

# Brian Friel: Translating/Adapting Russia onto the Irish Stage

The relationship between adaptation and translation is of fundamental importance for Brian Friel's work. Arguably his most famous play, *Translations* (1980), problematises the act of translating one language into another, and focuses on the slippages between languages and words, highlighting what is lost in translation, and how those missing meanings can be politicised in a post-colonial context. Friel's position as Ireland's most prominent and important playwright (Roche 2006: 1), affords him the opportunity to explore and develop his evident interest in language and its possibilities for identity creation and loss, as well as providing him with the possibility of translating plays himself. This chapter will explore Friel's fascination with the slipperiness of language and the creative potentials for translating texts from other nations. Friel's adaptation of two Chekhov plays form the basis of the discussion and, as we shall see, his translation of these classic plays challenges the very definitions of the terms 'translation' and 'adaptation', as well as posing significant questions about the transposing of drama from one nation to another.

Friel's version of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* in 1981 was the second production for the Field Day Theatre Company, a company established "with the intention of finding or creating a space between unionism and nationalism and providing by example the possibility of a shared culture in the North of Ireland" (Richtarik 1994: 7). It is clear, however, that over time the perception of this theatre company suggests that the endeavour was rather more politicised than that, and that the company has become identified with a more nationalistic approach,

“centring on the idea of Ireland as a post-colonial country and of the violence in Northern Ireland as a lingering effect of colonial rule” (Richtarik 1994: 3). Friel’s *Translations*, which was the first production by the company, explored the 1833 Ordnance Survey of Ireland, in which Irish language was superseded by Anglicised versions of place names. Friel shows this as an act of colonial force, undertaken by the British military, although in reality the exercise was completed by cartographers. Although the soldier tasked with this assignment is shown to be sensitive to local nuances, and so beguiled by the romanticised scenery and landscape that he absconds, there is the constant threat of violence, as the commanding officer promises to “ravish the whole parish” (Friel 1996: 440) if the missing lieutenant is not found. In a particularly touching scene, Friel shows the young lieutenant falling in love with a local girl and, although they have no common language (despite both speaking through the medium of English on stage), they manage to communicate and find a shared bond. Throughout the play, the locals are shown to be marginalised and excluded from the project, however, and their national and personal identity is shown to be compromised by the undertaking. As Harold Pinter’s *Mountain Language* (1993) also powerfully demonstrates, language is vital in establishing and securing a sense of personal and shared experience and identity, and attempts to prevent expression in one’s mother tongue are shown to be brutally politicised.

Friel’s evident concern about the relationship between nation and language, and about the gaps between words from different languages, as demonstrated in *Translations*, is clearly developed in his translation projects. As well as translating two Chekhov stage plays, *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, he also based *The Yalta Game* (2001) on Chekhov’s short story “The Lady with the Lapdog”, and *The Bear* (2002) on a vaudeville by the dramatist. His engagement with Chekhov’s work reached a crescendo in 2002 with *Afterplay*, a new piece of theatre in which a character from *Uncle Vanya* meets another from *Three Sisters*, and they share Friel’s imagined stories of their lives after the Chekhov plays ended. He has also dramatised two Ivan Turgenev texts—the novel, *Fathers and Sons* (1987) and the play, *A Month in the Country* (1992), which is explored briefly in a short interlude later in Chap. ““An Interlude”: Adaptation Without Nation: Ivan Turgenev and Brian Friel’s *A Month in the Country* and Patrick Marber’s *Three Days in the Country*”. Beyond these named translations/adaptations of Russian works, Friel’s other plays have often been seen to echo Chekhov more generally. Elmer Andrews argues:

[A] very similar dramatic tension informs the work of both, a tension which stems from the recognition of the disparity between the reality of people's lives and the dreams by which they attempt to live. The playwrights accept both, seeing human life as the meaningful and at the same time pathetic, ludicrous and tragic attempt to bridge the gap. (1995: 183)

More widely, there are echoes and resonances across plays and dramatists across many nations and at different points in history, as texts speak to each other in an endless web of intertextual connections, as described by Kristeva (1980) in the Introduction to this volume. It should not, therefore, surprise us that “Friel shows how his works echo one another endlessly” (Roche-Tiengo 2012: 107), because all works can be seen to be innately connected and related to one another. Of course, where a specific and explicit adaptation is present, these echoes are especially loud.

Several critics have argued that the decades following Field Day's production of *Three Sisters* were marked by “a certain effervescence in adaptation” (Dubost 2012: 11) and “a profusion of adaptation on the Irish stage” (O'Dowd 2010: 143). From the 1980s onwards, there was a proliferation of adaptations in Ireland by famous playwrights, including Friel, from other writers and dramatists such as Thomas Kilroy (who adapted another Chekhov play, this time *The Seagull*), Thomas Murphy, Brendan Kennelly, Tom Paulin and Frank McGuinness (Piola 2012: 38). O'Dowd decides that “a clear focus on re-inventing and re-imaging” (2010: 150) helps explain this resurgence in adaptation, as Ireland looked to the past in order to retell classic stories in a contemporary context. There are also clear geographical elements. Gunilla Anderman argues that “the rapid growth of electronic communications and the emergence of English as the lingua franca of Europe are now providing Europeans with easy access to the cultural and literary heritage of other nations” (2007: 6) and consequently there is a widening out of Europe, as writers from different countries engage with each other's texts and cultures. What is more, “the English stage has provided fertile ground for a burgeoning theatrical phenomenon: the new version of adaptation of a foreign-language play by a contemporary playwright” (Rappaport 2007: 66). This rise of the ‘celebrity’ translator raises some crucial questions about the place of adaptation in the theatre: “whose work are the audience really paying to see—the original playwright's or that of his adaptor?” (Rappaport 2007: 74).

