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Disrupting Mythological Foundations of Identity: Hugh O'Neill, Making History, and the Troubles

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Kevin Rodden and Ethan Lipkin in *Making History* at Irish Heritage Theatre, Philadelphia.
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"Disrupting Mythological Foundations of Identity: Hugh O'Neill, *Making History,* and the Troubles"

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Brian Friel's *Making History,* performed by the Field Day Theatre Company, debuted in Derry on September 20, 1988, during one of the bloodiest times of the Northern Irish Troubles. One of the deadliest events of this period was the 1987 IRA Remembrance Day bombing which killed ten civilians and inspired a spate of revenge killings by Loyalist paramilitaries. *Making History* thus appeared on the stage during high sectarian tensions in a Northern Ireland distant in both years and mindset from the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Many critics rightfully read the play as a conscious critique of historiography but overlook its connection to the Troubles. Martine Pelletier, along with other critics, explores the notion of public vs. private histories, asserting that "tension between the private realm of individual story and the public History with a capital H has characterized Friel's work" (186). Other scholars, such as Kathleen Hohenleitner, Ulf Dantanus, and Carmen Szabo claim that *Making History* dramatizes the "history wars" in Irish Studies between the competing historical methodologies of nationalism and revisionism. Still others, including Barry Sloan and Hyungseob Lee, argue that *Making History* problematizes the detrimental effects of historiography's ideological construction on national identity.

While previous examinations of the play's treatments of historiography are certainly valid, my paper builds upon these critical approaches to explore how *Making History* disrupts the

textual foundations of national myths, especially those that restrict acceptable expressions of national identity. I argue that through these various disruptions, the play intervenes in the Troubles by using its historical protagonist, Hugh O'Neill, and its overall dramatic structure to both invalidate the national myths that so often underpin sectarian violence and to create a new foundation for cross-cultural understanding. The necessity for such an awareness of the constructed and ephemeral nature of identity-restricting myths is especially pertinent due to Brexit's potential consequences for the fragile peace established by the Good Friday Agreement. As Irish political leaders on both sides of the border have pointed out, the agreement's current terms depend on the membership of both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in the European Union without a hard boundary between them. Re-negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement could lead to the explosion of simmering sectarian tensions. Thus, Brian Friel's *Making History's* disruption of totalizing national myths that restrict national identity intervened not just in the times of the Troubles but could also be valuable in preventing their renewal.

Making History **and the Troubles**

While the Elizabethan era setting of *Making History* seems far removed from the twentieth century, *Making History's* significance to the Troubles lies in the aftermath of the historical events behind the play. The Battle of Kinsale, while not explicitly depicted, is the turning point of both the play and the war. Here, Brian Friel follows history: the combined Irish and Spanish forces would not recover from their resounding defeat at Kinsale in 1601, and O'Neill surrendered to English forces after the battle of Mellifont in 1603. This marked the end of not only the Nine Years War but also of the last organized Irish resistance to English rule for several hundred years. In September 1607, fueled by suspicions of imprisonment and execution, O'Neill and the remaining Irish ruling class in Ulster exiled themselves in France, Spain, and Italy in a dramatic escape known as the Flight of the Earls (Cronin 64). The sudden exodus of over ninety of Ulster's most influential leaders and largest landowners created a "power vacuum" that allowed England to escalate the colonization of Ireland in the now vulnerable North, which Joseph Coohill terms "perfectly open to settlement" after the departure of its core leadership (23). Previous Tudor efforts at plantation had largely failed due to the existing Irish power structures maintained by Hugh O'Neill and other Irish chieftains. After the departure of O'Neill and his counterparts, the English government sought to "secure the future stability and peace of Ireland for the Crown" through a "full-scale process of plantation" in Northern Ireland (Cronin 65). Consequently, the 1609 Articles of Plantation bequeathed all land forfeited by those who had fled, as well as other lands forcibly taken from those who remained, totaling around 500,000 acres, to English and Scottish Protestant settlers. Thus, according to Jenny Wormald, the "sudden and dramatic Flight of the Earls" led to the plantation of Ulster (21). This forced settlement led to deep enmity between the minority land-owning Protestant ruling class and the majority native Irish Catholics.

