not prevent the emergence of parallels between the decay of the Russian landowning class and its counterpart in Ireland. What a close analysis of the translation proves is that the parallels offer themselves regardless of the fact that the translation itself does not intend to emphasise them in any way. Murphy, like McGuinness, leaves all the Russian realia and linguistic elements like patronyms or unique terms of endearment intact. If his translation brings about any changes, it does so by emphasising those Russian elements even more by means of adding and creating new ones.

Notwithstanding the linguistic modernisation and the texts' being necessarily moved towards the target audience, the cultural origin of McGuinness' and Murphy's Chekhov plays is not erased, rather, when compared to earlier English language translations, both texts find ways to mark the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text. The plays allow the audience to register the foreign and thus they stage a kind of opposition towards the earlier Irish domesticating trend, with a view to ensuring more internationality, more openness to foreign voices and perhaps to acknowledge more explicitly foreign literary influence.

Friel's three recent Chekhovian plays, in contrast to his first two translations, do not display the features of resistant translation in any way either. The playwright immerses himself in the Chekhovian world, going beyond the major plays and dipping into works representing the diversity of the genres Chekhov deployed. Friel's *The Yalta Game* (2001) is a dramatic adaptation of a Chekhov short story, *The Lady with the Lapdog* (1899). *The Bear* (2002) is a revitalisation of a 1888 Chekhov vaudeville. Finally, his most recent work based on Chekhov, *Afterplay* (2002), represents the extremes of adaptation: it revives two characters from two different plays, Sonya, from *Uncle Vanya*, and Andrey from *Three Sisters*, and places them into a new play. Friel's *Afterplay* can be seen as an exercise in bricolage: "the purposeful reassembly of fragments to form a new whole, which [...] is an active element in many postmodernist texts" (Sanders 4).

These rewritings, even more obviously than the first translations, are created in a labour of love and result in more intimate, personal works. Talking about Friel's earlier adaptations, Richard Pine argues that the 'Russian plays explore varieties of love' (Pine, *Brian Friel* 330). This is much more conspicuously true of the three later adaptations, where the political undertone is completely lacking, and, instead, more personal concerns are examined. Ideas that are of mutual interest for Friel and Chekhov re-emerge in them, such as the theme of living "lives based on selected fictions" (Pine, "Review" 192). Characters in both Chekhov and Friel tend to indulge in self-dramatisation, inventing themselves and each other; unable to live in the present. They escape into private worlds, looking back or forward, waiting for a real, happy life that is yet to come. The three Friel works under consideration explore such aspects of the private world of human experience without taking too much account of the world outside. As rewritings, they represent Friel's turning inwards and away from the issues of public responsibility and social engagement. Whereas the Russia of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* represented in many ways Friel's homeland, in these later plays he completely omits the Russian historical context and consequently the potential for the Irish cultural analogies to emerge. Thus the political motivations underscoring Friel's earlier adaptations seem to be abandoned. However, as Vera Gottlieb claims with regard to the productions of Chekhov's plays, theatre has always been political, "by omission if not by commission" (Gottlieb, "The dwindling scale" 147). Friel's focus on private concerns instead of the earlier, more explicitly public concerns inherent in his translations of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, signals a change in his political attitude towards perhaps a general disillusionment.

This shift from public to private projects appears to illustrate what Scott Boltwood recognises as Friel's complete disillusionment with and alienation from both the politics of the Republic and Northern Ireland. Boltwood attempts to "chart the long arc of Friel's ideological evolution: from his paradoxical combination of alienation from and enthusiasm for Irish nationalism in the 1960s, through his sceptical interrogation of the state in the 1970s and 1980s, to his ultimate disillusionment with Ireland in the largest sense in the 1990s and early 2000s" (5).

However, it is not the employment of the foreign setting instead of an Irish one and the lack of domestication that indicate a change. In his first two translations, the Russian milieu was Hibernicised and therefore functioned as a proxy for Ireland, while in the later one-act plays this is not the case. There are no allusions to either Russian or Irish social contexts any more. This de-contextualised and de-historicised nature of the plays' setting is, as Boltwood argues, symptomatic of Friel's retreat from Ireland due to his ideological disillusionment with his homeland, and as such, "mark a rupture in Friel's career" (Boltwood 9).

The omission of historical context is the most pronounced in *Afterplay*, set in Moscow, around twenty years after the original play's action, which would presuppose the backdrop of the political turmoil of 1920s Russia, especially the effects of the Russian Revolution. For the complete elimination of the historical background to the play's action, Friel has received criticism: Fintan O'Toole, for instance, regrets an "absence of historical reality" ("Two Plays After" 14). Boltwood, however, argues convincingly when he says that Friel's strategy of "historical erasure," or in other words, his forcing "pertinent issues of history and nationality from the narratives" (201), is a result not merely of an oversight, or "Friel's attempt to elude issues of nationalism" (197), but his general retreat from Ireland in his drama. Creating a distance from the issues of the day Friel's most recent Chekhovian works become engaged in the representation of personalised experience.