This question raises some crucial problems in the definition of key terms such as translator, adaptor and playwright. As academic translators

of theatrical texts, described as “the tedious [...] and oft-ignored work of theatrical translators” (Allen 2004: 32), are increasingly overlooked in favour of playwrights, already experienced and skilled in stagecraft and production (Rappaport 2007: 68), is something getting lost in translation? If “critics view translation as being synonymous with adaptation” (Rappaport 2007: 75), how do we define or understand these key terms and the difference between them? The playwright Howard Barker, who himself adapted *Uncle Vanya* in 1991, has claimed that eminent playwrights need not worry about revisiting the classics with undue reverence:

as you get older [...] you achieve a certain parity with the artists of your culture. If you take your life as an artist with the upmost seriousness then I don't think you need feel an unnecessary humility towards the classics. You feel you have acquired the right to engage with them (quoted in Young 1998: 442)

This approach might help explain the prevalence of the ‘celebrity’ translator, who is probably more concerned with putting their own stamp on the play than they are with offering a faithful translation of the original text. However, we must be cautious when approaching the term ‘translation’ and not assume that any rendering of a text in another language can be simple or complete. As Friel’s own *Translations* set out to explore, the slippages between two languages can offer completely different interpretations, and no text can ever move between nations without some shifts and compromises. However, traditionally it is not unreasonable to expect a translation to at least attempt a close recreation of the original, to bestow upon the source text “an axiomatic primacy and authority [...] the rhetoric of comparison [being] that of faithfulness and equivalence” (Hutcheon 2006: 16). Even if we accept there must always be slippages in meaning, a true translation generally attempts to capture an accurate version of the original, without any additions or subtractions from the translator that might alter the meaning or interpretation of the first text. This is the traditional role of the translator. An adaptation is one step removed from this process. It deliberately shifts the meaning of the text, and embeds within it the adaptor’s own views and artistic perspective. While the original text lives within the new version, and must self-consciously do so in order for it to be considered an adaptation, it must also be sufficiently different to make the adaptation worth doing. It must be recognisably the same in some respects, but add something new to warrant the playwright’s endeavour. It is into this gap between

translation and adaptation that Friel's versions of Chekhov fall. They are more than direct translation in that they add something different and, crucial to the argument of this book, nationally specific, to the originals, and yet they are not radical reworkings, capable of standing alone and apart from the original plays.

Friel did not translate *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* in the traditional way, i.e. reading the original in Russian and then finding an equivalent word, phrase or expression in English. This is because, unlike more traditional theatre translators, Friel cannot speak or read Russian. Instead he used six existing translations (ones produced in the more formal manner outlined above) and produced a new text from them. And so what he has written is not so much a translation as an amalgamation or mosaic. Friel's plays are also not strictly adaptations, as they offer very few gaps between the original and the new. As Richtarik points out, "Friel was quick to explain that he had not adapted the play, changed it to an Irish setting, or tried to underline specifically Irish meanings" (1994: 119–120). And so what has Friel produced? This chapter will argue that, counter to Richtarik's suggestion, there are specific Irish resonances in these plays, and that we can detect some political or national impetus behind this specific adaptation process, that in the moving from Russian to English (which for Friel is itself a contested term, as we shall see), there is a shift in meaning and emphasis. I would argue that this is enough to justify the use of the term 'adaptation'. Indeed, Kevin Windle agrees with this terminology, and suggests that "Friel should have described his work as a 'free adaptation', rather than a 'translation'" (2006: 364).

The uncertainty about how to classify these works has produced some critical hostility. Windle suggests that critics might have questioned these plays because they were seeking a much closer relationship between the Chekhov original and the Friel version. Use of the term 'translation' encourages audiences to see a direct correlation between the texts, despite Friel's own problematisation of the term. David Krause describes the Chekhov 'translations' as "inconsistent, careless and often awkward" (1999: 645) as well as "patronizing" (634) and "demeaning" (636). Krause is referring to one of the ways Friel makes the plays specifically Irish, which will be explored shortly, and thus I would argue that the use of the label 'translation' rather than 'adaptation' suggests that there will be direct connections, and deviations from a clear and faithful conversion between the texts therefore seems controversial. As I shall explore, Friel does consciously reflect national concerns in his reworkings of Chekhov, thus deliberately

shifting the national context and engaging in contemporary political debates and concerns. This translates his ‘translations’ into ‘adaptations’.

For *Three Sisters*, these issues are linguistic and for *Uncle Vanya* the audience is asked to reflect upon political parallels between Russia and Ireland. I have decided to focus on these two plays in this chapter, as they are adaptations of other plays, rather than novels or short stories, and this is in keeping with the purpose of the book more widely. I will also reflect briefly on *Afterplay*, as this text is Friel’s most daring engagement with Chekhov, and again raises questions about the terms and classifications of adapted texts. Before I move on to explore the plays in more detail, it is worth reflecting a little on why Friel, like many before him, selected Chekhov to work from. J. Douglas Clayton and Yana Meerzon argue that Chekhov offers writers a blank canvas on which to ascribe their own ideas and agendas. They describe Chekhov as a playwright who offers us “not an ideological take on reality [...] the works of the Russian playwright have never been used as a weapon for ideological propaganda and colonial ideology” (Clayton and Meerzon 2013: 3). This is a fascinating point, because although Chekhov is not always described as political in his own terms, other writers have used his plays to explore the political climate in their own national contexts. This is precisely what Friel has done in his adaptation of *Three Sisters* and, despite claims here that colonial agendas are not present in Chekhov, we can see that they most clearly are in Friel’s versions of the classics.

### THREE SISTERS

It is worth pausing here briefly to outline Chekhov’s original *Three Sisters* (1980). First performed in 1901 in Moscow, the play focuses on the Prozorov family: Andrey, his wife Natasha, and his three sisters Olga, Masha and Irina. Olga is an unmarried school teacher, Masha is unhappily married to Kulygin, a schoolmaster, and Irina, the youngest, is a postmistress. They live in a provincial garrison town outside Moscow, but yearn to return to the city. A Lieutenant-Colonel named Vershinin arrives and falls in love with Masha, despite having a wife and two children. The sisters mock and berate Natasha for being crude and vulgar, fussing about her children and being cruel to the servants. A fire breaks out in the town. The sisters collect clothes to help those who have been made homeless. Natasha tells the elderly nursemaid, Anfisa, that she is elderly and no use in the household, and so must return to the village,

which the sisters find appalling. Andrey mortgages the house to repay his gambling debts and Baron Tuzenbakh proposes to Irina, an offer she accepts, even though she does not love him, in order to return to Moscow. Vershinin's wife tries to kill herself and, whilst he and Masha confess their love for each other, the brigade are posted away from the town and must be parted. Irina is preparing to marry Tuzenbakh but news reaches her that he has been killed in a duel. The sisters are left alone and in sorrow. Irina asks, "What is all this for? Why all the suffering? The answer will be known one day, and then there will be no more mysteries left, but till then life must go on, we must work and work and think of nothing else" (Chekhov 1980: 236–237). The military band fades into the distance as the soldiers leave town and Olga cries, "It feels as if we might find out what our lives and suffering are for. If we could only know! If we could only know!" (237).