Many historians claim that the Ulster Plantation is a direct cause for both historical and current issues in Northern Ireland, including the Troubles. The Plantation created an imbalance of power in the North of Ireland, establishing a Protestant ruling class that, over the centuries, practiced both social and legal discrimination against the Catholic population. Additionally, the

Northern Protestants' political and cultural loyalties lay with the British. As a result, Heather Laird claims that the Plantation of Ulster and the tensions it engendered eventually "resulted in the partition of the country" with the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 and the Republic of Ireland in 1949 while Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom (391). Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry state that the Plantation is the "one indisputable historic cause of the current conflict" and that "without the colonial Plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century, and its legacy, Northern Ireland would not exist" (56). These events create the connection between the story of Hugh O'Neill and the Troubles in *Making History.* By returning to the events at the very roots of the Troubles, the play seeks to undo its foundations at their moment of inception.

Making History upends the foundations of the Troubles by disrupting myths of nation and national identity to call for new cross-cultural understanding no longer founded in restrictive national mythological narratives. The play's main conflict centers around Archbishop Lombard's attempt to create a mythological national hero from Hugh O'Neill and use this hero to unite a downtrodden Ireland. Lombard's vision of the heroic Hugh O'Neill creates an "authentic" Gaelic Catholic warrior hero by erasing seemingly conflicting aspects of O'Neill's identity, such as his marriage to an English woman and his previous loyal service to the Crown. In this dramatization, Friel shows that mythological narratives intended to promote national unity are ultimately exclusionary and lead to mutual bitterness and distrust as they calcify national identities by dictating what aspects of identity are acceptable in a national community. Lombard's biography and the action of *Making History,* then, become the site of disruption of the mythological narrative controlling national identity.

Friel returns to the very moment of the origin of the Troubles to perform several disruptions of the mythological foundations of the nation. These disruptions, in their many forms, aim to invalidate the national myths to create a new, inclusive form of understanding that does not depend upon singular, exclusive visions of national identity. These disruptions occur on several levels. The character Hugh O'Neill disrupts the mythological narrative of Lombard's biography by consciously inserting conflicting narratives while Lombard constructs the myth of O'Neill's life. Additionally, the dramatic structure of the play itself, which roots O'Neill's loss at Kinsale not in his singular identity as a Gaelic Catholic hero but in the denial of the strength inherent in his hybridity, disrupts the notion of the necessity of a singular national identity for national unity. Ultimately, throughout all the instances of disruption embodied in Friel's play, "making history" becomes a deliberate process that counters the unitary mythological narrative; it means embracing a nuanced and inclusionary version of events that does not avoid uncomfortable facts. Before examining these disruptions, it is necessary to investigate the creation of mythological national narratives, especially in their divisive rather than uniting functions.

National Mythological Narratives: Exclusion in the Name of Unity

The disruptions in *Making History* target the mythical foundation of nations and national identity. Both imperial and colonized nations (and communities within those colonized nations) use national myths to solidify campaigns of either dominance or resistance. Nation-building and

national origin myths share elements in common with and often build upon religious and cultural myths. However, the specific purpose of national myths is to promote unity through a foundational narrative of national pride created by re-shaping historical events and figures to fit a common narrative. The purpose of national myths is twofold. First, national myths provide a base upon which a community can form a common identity. According to Jan Ifversen, such "master narratives" have the power to "confer identity" and build a community since "a community only comes into existence through narrative, more precisely through those narratives which the community accepts as its own" (452). Thus, communities are formed through common stories that shape a shared identity. However, such master narratives have an alienating effect upon national identity as they create an idealized, monolithic version of identity; non-conforming identities are erased from the narrative and/or marginalized in society. A second purpose of national myths is to serve the purported needs of the nation, whether to justify current government actions, to support a new national direction, such as a rebellion, or to unify the people in crisis. In such times of crisis, the veracity of national myths becomes nearly unassailable; to question the myth is to question the nation itself. These characteristics are apparent upon examination of the foundational national myths of both England and Ireland.