5. Conclusion

Cultures make various demands on translations" Lefevere and Basnett observe ("Proust's" 7) and indeed, the Irish social milieu in the last two decades of the twentieth century seemed to generate, and to be appreciative of, the type of acculturating translations that has as their underlying agenda a resistance to the dominance of Standard English. The aim of the resistant translations was to further cultural and intellectual decolonisation by re-appropriating Chekhov after he had been appropriated and canonised by the British, and by re-positioning his works within the Irish theatrical canon in Irish English. The intensive revisiting of Chekhov and other seminal European writers was perceived by the playwrights themselves as a necessary appropriation of these dramatists, and as an integral part of their own contribution to the development of modern Irish theatrical writing.

Theatre in Ireland has always been political, ever since the Irish Literary Renaissance's endeavour to create national theatre and drama of distinct Irish character. As Shaun Richards observes, in Ireland "drama in its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century manifestation sought to define and determine the basis of Irish claims for political independence from Britain" ("Plays" 1). The translations and adaptations of Chekhov created in the last two decades of the twentieth century are also political in that they do not merely update the language and relevance of the plays, but also, through their adaptation and translation techniques they use the Russian plays as analogies for Irish realities in order to reflect on the pressing issues of those realities. They represent a contribution to the final phase of establishing cultural independence from Britain and the legacy of domination. Kilory's *The Seagull* and Friel's first two Chekhov plays function as resistant translations in the context of the ongoing process of cultural decolonisation, in other words, they do not only comment on the social, political scene but also endeavour to effect some change.

As I argue along with Joseph Long, however, this phase of postcolonial re-appropriation seems to "have now run its course" ("Diction"175). In the most recent adaptations a pattern of change in motivation and rewriting technique can be detected, which reflects a change in the measure of political

urgency underlying the plays. It seems that once the desired cultural assertion is achieved (partly via acculturating translations and adaptations that justify the legitimacy of Irish English as a language as the medium for modern classics), ensuing translations and versions display less of the acculturating impulse and more willingness to show Chekhov as a Russian, foreign author. This shift appears to stem from the important changes Ireland has undergone since the mid-1990s. The country's unprecedented and spectacular economic growth since then earned it the epithet "Celtic Tiger" and proved to be a watershed in the country's history. The economic boom resulted in the Republic's totally new position in the world market as one of the most active and successful players in the global economy, rather than a country on the periphery. This has led to profound changes taking place in Irish society. While culture, economy and society under the exceptionally radical transformations of Celtic Tiger Ireland have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention in terms of the preconditions and roots of the economic success and also in terms of the impact of economic growth on society, most contemporary drama, as some critics argue, seem to fail to interrogate global Ireland in a profound way.

Shaun Richards, surveying a number of recent plays by the younger generation of playwrights sees the image of bleak uniformity as a consensus in much Celtic Tiger drama. "What these plays dramatise is an Ireland which, while globalised in terms of references and economy, has lost all meaningful cultural and moral coordinates," therefore, "what these plays suggest is that despite the acquisition of prosperity the country now orbits around a void" ("To me" 11). The critic argues that "Irish drama has yet to establish a new role outside of the comfort zone of postcolonial criticism and soft-centred Celtic Tiger critique and engage with the position it occupies in a state which now has the power to 'translate' – its own as well as other subjects – rather than being always 'translated' (12).

Richards' ideas seem to have relevance to the actual translations produced by Irish playwrights since around 2000. If there is indeed a void, or at least a transitory phase, in contemporary Irish drama where the old postcolonial context and its issues are not relevant anymore, but a new type of artistic engagement with the new realities of Ireland as a global actor and beneficiary, which is at the same time vulnerable to the external forces of global capitalism, has not been found yet, then perhaps the abundance of translations and adaptations might be taken as symptom of the times. If rewriting foreign plays can be made part of the critique of the *Zeitgeist*, it can just as effectively signal a tendency to avoid engagement with Irish concerns. Along with the rewriting strategies that fail to offer social commentary, rewriting itself as opposed to creating original ones can also be a way of distancing from current issues, a reluctance to enter into a deep, critical engagement with them. The Chekhov adaptations or retranslations of the late 1990s and early 2000s, although marked by a new confidence and consequently a lack of the need to assert the right to "Irish" the plays, do not display either a postcolonial critique or engagement with Irish realities in terms of adaptation technique or dramatic concern, which implies that such interrogation still has to be waited for.

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