There are few real events in the play, perhaps excepting the fire and the Baron's death, both of which happen off stage. What the play lacks in plot, it makes up for in atmosphere and emotion, as the characters are left abandoned in their stifling and unbearably pointless existences, desperately wondering what the meaning of their lives will be. In this way, Chekhov anticipates Modernist theatre, which its preoccupation with existence and reality. The play's commentary on the human condition, which Andrey graphically describes as "A miserable lot of living corpses" (Chekhov 1980: 231), pre-empted existentialist anxiety and Absurdism. However, there is also a discernible concern in the play with politics and economics. Running underneath the narrative there is a regular discourse of change brewing and dissatisfaction and boredom with the status quo. The Baron states he feels "an avalanche is moving down on us and a great storm is brewing [...] it's going to blast out of society all the laziness, complacency [and] contempt for work" (174). In comparison to this, the sisters are shown to be exhausted and depressed by their professions, with Irina complaining: "We must work, work, work. That's why we're so miserable and take such a gloomy view of things" (186). This commentary perhaps also reflects upon the huge social and economic upheavals of Russia in the early twentieth century. The Revolution of 1905, marked by violent unrest and strikes, was only a few years away from the first performance of *Three Sisters*, and the Revolution of 1917, which overturned the rule of the Tsar and replaced it with a communist government, was also close at hand. Chekhov's interest here in the changing nature of Russian society pre-empted some of the colossal

revolutions ahead. The relationship between the privileged Prozorovs and the provincial Natasha, and her cruel treatment of their maid, again underscores the potential conflict between those who have power and those who are dispossessed.

Friel's version of the play differs only slightly from Chekhov's. The plot, such as it is, remains exactly the same. The characters' names are unchanged and the location remains in Russia. There are, however, a few interesting points of departure. Generally he has elongated the text, taking an already lengthy play and extending it yet further. The first night performance lasted four hours, with one reviewer commenting "The audience certainly received good value for their money" (Richtarik 1994: 126). There are also more stage directions, giving the reader and director more information about both the setting and the characters. Friel has also made the language more expressive and emotional. For example, "I felt so happy and excited" (Chekhov 1980: 171) in the Oxford World's Classics translation becomes "I felt elated. No, exalted!" (Friel 2014: 8) for Friel. Similarly, "I remembered when we were children and Mother was still alive" (Chekhov 1980: 172) becomes "[when] Mama was alive [...] life was so simple and there was so much happiness" (Friel 2014: 9).

More controversially, perhaps, Friel uses more contemporary language, allowing the characters to swear. "I say, what a lot of flowers" (Chekhov 1980: 183) is translated as "My God, I've never seen so many flowers" (Friel 2014: 27), "How frightful" (Chekhov 1980: 176) becomes "Oh my God!" (Friel 2014: 17) and "I'm going to have a little glass of something" (Chekhov 1980: 187) is now "Why are you keeping the damned wine hidden up there?" (Friel 2014: 34). Friel also indulges in a more melodramatic use of language. Vershinin's wife's suicide attempt is described as "grotesque" (Friel 2014; 58) and "theatrical" (59) by Friel and "frightfully unpleasant" (Chekhov 1980: 200) and "peculiar" (201) in the original.<sup>1</sup> Masha describes the inebriated Baron as "pissed" (Friel 2014: 64) whereas he remains simply "drunk" (Chekhov 1980: 203) for Chekhov. Friel also adds a modern and ironic commentary in places. Andrey's woeful marriage to Natasha is summed up in the words "my wife doesn't understand me" (Chekhov 1980: 192) in the classic translation, but Friel adds "To coin a phrase, 'My wife doesn't understand me'" (Friel 2014: 42), ironically commenting on the now rather hackneyed expression used to convey marital disharmony. His use of the inverted commas also perhaps draws attention to the translation process itself, as he exposes the layered effect of one text within the other.

While Friel maintains the political commentary and references to Russian geography, society and culture, he adds a dimension of Irish language quite distinct from the original. It is in this addition that Friel departs most significantly from Chekhov and, I shall argue, it is this element that allows us to see this version as an adaptation consciously shifting national contexts, rather than a simple translation. Friel gives Natasha and the servant Anfisa a specific and distinctive use of the Irish idiom. For example, Natasha's first words in the play are "Sweet Mother of God" (Friel 2014: 330), with no equivalent in the Chekhov text, and goes on to use the same expression three more times in the play. Similarly, when startled, she exclaims "Jesus, Mary and Joseph! You put the heart across me!" (118). She describes her children as "wee ones" (73), and herself as "a silly, doting mammy" (37) as well as an "eejit" (56). She is also shown to adjust her accent, becoming "*slightly posh*" (330) when addressing the sisters. Anfisa also uses language closely associated with Irish language, for example referring to herself as "Amn't I living the life of a queen? [...] Thanks be to God, but He's made me a very contented aul woman in my old age" (113).

These shifts, subtle though they may appear, represent a distinct departure from more classical translations of Chekhov, and are a clear indication of an overt placing of the translation in a new national context. It could also be argued that this overt linguistic additional has a political motivation.

Martine Pelletier argues that for all of Field Day's stated aims of unity and openness in Northern Ireland, they "remained, in practice, faithful to an unreconstructed nationalist agenda" (1999: 334). In this context, we can read Friel's *Three Sisters* in broadly political, and certainly specifically Irish, light. This is due to Friel's use of language in the play. It must be remembered that, as he demonstrated in *Translations*, language is not a neutral or uncontested means of communication. Language is politically charged and potentially controversial. As Charles Baker points out, "Ever since colonial times, the English have systemically tried to dismantle Irish identity by attacking Irish culture" (2000: 264) presenting the Irish as uncultured, rough and vulgar. Baker goes on, "In their postcolonial response to these stereotypes, many Irish nationalists now seek a return to their roots, be they mythic or *linguistic* [italics mine], thereby reasserting the past that their predecessors were taught to be ashamed of" (264). For this reason, Friel takes issue with the way in which previous translators of Chekhov have shifted the play into English in an

unproblematic or unquestioning way. For Friel, the English language is itself a contested, politically charged and fraught mode of expression.