At several points in its history, the English government appropriated national origin myths to justify colonial activities. Geoffrey of Monmouth's 1136 quasi-history, *History of the Kings of Britain*, created a seemingly authoritative origin myth that gave British colonial activities the air of a sacred national duty (Greenfield 182). In *History of the Kings of Britain* the English enacted a *translatio imperii* (translation of empire) from ancient Troy to modern Britain by claiming that the English nation could trace its origins to the city of Troy (Greenfield 182).[1] Monmouth's *History* thus turned English imperialism into a seemingly valid continuation of the Trojan Empire. According to Hugh A. MacDougall's *Racial Myth in English History,* Monmouth's *History* grew into a "great national myth" that was not without precedent as classical writers often claimed national origin from another great civilization (8).[2] The strength of England's origin myth increased through continuous re-inscription upon the national consciousness in subsequent works, such as Spenser's 1590 *The Faerie Queene,* England's national epic in the Elizabethan era. *The Faerie Queene* lavishes praise upon England's government, Queen Elizabeth, and the English through numerous allegorical heroic endeavors. *The Faerie Queene* continues the *translatio imperii* from *History of the Kings of Britain,* beginning its prolonged history of England in Books II and III with the fall of Troy. Here,

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[1] The *History* includes an account of Brutus, Aeneas of Troy's grandson and the great-grandson of the goddess Venus. Brutus is banished at age fifteen, blamed for his father's accidental death. After years of wandering and heroic deeds, Brutus arrives with a small band of followers in the giant-populated land of Albion. He renames Albion Britain after himself, conquers the giants, and founds a city named Troynovant ("New Troy") that eventually becomes London. The *History* then details "the heroic exploits of a long line of kings" descended from Brutus including King Lear (immortalized by Shakespeare several centuries later) and King Arthur (MacDougall 8).

[2] Vergil's *Aeneid* portrays Aeneas as the founder of Lavinium, Rome's parent city. The Gallo-Romans, the Franks in Gaul, and the Normans all traced their own origins to Troy. In his appropriation of supposed Trojan ancestry, Geoffrey of Monmouth "simply exploited an existing myth which was guaranteed to sit well with the Norman masters of England" (8).

Spenser suggests that English history has proceeded in an unbroken line since the city of Troy.[3] The myth of Trojan lineage fulfilled both purposes of a national myth in that it provided a justification for current national endeavors, namely colonialism, and provided a foundation upon which to create a community and define a national identity. The origin myth of Trojan lineage provided the British with "a national literature, a national language, a shared historical memory, and common ancestors" through which they celebrated national achievements (Greenfield 182). The notion of Trojan ancestry thus became prominent in the national imagination. Imagery from the Trojan War pervaded Elizabethan and Stuart iconography, especially pertaining to the monarchy, imbuing the government and its colonial activities with "classical authority" (James 22). English imperial activities, then, became a part of a larger master narrative of the nation and perfectly justifiable in the name of perpetuating Troy's legacy.