Discussing the translation of *Three Sisters*, Friel remarks in interview,

I think that the versions of *Three Sisters* which we see and read in this country always seem to be redolent of either Edwardian England or the Bloomsbury set. Somehow the rhythms of these versions do not match with the rhythms of our own speed patterns, and I think that they ought to in some way. Even the most recent English translation again carries, of necessity, very strong English cadences and rhythms. This is something about which I feel strongly – in some way we are constantly overshadowed by the sound of English language, as well as by the printed word. Maybe this does not inhibit us, but it forms and shapes us in a way that is neither healthy nor valuable for us. (Murray 1999: 84)

On one level, this approach has a purely practical application. Writing for a group of Irish actors, it makes sense to write an adaptation which suits their individual linguistic tendencies. He explains further,

I wrote this play in an Irish idiom because with English translations Irish actors become more and more remote. They have to pretend, first of all, that they're English and then that they're Russian. I'd like our audience to see Captains and Lieutenants who look as if they came from Finner or Tullamore. (Richtarik 1994: 120)

Of course, Friel's statement also has a political dimension. He describes his intention in writing this adaptation as a "decolonisation process of the imagination" (Richtark 1994: 120), by which the assumed voice of the English coloniser is expunged by the "subtle political act" (Csikai 2005: 79) of privileging an Irish idiom over the normalised English. This use of Hiberno-English, the 'version' of English adopted and spoken by the Irish in Ireland, is a complex and politically fraught choice. While, on the one hand, we might read the assumption of English as the dominant linguistic form as a defeat for the Gaelic language spoken before colonialism, Baker argues that for the Irish, a middle way can be adopted, and he suggests that the way forward for "personal liberation" is through "the Irish appropriation of English" (2000: 271). In this way, I would argue that the process of linguistic colonialism is in some ways akin to adaptation, that a new way of expression can be found in a blending of previous forms.

In giving some of his characters a distinctive Irish voice, Friel is clearly adapting Chekhov to a new national context. This can be clearly read as a political choice, as Friel so overtly describes himself, in his desire to create a text which speaks to the Irish actors and audience he is addressing. However, although Friel says he would like his audience to see “Captains and Lieutenants” coming from Irish locations, it is really only his lower-class characters who adopt an Irish speech idiom. This is principally the case for Natasha, wife of Andrey and sister-in-law to the sisters. She is depicted by Chekhov, and Friel, as a rather unpleasant and gauche character. Friel has Masha describe her as “Vulgar, for God’s sake! Downright vulgar!” (2014: 23), and Olga reduces her to tears when she criticises her choice of dress, implying she has few social graces or refinements (34). Once Natasha marries Andrey, she is shown to be a fussy and over-protective mother, and a cold wife, rekindling an affair with a former suitor, and treating the servants cruelly. Masha mockingly describes her as a “theatrical mammy” (using her use of Irish idiom to taunt her) and as a “bitch” (65), which is a heightened version of Chekhov’s “vulgar creature” (1980: 202). She is also cruel to Anfisa, telling her she is no longer of use to the family, too old to work, and that she must return to where she belongs, “out in the bogs” (Friel 2014: 74). This is another specifically Irish reference, Chekhov simply suggesting she “go back to her village” (1980: 209). She is thus not just a character from a lower social class, she is also depicted as a cruel and difficult character, and one with whom the audience is not explicitly encouraged to sympathise.

Friel’s partial use of Hiberno-English creates a problem for the critics. Windle points out that colloquial Irish speech is “particularly [...] apparent in the speech of those of lower social standing, the servants and the retainers, and the ‘vulgar’ Natasha” (2006: 359) and that “it is lower-class speech that betrays the clearest Irish influence” (360). Monica Randaccio agrees, arguing that Natasha’s “lower social status is portrayed in her language richer in colloquialism and local expressions” (2013: 123). Krause sees this as a deeply problematic aspect to the play. He finds it belittling that

[It is only] the servile or socially inferior characters [...] who speak in the Irish English idiom [...] Was Friel deliberately or inadvertently making what might be taken as a demeaning political statement by maintaining such class distinctions in his version of the play’s language, distinctions not evident in Chekhov’s text? (1999: 636)

He concludes: “Something is wrong here” (643).

It is indeed surprising that Friel’s overt political agenda, and his clear desire to create a text with language accessible to an Irish audience, would make these social distinctions also linguistic ones, marking the servants and Natasha out as socially inferior by means of the way they speak. However, Richard Jones suggests that we can read Natasha in a different way, pointing out that “many members of Friel’s audience speak more like Natasha than like the sisters” (2002: 36), and thus she might be interpreted more favourably by them. He also claims that Natasha’s character is not entirely negative, that there is “an energy in [her] colloquialisms” and that while her “pretensions are played up, [so] is her link to ‘real people’ and to a self-confident pragmatism which is not completely unattractive” (36).

Critics have also suggested that Friel’s attempt to present Hiberno-English alongside more standard forms of English reduces the play to a “cultural soup” (Marsh 2012: 121). An interview in 2004 with more traditional theatrical translators also prompted what might be seen as a veiled attack on Friel’s adaptation, “I loathe it when a translator takes a Russian peasant and makes him sound like an Okie in English. This is abominable. Better to lose some of the ‘local flavour’ than add spices that have nothing to do with the original” (John Freedman, quoted in Allen 2004: 33–34). Of course, it is this ‘local flavour’ that Friel is trying to establish, and again this debate goes to the heart of what is meant by the key terms ‘adaptation’ and ‘translation’. While a theatrical translator may feel it is not their task to add local characteristics, it is exactly in these additional features that we see an adaptation beginning to take shape. The addition of local flavour, in this case, *national* flavour, is what makes Friel’s work a step beyond traditional translation, and what defines it as adaptation. The layering of new elements on top of existing characteristics is what we can meaningfully speak of as the adaptation process, and one in which a distinctive national and political element plays a crucial role.

There are further political dimensions to the adaptation of *Three Sisters* Friel has created. Jones goes on to argue that Friel has elongated the role of the servants in his adaptation, and in which they “simply speak more than Chekhov’s” (2002: 37). Richard Pine agrees, that Friel “develops a more interpersonal and Irish relationship between masters and servants than the history of nineteenth-century Russia would bear” (2006: 112). In developing the role of the servants, Friel is clearly giving the local characters a more rounded and prominent presence on the stage. It

is also worth reflecting on the synergies between Northern Ireland in the 1980s and the Moscow of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. Richtarik suggests that "The three sisters' unfulfilled longing to go to Moscow was not unlike the frustrated yearning of most people in Northern Ireland for an end to the violence and the political impasses" (2004: 196). Roche-Tiengo describes the premiere for the adaptation as taking place "in the midst of car-bomb scares and British military intervention" (2012: 98). Although the overt politics and nationalism of *Three Sisters* are found in its linguistic adaptations, it is also the case that the context of 1980s Northern Ireland provides the audience with a tangible opportunity to compare their own political circumstances with that of Chekhov's Russia. Csikai suggests that the context of Friel's 1981 *Three Sisters* was marked by a "confident belief in the power of literary methods, drama or pamphletting to affect some political change" but by the time he adapted *Uncle Vanya*, some 17 years later "a tone of scepticism" (2005: 81) had taken over. Friel's second adaptation of a Chekhov play makes much less of the linguistic battles between England and Ireland, and focuses more closely on the comparisons between Ireland and Russia, as well as the political context of the emerging Northern Ireland peace process.

## UNCLE VANYA

*Uncle Vanya*, subtitled "Scenes from a Country Life in Four Acts", premiered in 1897. The subtitle 'scenes from a life' helps describe the play in which, again, very little happens. However, as with *Three Sisters*, what is missing in terms of action and plot is gained in emotion, as the characters are yet again shown to be trapped in restrictive and oppressive lives. The play centres around the rural home of Vanya Voynitsky, his mother Maria and niece, Sonya. The estate belongs to Vanya's brother-in-law and Sonya's father, Alexander, a retired university professor. The play begins with his arrival with a new young wife, Elena. Vanya falls in love with Elena, but she is attracted to Mikhail Astrov, a local doctor, with whom Sonya is also in love. Alexander announces that he will sell the estate. Vanya, furious by the selfishness of this intention, shoots him with a gun but misses. Alexander and Elena leave, with tearful farewells from both Vanya and Astrov. Sonya says goodbye to Astrov for the winter; it is clear he cannot return her love, and she and Vanya confess their great unhappiness to each other. Sonya declares that they must "bear patiently

the trials fate has in store for us” and the final words of the play are “we shall find peace” (Chekhov 1980: 167).

The play has a number of subplots, or perhaps what can more accurately be described as additional running themes. Maria, the mother of Vanya and mother-in-law of Alexander, is a radical figure, espousing political pamphlets with enthusiasm and zeal. Astrov is also an idealistic figure, discussing what might in the twenty-first century be described as environmental concerns, campaigning to save Russia’s forests, bemoaning “millions upon millions of trees perish, the homes of birds and beasts are devastated, rivers grow shallow and dry up, wonderful scenery disappears without trace, and all because man’s so lazy” (127). He goes on to suggest that civilisation itself is not progressing, with peasants still living with terrible “poverty, typhus and diphtheria” and “everything’s gone downhill” (148). As outlined above, it is not difficult to see the concerns of Russian society in the late nineteenth century being explored again here, with anxieties about the condition of the poor and questioning of privileged society. As with *Three Sisters*, the play is also punctuated with expressions of despair and ennui, Vanya responding to Elena’s comment about the pleasantness of the day with the remark, “It’s a perfect day. For a man to hang himself” (126) and his final words of the play are “I’m so depressed, Sonya, you can’t think how depressed I feel” (167).

Again, as with *Three Sisters*, Friel makes very few significant changes in his version. Friel’s *Uncle Vanya* premiered in 1998. It retains all of the Russian names, geographies and overall plot. As with *Three Sisters*, however, Friel changes some of the language, perhaps to make the adaptation feel more contemporary. For example, Astrov complains about being overworked, and describes his patients as “odd” (Chekhov 1980: 119) in the original and by Friel as “boring” and “squalid” (2014: 254), the emphasis here being on unacceptable living conditions, and thus providing a potentially more political context. He later asks Sonya if he may “cadge a bed for the night” (Friel 2014: 260), which is simply “stay till tomorrow” (Chekhov 1980: 124) for Chekhov. Vanya interjects with a sarcastic “whoopee!” (Friel 2014: 261) at the prospect of haymaking, which is entirely absent in Chekhov’s, and there are several added phrases, “Oh Jesus” (272) and “Oh my God” (275), which are not in the original translations. Elena dismisses Sonya’s suggestion that she become a teacher with “Teaching snotty little brats? Are you serious, Sonya?” (296) which in Chekhov’s is a more measured “I’m no good at that sort of thing” (1980: 144). Sonya describes a late night with

food and wine as “a midnight orgy!” (Friel 2014: 291) which is entirely absent in Chekhov’s. Friel has also removed some particular phrases. Chekhov twice describes the local “peasants”, once as “uncivilised and [living] in filth” (1980: 139), and again when Elena rejects a suggestion that she take work “teaching and dosing peasants” (144). On both occasions, Friel takes this word out, or removes the sentence completely, suggesting that such use of a politically incorrect word in 1998 would perhaps alienate the audience. Although in *Three Sisters* the addition of Hiberno-English was highly significant, it is largely absent in *Uncle Vanya*, save for one line: “We’ll take a little rest, Doctor, will we?” (Friel 2014: 286), delivered by a character Friel describes as “an impoverished landowner”, so again use of the more informal dialect is associated with poverty and dispossession.

Despite these few departures, the similarities between Chekhov’s original and Friel’s adaptation are significant. In fact, it is worth questioning why Friel felt it worth adapting this play at all. While he may have modernised the language, and made it more informal, there are few significant linguistic distinctions between the two versions. However, when we explore the political language of both plays, more telling divisions begin to become apparent.

A rather underdeveloped character for Chekhov, Vanya’s mother, Maria, is more crucial for Friel’s retelling of the play. Her revolutionary zeal is foregrounded more heavily, and her language heightened. For example, Chekhov has her critiquing a politician who “attacks the very position he was defending seven years ago” (1980: 125). This, for Friel, becomes, “abandoned every revolutionary principle he ever had” (2014: 262), a more radical and aggressive rebuttal. Friel also gives Maria more stage time, and extends her comments on political ideology, adding the lines, “Abandoning one’s principles seems to be fashionable nowadays. What became of the man who had convictions, staunch beliefs?” (Friel 2014: 262) and “Principles, convictions are only guidelines. They must be translated into revolutionary action” (263). Later on in the play Maria is given additional lines again, describing a house meeting as “a protest meeting! Excellent! [...] I’m voting No” (308), again with no equivalent in the original. Similarly, she “*thrusts a pamphlet into Astrov’s face*” in Friel’s and declares “No prisoners taken. Everybody is—*She draws an imaginary knife across her throat and plunges the pamphlet again*” before describing herself as an “old gladiator” (328). Again, an additional scene is created where Maria is seen pronouncing “The anarchist, Rosimov”

proclaiming him “(*with delight*) Merciless” (332). These are all additions to the text, and do not exist in the earlier Chekhov translations. Furthermore, in general, the language is heightened around the topic of politics and revolution. Astrov describes green land he is protecting as “defending it with my life” (301), a phrase missing in Chekhov’s version. In discussing Elena’s faithfulness to Alexander, Telegin, the ‘impoverished landowner’ remarks, “Anyone who betrays a wife or husband could easily be unreliable enough to betray his county as well” (Chekhov 1980: 123) which is elevated to “high treason” (Friel 2014: 259) for Friel.