To combat justifications of English imperialism, Irish national myths have also deliberately manipulated historical source material into master narratives to both justify national activities and build a community, ultimately creating a monolithic version of national identity. Against an imperial English tradition that solidified its standard of "Englishness," which the Irish, although English subjects, could never achieve, Irish nationalism sought to re-claim and concretely define what was authentically Irish. As events and people very rarely conform into essentialist modes, these myths of nation often arose from blatant rewriting of the past, similar to England's own national myths. The re-packaging of Wolfe Tone, leader of the 1798 United Irishmen Uprising and the first Irish nationalist movement, is a prime example of the phenomenon of national essentialism. The historical Tone envisioned a religiously and culturally inclusive nationalism. His organization, the United Irishmen, imagined "a country where the terms Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter would be subsumed under the common name of Irishman" (O'Brien 16). However, Patrick Pearse, one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter rising, refashioned Tone to better situate him within a mythologically shaped essentialist identity. Pearse, in a 1913 graveside oration purportedly celebrating Tone's life and achievements, claimed that Tone "was the first to formulate in worldly terms" a strictly Catholic and Gaelic "gospel of Irish Nationalism" and erased the inclusivity of Tone's movement (O'Brien 17). Pearse's statement reflects Victor Merriman's analysis that "nationalist rhetoric" worked to "erase the complexity of pre-1916 Ireland" in that Pearse erases Tone's vision for an Irish identity replete with multiplicity (8-9). Pearse's mythologizing of Tone fulfills both functions of a national myth: justifying current national activities and building a community based on a shared identity.

In this way, nationalist rhetoric began to erase hybrid identities and histories to uphold the image of a mythical united Gaelic Catholic Ireland, despite the long records of infighting among Irish kings and chieftains dating well before the 12th century Norman invasion of Ireland. This process alienated those who, for whatever reason, did not fit the prescribed mold. Such alienation intensified as Ireland navigated the intricate process of establishing a national identity after independence. Robin Bury claims that after the Free State came into being in 1922, "a new

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[3] Spenser was especially invested in strengthening the mythological foundations of England's imperialism. There were fewer than fifteen hundred English settlers in the North at the time of Hugh O'Neill's rebellion, and "many were quickly driven off by O'Neill," including Spenser, at the beginning of the Nine Years War (Cronin 64).

Ireland emerged based on blood, religion and – above all – enmity with Britain. A homogenous society came into being, nationalist and Catholic…in such a world, those supporting England were unwanted, their rights as a minority in conflict with the ethos of the Free State" (10). The emphasis on a pre-defined, unified national identity was no doubt an attempt to create a strong united front against imperial England, which is an understandable desire after centuries of colonial rule from England. However, such a monolithic national identity sacrificed the myriad of identities that characterize the post-colonial experience. As Bury points out, the idea of patriotism intertwined with a "homogenous" Ireland excluded Protestant Unionists who wished to remain a part of the United Kingdom and identify as both British and Irish in their heritage (10). While national myths claimed to recover a "unified Ireland" that in all reality never actually existed as such, their singular idea of the nation sacrificed a unity that would allow for a multiplicity of expressions of nationalism and national identities, envisioned by leaders like Tone, whose very reality were effaced from history through the national myth making process.

Anglo-Irish living in the North responded in kind with their own master narratives to solidify expressions of national identity as well as justify actions in the name of national community. Tom Maguire describes Northern Ireland as "replete with myths" such as the "loyalist siege myth" (78). Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry point out that unionists trace their origin to the plantation of Ulster in 1609 and have been steeped in the tales of "the survival of Protestants of British stock steadfastly withstanding barbaric sieges ever since" (54). Reactions to the 1641 Irish rebellion also contributed to this mindset as its depictions were replete with wildly exaggerated casualty reports and tales of "widespread atrocities perpetrated by the natives against the colonists" that "lay unsparing emphasis upon the savagery of the native Irish Catholics" (Mahony 65). What then arose was what Robert Mahony terms a "rhetoric of defense" that portrays the Northern Protestant community as constantly under attack from dangerous Catholic encroachment (65). Just as Irish nationalist myths alienated the Protestant Anglo-Irish, the Northern anti-Catholic myths marginalized the minority Catholic community living in Northern Ireland. Northern Catholics faced legal, social, and religious discrimination because they did not conform to the community's identity standards, largely influenced by mythological master narratives. The longstanding tensions between the entrenched communities exploded into the Troubles' thirty years of strife.

Such rigid identity formations leave the myriad of hybrid identities that characterize the post-colonial experience on the periphery. National myths solidify identity, according to Richard Pine, "in terms of the 'other'" as "identity depends not only on who you are, but who you are not, and on who is not you" (163). The creation of an "other" through master narratives justifies conflict "while simultaneously constructing the enemy's conflict behavior as irrational" (Morden 550). "Othering" also has justified the violence of both the IRA and Loyalist paramilitaries; steeped in the myths of republican martyrdom and loyalist siege, each side constructed a rationale for committing violence in its own name by simultaneously condemning that of the other. In this way, national "narrative identifies the danger that is posed by an out-group and the dire implications of failing to meet the challenge" (Morgan 551). Additionally, Morgan states that "stories delegitimize members of the out group by broadly ascribing to them negative and, even at times, sub-human characteristics, identifying them as valid targets of violence and discrimination" (551). By using myths to build a community and solidify national identity, then,

both sides of the Northern Irish Troubles created narratives that continue to fuel violence through the exclusion of all those who do not conform. While certainly not the only reason for sectarian violence, these myths of national identity and origin have created deep-seated divisions and bitter distrust between the communities.

The Mythologization of History Through Hugh O'Neill

Hugh O'Neill, the historical figure as well as the fictional protagonist of Friel's *Making History,* is the embodiment of the restrictive nature of the manipulation of history into national myth. O'Neill is one of the key disputed figures of Ireland's "history wars" as his story was appropriated over the years for various nation building purposes. Much like Wolfe Tone, the plurality of the historical Hugh O'Neill's identity was effaced to serve the national mythological narrative against England's imperialist myths. While he lived hundreds of years before the Troubles, Hugh O'Neill's failed war effort and subsequent exile paved the way for the Ulster Plantation scheme, laying the historical foundations for the violence which would ensue over the following centuries. Thus, Hugh O'Neill is a key figure in the dismantling of the mythological master narratives that fuel sectarian tensions.

After leading Ireland's nearly successful bid for independence from England in the early seventeenth century, O'Neill's legend grew as authentic Gaelic royalty and a true Irish warrior hero (Fogarty 19). The historical Archbishop Peter Lombard, upon which Friel's character is based, began the mythologization of O'Neill in his own lifetime with his tract *De Hibernia Insula Commentarius*, written between 1598 and 1599 and published in its entirety until 1632. In the *Commentarius,* Lombard makes sweeping, loosely historical claims about O'Neill's unmatched achievements and unwavering commitment to Catholicism. He insists that O'Neill vowed to "never sheath" his sword "until all heresy and schism has been expelled from every corner of Ireland, and the free exercise of the one only true Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion … has been restored and established throughout the whole of this Island" (41). Lombard also assigns O'Neill an exclusively Gaelic lineage "descended in unbroken line from the ancient Kings of Ireland" (27). However, Lombard's quick defensive turn while discussing O'Neill's commitment to Catholicism reveals a latent insecurity about his claims' verity. Lombard asserts that "there are persons scattered amongst foreign nations" who "doubt if this Chief, its general, is a Catholic, at least if he is a real Catholic, and is really concerned for religion in this his rebellion, as they call it" (Lombard 41). He dismisses these claims as motivated by "some political jealousy" (41). Lombard also points out that there are those who would claim that O'Neill's "life is so inconsistent with his professions" of "waging a holy war for religion" because he "lives in open adultery and keeps three wives at the same time" (41). Despite the dubious circumstances concerning O'Neill's marriages, particularly the end of his marriage prior to eloping with Mabel Bagenal, Lombard insists that "each [wife] was joined to him in lawful matrimony" (41). Here, Lombard anticipates objections to his characterization of O'Neill as a holy crusader in such a way that shows a great deal of familiarity with them. I read Lombard's defensiveness as evidence that Lombard perhaps knew that his claims were exaggerated and would engender disagreement from those who were acquainted with O'Neill. Lombard did not

meet O'Neill until the latter's exile in Rome, and most of what he wrote about O'Neill was done so from hundreds of miles away based on hearsay about the situation in Ireland.