The effect of these additions and adjustments is to flavour Friel’s adaptation with a sense of revolution, to put politics and ideology far more centre-stage. While Chekhov is generally not known for being explicit in his political musings, despite giving a general sense of unease or unrest, Friel is keen to be much more explicit in his discussion of political context. And so we can see that he is using this play, and its rather muted discussion of political mutiny, to rehearse more specific contemporary concerns in Northern Ireland at the time of its first performance.

Friel’s *Uncle Vanya* premiered in October 1998. Earlier that year, on 10th April, the Belfast Agreement, commonly known as the Good Friday Agreement, was signed, with the aim of ending three decades of violence in Northern Ireland, and the loss of over three thousand lives (Walker 2012: 107). These years of turbulence and trauma had undoubtedly had a significant effect on the lives of people in Northern Ireland, creating years of uncertainty, fear and, arguably, increased engagement in political activity and discussion. A year later, in 1999, Friel discussed his interest in Chekhov, and suggested that one of the reasons he felt connected to the Russian playwright was due to similarities between his own time and Russia at the turn of the twentieth century:

I’m not sure why I find the late-nineteenth-century Russians so sympathetic. Maybe because the characters in the plays behave as if their old certainties were as sustaining as ever – even though they know in their hearts that their society is in melt-down and the future has neither a welcome nor even an accommodation for them. Maybe a bit like people of my own generation in Ireland today. (Murray 1999: 179)

Friel’s words seem to hint at a loss of faith and a certain wariness about the future rather than celebratory hope and optimism about the change promised by the Agreement. On the one hand, we can see the political vibrancy of the late 1990s in Belfast reflected in Maria’s revolutionary

principles and certainly Sonya's final words, "There will be peace" (Friel 2014: 338), are particularly resonant in the context of Northern Ireland in 1998. In addition to expanding Maria's role, and foregrounding her political campaigning, Friel makes a further subtle change in the text, using a small narrative aside about a group of villagers asking about what Chekhov describes as "that bit of waste land" (1980: 126) as "That old squabble about the common ground down beside the lake. They're going to submit a 'discussion document' on it next week" (Friel 2014: 264), which seems to allude to the current political wrangling, as well as the years of conflict over disputed territory.

However, on the other hand, Friel does not seem to be suggesting that the Good Friday Agreement will bring unqualified unity or peace. The parallel he evokes here implies that the future does not necessarily appear certain or secure. Indeed, Csikai argues that *Uncle Vanya* is, while "quietly political" (2005: 79), also "taken over by a tone of scepticism" with "allusions to the still crisis-ridden reality, and especially Northern Irish reality, of contemporary Irish audiences" (81).

While the general narrative of Northern Irish politics in 1998 might have been one of hope and reconciliation, and Friel's adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* seems to reflect a preoccupation with questions of politics, revolution, and change, perhaps we can also detect a cynicism or uncertainty about the political process in 1998. Of course, in reality, events in Northern Ireland in this year were also complex and fraught. While there was notable and significant change, Brian M. Walker argues that: "These changes must not be exaggerated", and points to the "severe difficulties", "serious crises" and "lack of trust" (2012: 148) that dogged the peace process in its early years. He also cites the 128 further deaths between 1998 and 2006, signalling that the Good Friday Agreement did not bring immediate peace for all. It is also worth remembering that while the premiere of *Uncle Vanya* took place just 6 months after the signing of the Agreement, and is perhaps the most obvious political context for the play, audiences would be equally aware of another, much more troubling event from merely 2 months earlier—the 29 lives lost in Omagh in August that year as an IRA bomb exploded in a busy shopping street. Given this turbulent and contradictory political and national context, perhaps it is possible to read Uncle Vanya's depression, uncertainty and ambivalence in a more equivocal light, whereby the seeming inaction of the play is mirrored by the Northern Irish political situation and its many difficulties and crises.

Whenever a playwright chooses to adapt a play rather than write an original one, it is important to question what motivated this decision. When we also consider national contexts, we are frequently invited by the playwright to see an analogous relationship between the original play, and its place in its national consciousness, and the new context offered by the adapting dramatist. Although Friel has not explicitly relocated the action for *Uncle Vanya*, or for *Three Sisters*, by his own admission, there are several key similarities between the Russia of the turn of the twentieth century and the Northern Irish context within which Friel was writing. These resonances have been noted by numerous critics. York describes the worlds of Chekhov and Friel as sharing “disturbing closeness” (1993: 164). Pine outlines a number of social and historical similarities between Ireland and Russia “such as the prevalence of famine in both countries” (2006: 107), and Pelletier notes that there are also connections between each nation’s relationship with alcohol, which “features quite prominently in both Irish and Russian culture” (2013: 190), a fact mirrored by Astrov in *Uncle Vanya* who drinks heavily throughout the play. It has also been argued that there are also similarities between the psychologies and emotional states of the people in both countries. Andrews suggests that “Russian disenchantment and frustration have their easily recognisable counterparts in the Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s. The continuing Troubles enforced a sense of impasse and endless malaise, a feeling of stagnation and depression” (1995: 183). This is easily recognisable in Vanya’s emotional state, and, for example, in his line, “Everything will be the same” (Friel 2014: 328).