Following Archbishop Lombard's *Commentarius*, Hugh O'Neill became the ideal Gaelic Catholic patriot at various key times throughout Irish history. His mythologization directly correlates with the goals of various movements and trends, such as the nineteenth century Young Ireland group and the insularity of the Irish Free State. Both stressed a homogenous Gaelic Catholic Irish heritage and minimalized Anglo-Irish and Presbyterian contributions to Irish culture. John Mitchel, an O'Neill biographer and Young Irelander member, eulogizes Hugh O'Neill as "the illustrious chieftain who was the leading spirit of the time; who was the first, for many a century, to conceive, and almost to realize the grand thought of creating a new Irish nation" (viii). This image of O'Neill matched squarely with what Dennis Dworkin describes as the Young Ireland movement's "crusade to save the Irish people from becoming Anglicized" (51). To do so, the movement linked the Gaelic past and the Catholic majority, creating a vision of a singular Gaelic Catholic nation. De-anglicizing Hugh O'Neill became synonymous with de-anglicizing Ireland. However, this singular vision of O'Neill and Ireland isolated Ulster loyalists, who "saw themselves as British" (Dworkin 50). Following the 1916 Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War, which led to the creation of the Irish Free State, a restrictive vision of Irish nationalism continued, with Hugh O'Neill as an exemplar. F. C. McGrath points to the 1930s rise of the "dominant myth" of "the Gaelic O'Neill, the warrior hero who united the country and nearly overthrew English rule" (213). This version of Hugh O'Neill was congruent with the politics of the Free State, dominated by a "narrow Gaelic, Catholic, conservationist, isolationist nationalism" (McGrath 211). Hugh O'Neill, then, at key times in Ireland's history, became both synonymous with, and symbolic of, an exclusive Gaelic Catholic Irish patriotism.

However, these portrayals were squarely at odds with the historical reality of O'Neill's life. Far from a lifelong Gaelic loyalist, O'Neill was raised and educated in the Pale of Dublin among English settlers after the murder of his father in a squabble between local Irish chieftains. As a result, O'Neill could move interchangeably between the English and Irish worlds, speaking both languages and understanding both cultures (Latimer 63). O'Neill also served in Queen Elizabeth's army, earning lands and titles for his loyalty to the crown in quelling Irish rebellions. As a result, O'Neill had a well-trained army at his disposal as well as allegiances which spanned all over the north of Ireland. O'Neill harnessed the "considerable network" of connections and power associated with the title to build up his forces and alliances (Latimer 64)[4]. In his eventual rebellion, O'Neill united feuding Irish chieftains under the common banner of Catholicism in a shrewd political maneuver rather than an expression of authentic patriotism or piety.[5]

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[4] As Earl of Tyrone, O'Neill was authorized a standing force of six hundred troops, trained by English officers. O'Neill built up his force by continually training men, rotating them out of his army, and enlisting raw recruits. Eventually, he was able to field about one thousand cavalry, one thousand pikemen, and four thousand infantry trained in firearms (Latimer 64).

[5] John McGurk describes O'Neill as having the "rare gift of patience and the ability to inspire loyalty among erstwhile feuding chieftains" (9). This ability to join various factions stemmed from O'Neill's propagandizing of a dual faith and fatherland ideology, which had developed in sixteenth century Ireland and emphasized the protection of Catholic nationhood (23). O'Neill saw Catholicism "as a potent unifying force" (McGurk 21). The national system of politics which did exist in Ireland was a "rudimentary bipolar factional system" and not a unified Ireland

Additionally, O'Neill married an English woman, Mabel Bagenal, the sister of his one-time ally turned bitter rival, Henry Bagenal, to solidify his position as a trusted English ally (Morgan 216). While undoubtedly a noteworthy Irish leader, the historical O'Neill sharply differs from the mythologized one. As biographers and storytellers excluded seemingly contradictory facts, Hugh O'Neill's life thus became part of the master narrative in which a traditional Gaelic and Catholic identity was a prerequisite of an ultimately exclusionary Irish patriotism. This master narrative that appropriated the story of Hugh O'Neill was intended to unite Ireland after centuries of mistreatment under British rule, but it alienated Anglo-Irish Protestants in the North, contributing to the growing resentment between Catholics and Protestants that later erupted into the Troubles.