These cultural echoes are reinforced by more significant political parallels. Pelletier connects Irish and Russian politics at the turn of the twentieth century, arguing:

both societies were then on the brink of a violent revolution that would annihilate the dominant landowning aristocracy and political elite, leading to the establishment of the new social order and, in the case of Ireland, the birth of the Free State and the emancipation of most of the island from the British Empire. (2013: 186)

It is therefore possible to see both Ireland and Russia as countries in moments of transitions of power; that they have been subject to “the exercise of remote power” (York 1993: 165) but are on the cusp of momentous political change and revolution. For example, at the time of

Friel's adapting of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, the political situation in Northern Ireland, in the midst of the Troubles and then again at their possible end, did indeed evoke the political unrest of pre-Revolution Russia. In considering these similarities, the audience is encouraged to view Friel's adaptations of 100-year-old Russian plays as ways of accessing their own recent history and current political context. In bringing together Russia and Ireland through the merging of theatrical texts in a new translation/adaptation, Friel is able to offer a commentary on the specific conditions of his own national context, and invite audiences to also feel the resonances of the distinct political environments connected through the juxtaposition of one nation with another.

This book is concerned with the complex ways in which playwrights engage with their own national contexts, and those of the original texts, through shifting the national character of a play in the process of adaptation. The aim of the book is to examine why a dramatist would either entirely shift a play to a different national context, or how they embed a new culture into the adaptation or translation of a classic text. Pine argues that context can only be understood through an appreciation of the relationship between past and present: "In any context there is a past which determines meaning, and a present (the context itself) which looks to future based on what is about to be transacted" (1999: 343). In any understanding of national context, the history of that nation is of crucial significance and without which the audience cannot fully understand the current social or cultural debate. The same is true of the relationship between the original text and the adaptation. Just as the audience must appreciate the history and the national significance of the Northern Irish peace process, or the politics of language construction in the country, they must also appreciate the connections between Russia and Ireland, in order to fully appreciate the purpose of Friel's engagement with Chekhov. In this way, the relationships outlined above, between Ireland and Russia at different points of history, help give Friel's texts their meaning.

#### AFTERPLAY

The final play this chapter will explore represents an entirely different engagement with Chekhov. In *Afterplay* (2002), Friel revisits his relationship with *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*, but in such a way that again questions and challenges the very definition of adaptation, and the significance of national distinctiveness. While the early plays offer very little

addition or revision to the original texts, this play creates an entirely new fictional universe for two of Chekhov's characters.

*Afterplay* imagines a fictional meeting between *Three Sisters*' Andrey Prozorov and *Uncle Vanya*'s Sonya Serebriakova, 20 years after the end of both plays. Now in middle age, the characters meet in a café in Moscow, and share a brief, but intimate, conversation. Andrey is ostensibly now a violinist at the Opera House with his two children, who are a successful doctor and engineer. As the pair chat about their lives and experiences, they give possible outcomes for other characters in the play, such as the death of Sonya's father and Vanya's renewed obsession with Elena, Masha's suicide, and Natasha leaving Andrey and abandoning their children. As the conversation unfolds, it becomes clear that Andrey has lied about some key factors in his life; that his children are not in truth successful professionals, and that his son is in fact in prison. He also reveals that he is not a violinist in an orchestra, but instead a busker on the street. Sonya is angry, but it is clear the couple are attracted to each other and there is the promise of blossoming romance. As Sonya prepares to leave, however, she confesses her love for Astrov, who, she reveals, has married Elena after her father's death, leaving Sonya devastated. She says she cannot meet Andrey again because Astrov still visits her occasionally, usually drunk, and they share a "love of sorts", while admitting it is "Not the most satisfactory way to get through your life" (Friel 2014: 447). After she leaves, Andrey begins to compose her a letter, leaving the audience to wonder what he will say to her.

This very brief play has, like the two that inspired it, very little action but it too has great emotional intensity and is also infused with a sense of loss and despair. As each of Andrey's little fictions are exposed, the audience are invited to feel both his humiliation and humanity, as well as the desperate situation outlined by Sonya at the close of the play. As a piece of intertextual theatre, it is also an extremely interesting piece of adaptation. Friel provides a note at the start of the text, and one section is particularly telling in his approach to Chekhov:

Had I created these two characters in the first place I would feel free now to shape them as I wished. But they are not mine alone. I am something less than a parent but I know I am something more than a foster-parent. Maybe closer to a godparent who takes his responsibilities scrupulously. So when I consider the complex life Anton Chekhov breathed into Sonya and

Andrey one hundred years ago I believe that that life can be carried forward into this extended existence *provided the two stay true to where and what they came from*. That means that the godfather has to stay alert at all times to the intention of their first beggter. (409–410, italics added)

What is particularly interesting about these words, apart from what they reveal about how Friel views his own position in relation to Chekhov in the role of adaptor, is the section italicised. Here Friel suggests that there is a ‘truthful’ way to write this play, and to imagine these characters in the future and, therefore, also a dishonest or incorrect way. Clearly this recalls the significance of ‘fidelity criticism’, which Hutcheon describes as an erroneous form of analysis derived from “proximity or fidelity to the adapted text” (6), with adaptations judged negatively should they stray too far away from the original. Hutcheon argues that this is a “morally loaded discourse” (Hutcheon 2006: 7), and that fidelity merely describes replication of the original, rather than a new and original text.

While this example does not fit exactly (clearly Friel has not adapted these plays but created an original play), it is intriguing that he too uses the discourse of fidelity and truth. His words seem to imply that there is a ‘right’ and truthful way to imagine these characters in their future life, or there is a false or dishonest way, and that by somehow connecting closely with Chekhov (he does not describe how this is possible), we might be able to understand what is the right way to write this fictional encounter. Of course, in reality, these are not real people; they were always a fictional imagining and how best to continue their ‘lives’ in a new play is not a matter of morality or virtue, however framed by Friel. That he felt the need to “stay true” to Chekhov’s original vision is a fallacy, and one which gives the original source text primacy over all other texts, despite being a fictional creation itself. What’s more, the entire text is a musing on the nature of truth, reality and fiction, as each one of Andrey’s lies are revealed to be fantasies. He refers to them as “Little fictions” (Friel 2014: 438), suggesting a literary self-awareness, as of course all of the play, and the two it is based on, were entirely fictitious themselves. Therefore, all searches for the ‘truth’ are rather meaningless as all of Andrey’s life is revealed to be a fiction, not simply within the context of the play’s narrative, but also in the wider web of literary creations. He is, quite simply, a fictional character—an ‘untruthful’ creation, and therefore attempts to be faithful to his character are ultimately impossible.

Critics have argued that *Afterplay* constitutes “the extremes of adaptation” (Csikai 2005: 83) and is taking the “greatest liberty” (Pine 2006: 105) with Chekhov’s text and characters. O’Dowd argues that audience members must have a prior understanding of who these characters are (i.e. they need to be familiar with *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya*), and that they must have “acceptance of [the characters’] essentially fictive qualities” (2010: 146), as outlined above. Richard Pine’s reading of the play is slightly more cryptic, suggesting that Friel’s aim with the play was to explore “the afterlife of make-believe, when we discover that we are not characters in someone else’s play, but responsible for our own thoughts and deeds” (2006: 113). Pine seems to be implying the reverse of Pirandello’s treatise in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921); that instead of inviting the audience to use the fiction of theatre to reflect upon the illusion and unreality at the heart of their lives, rather Friel is suggesting that the audience take from the play the message that these characters have somehow transcended the artifice of the stage to be responsible for their own actions, and that they also have a moral duty to be truthful and sincere.

However we read the play, it is clear Friel is pushing the boundaries of adaptation with this text, offering the audience an intertextual metatheatrical response to the earlier Chekhov plays. He even cites his own translation of *Uncle Vanya* within the text of *Afterplay*, having Sonya quote herself from the earlier text (Friel 2014: 422–423). Csikai suggests that we read the play “in a postmodern fashion” (2005: 86) and certainly it is easy to see Friel here at his most playful and self-conscious. Indeed, the whole process of adaptation and intertextuality can be read as a postmodern exercise, relying as it does so heavily on assumed knowledge, parody, ironic self-consciousness and the playful deconstruction of (often canonical) texts. However, once we read this text through a postmodern lens, we begin to question the importance and the distinctiveness of national borders. Postmodernism sees the disintegration and collapse of many old certainties, and postmodern scholars have argued for the need to see place and space in new and complex ways, seeing spaces as “a multiplicity of real-and-imagined places” (Woods 1999: 120) whereby “global homogenization” (Appignanesi and Garratt 2004: 186), or globalisation, elides national or cultural difference. Returning to Anderson’s “imagined communities”, we can see that as postmodernism blurs geographical and national borders, so too questions about the importance or possibility of distinct nations are also posed. In that context, *Afterplay*

seems to tap into a world beyond national individuality where texts are fluid and multiple rather than fixed and singular.

And so where does this leave our investigation of Friel's 'Irish' adaptation of Russian texts? On the one hand, York argues that Friel's versions of the plays give us "more specificness" than we might expect from Chekhov and that "art is process and purpose in a context" (1993: 166), suggesting that we need a specific context to give meaning to the play. On the other hand, Richard Jones believes that Friel has stripped authentic national distinctiveness out of the Chekhov texts, "but feels compelled to introduce a sort of superficial, almost pop culture, Russianness to his work" (2002: 47). The use of language implies a postmodern reading of the plays, whereby images of national identity are reduced to stereotypical cultural signifiers demonstrating a playful ambivalence to the possibility of authentic national experience. In reality, although *Afterplay* is set in Moscow, there is little in the text to offer a national context. In this most extreme of adaptations, and in pushing the definitions of that very term, Friel has created a piece of theatre stripped of national distinctiveness, the very quality he aims to introduce to his earlier translations of Chekhov. While *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* can be read in the context of the post-colonial relationship between Ireland and England, *Afterplay* is best seen as a purely textual exercise in postmodern intertextuality, deliberately exposing the complex series of connections between texts in a completely new and original piece of theatre.

## CONCLUSION

Friel's adaptations of Chekhov raise key questions about the very definitions of translation and adaptation, drawing attention to the imprecision of the translation process and the inevitable loss or gain of meaning in the shift from one context to another. Language is a political tool for Friel, and in these plays he demonstrates both the slipperiness of language in its journey from one nation to another, and also its inherent importance in the creation and maintenance of national identities. They also force us to question the relationship between two eminent playwrights, and to pose questions about whose work audiences are paying to see—the original dramatist or the 'celebrity' translator. What is crucial for our reading of these plays by Friel is some understanding of the relationship between specific national context and generalised common understanding and recognition. Is it possible to view plays under

a universal ‘umbrella’ whereby we see all characters and situations as applicable across the global spectrum or must adaptors embed their own culture in the fabric of the text, so that the play speaks to new and specific audiences rather than globally generic ones? Critics have remained divided over the success of, or indeed the need for, Friel’s adaptations of Chekhov. Andrews cites two reviewers of Friel’s *Three Sisters*, arguing that, “Chekhov needs no special papers to take up Irish residence. He can be at home there in standard translation” and “*Three Sisters* is a universal and timeless play of imperishable beauty, and it needs no colloquialised slant to enhance its level of acceptability” (1995: 182). Others, however, have suggested that through the use of Irish idiom, audiences might be better able to connect with Russian experience, that the plays “enlarge our understanding of Russian mores by making us recognise those which we share with them” (cited in Richtarik 1994: 126).

Clearly Friel felt the exercise to be worthwhile, and that in producing a version of the plays rich with Irish specificity, he was also reaching out towards Russia, making the most of the relationship between the two countries and asking the audience to reflect upon the connections between their own experience in late twentieth-century Ireland and turn-of-the-century Russia. Perhaps, ultimately, this is the best way to read these adaptations. Some will deem them unnecessary, and others will see them as valuable contributions to the Irish theatrical scene. What is important, however, from an adaptation perspective, is whether the texts usefully ‘speak’ to each other across the national divide. Has Friel offered his audience “repetition with variation” in such a way as to offer new meanings and readings for a new national context? The answer to this has to be yes; that he has successfully created texts which offer distinct national variation, and thus can be properly judged as adaptations rather than more straightforward translations. In this case, there is (perhaps just about) sufficient variation, although the additional layer of meaning Friel provides here is wafer thin in places, and almost transparent in others. In other adaptations, and as different playwrights engage with plays from different nations, and attempt to embed meanings from their own national contexts into new plays, we will see much more radical and fundamental rupture in the relationship between the texts, posing different questions about the meaning of adaptation and forcing audiences to ask just how far an adaptation can diverge from its original and still claim that title.

## NOTE

1. I am mindful, of course, that ‘the original’ is an ambiguous term here. I am referring to the more traditional translation of *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* provided by The Oxford World Classic series. Of course, these are translations themselves, and thus cannot be entirely reflective of the original Russian text. They are, however, attributed to Chekhov as the writer (with the necessary citation of the translator—Ronald Hingley), whereas Friel’s plays are presented as being by him as a separate and distinct dramatist. Therefore, I will use these traditionally sourced translations to discuss Chekhov’s texts.

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