Making History and *The Great O'Neill*

The play *Making History* arose from playwright Brian Friel's lifelong interest in Sean O'Faolain's 1942 biography, *The Great O'Neill.* F. C. McGrath claims that O'Faolain's book directly challenges the myths grown around its titular character in line with a concurrent Irish revisionist historical trend intended to "counter the parochial nationalism of the time" (211). Nationalist portrayals of O'Neill that ignored his complicated past to create a purely Gaelic Catholic identity troubled O'Faolain, who lamented that nationalist movements of the late nineteenth century turned O'Neill's story into "the usual romantic-patriot myth, all enthusiasm and glory and idealism and trustfulness in Ireland's cause" (196). In *The Great O'Neill,* O'Faolain captured "the ambivalent O'Neill vacillating between English and Irish culture" and explored O'Neill's "hybrid identity" as a man who exploited his stature in both the English and Irish political worlds for his own political gain rather than pure love of country (McGrath 211, 216). O'Faolain claimed, rather scandalously, that O'Neill was proud of his "unswerving loyalty to his English patrons" before his rebellion (117). O'Faolain's biography also implied that Irish national identity itself was far more ambiguous for much longer than mythological master narratives would suggest as he "recognized the profound hybridity of O'Neill and consequently dated the hybrid nature of Irish culture much earlier than many nationalists would prefer" (McGrath 212).

Following O'Faolain's example, Friel's O'Neill resists a monolithic mythological characterization that would restrict his national identity. Friel presents a nuanced O'Neill who openly struggles with what Homi Bhabha terms a "colonial hybrid identity" concretely exemplified by his wavering between an English accent and a Tyrone accent (155). Friel's O'Neill is quite aware, often painfully so, of the dilemma encompassed in this hybrid identity. Despite these difficulties, he insists that an embrace of hybridity could drastically improve Ireland's future. In an impassioned speech to his English wife Mabel's sister, Mary, who disapproves of their union, O'Neill describes his struggle to help the native Irish people hold onto their disappearing heritage under colonialism while at the same time embrace what he sees as the positive aspects of European modernity:

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in any sense (Morgan 27). O'Neill was trying, albeit for selfish rather than altruistic reasons, to replace the politics of bickering lordships with the relatively new idea of the Irish nation (McGurk 27)

I have spent my life attempting to do two things. I have attempted to hold together a harassed and confused people by trying to keep them in touch with the life they knew before they were overrun… And at the same time I have tried to open these people to the strange new ways of Europe, to ease them into the new assessment of things, to nudge them towards changing evaluations and beliefs. Two pursuits that can scarcely be followed simultaneously. Two tasks that are almost self-cancelling. But they have got to be attempted because the formation of nations and civilizations is a willed act, not a product of fate or accident" (Friel 299-300)

Friel's O'Neill, then, sees a promising future in exploring European culture. Friel modeled his O'Neill on O'Neill, aligning him with intellectuals such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett who went into self-imposed exile in France to escape the insularity of the Irish Free State and understood the destructiveness of an automatic rejection of European influences. This open view of cultural inclusivity does not diminish Friel's O'Neill's patriotism. Rather, he has dedicated himself to improving the lives of the Irish people and creating an Irish nation that revives the best aspects of their culture and combines those with new knowledge from Europe. This O'Neill seems to speak to sectarian extremists, offering a compromise of Irish national identity that goes beyond the usual republican/ Loyalist binary. Friel's O'Neill is by no means enamored with the English government; he is, after all, in open rebellion against Queen Elizabeth. However, he recognizes the advantage for Ireland in not rejecting outside cultural influences simply because they are foreign, a much-maligned approach of the politics of the new Irish Free State. He is, by no means, a representative of a naïve "let's all get along" approach that ignores the complicated lineage of sectarianism. As his speech indicates, O'Neill is fully aware of the contradictions and difficulties inherent in his approach. O'Neill's vision for Ireland attempts to bridge cross-cultural ideological divides that laid the foundations of the Troubles. In this way, Friel celebrates the unifying potential of a hybrid O'Neill and uses O'Neill's story as the cornerstone of his case against national mythologies. In the process of the reclamation of Hugh O'Neill's identity, *Making History* disrupts the narrative violence of erasure and makes the argument that such a process leads to division and alienation. *Making History's* disruptions of the foundation of national myth perform a specific textual intervention in the sectarian violence of the Troubles whose ideological roots are firmly grounded in such restrictive master narratives.

Disrupting the Text of National Myth: Hugh O'Neill and Lombard's Biography

Making History's disruption of national myths is also embodied in the conflict surrounding Archbishop Lombard's biography, based on the historical *Commentarius*. Friel's Lombard is a composite representation of all those who have re-shaped historical events and figures into myths to unite a nation. Lombard's biography in *Making History* represents an attempted disruption of England's colonial myths, such as *History of the Kings of Britain* and *The Faerie Queene*. The English justified their imperialism not only with a mythologically based imperative but also a campaign of systematic dehumanization of the Irish people. In turning Hugh O'Neill into a mythical hero, Lombard disrupts English colonizing myths with a narrative

of Irish worthiness and heroism and inserts a competing Irish narrative to challenge the mythological foundations of English imperialism.

In *Making History,* Lombard is keenly aware that he is deliberately shaping events and people to fit his text, and he insists that such fabrications are necessary to serve the nation. While O'Neill desires an honest depiction of his ambiguous identity, Lombard disagrees. Rather, Lombard omits the parts of O'Neill's life that do not fit a strictly Gaelic and Catholic envisioning of national identity. While Friel's O'Neill insists on truth, that is contrary to Lombard's mission. Lombard openly admits that he manipulates the truth to fit the "expectations of different people and different eras" (Friel 257). In fact, Lombard questions "truth and falsity" as the "proper criteria" in his project, quipping that truth is best mined by asking the question, "What do they want to hear?" (Friel 267) Here, Lombard admits that the actual purpose of his project is to actively create a mythological narrative to serve the needs and desires of those who read it. Lombard's view of the function of national myth coincides with Jan Ifversen's analysis that "myth is a discourse that is activated in situations where a community faces catastrophe" and that "grasping a catastrophic event within a mythical discourse means producing a dramatizing narrative which introduces a shift from causality to morality" (455). Friel's Lombard realizes that the current war with England represents a crucial turning point in Irish history, and that the nation could very well be on the verge of the sort of catastrophe that Ifversen describes (455). Thus, with his biography of Hugh O'Neill, Lombard hopes to create a mythical narrative that will inspire and unite the Irish people in their time of crisis.

Making History portrays Hugh O'Neill's deliberate disruption of Lombard's myth in progress. From the opening scene, O'Neill is immediately suspicious and openly uncooperative with Lombard's project, rightly suspecting that Lombard's planned biography will be less than historically accurate. To stop the text's enshrining in a national master narrative, O'Neill dramatically disrupts Lombard's myth making by thrusting into the conversation a seemingly irrelevant revelation or reflection upon some aspect of his identity that does not conveniently fit a mythologically conformed identity. In *Making History,* O'Neill's individual identity represents hybrid Irish identities, and his fight to save his own identity represents the struggle to save such a multiplicity of identities from exclusion by national myth that calcify acceptable iterations of national identities. O'Neill's disruptions also acknowledge the textual and narrative basis of national myth and are themselves narratives. Through his efforts to disrupt the myth as it is being written around him, O'Neill acknowledges the danger of the calcification of national myth once enshrined in a completed text.

O'Neill's disruptions are specifically calculated. He purposefully inserts alternate narratives into conversations in which the participants are creating a specific aspect of the mythologically constructed identity that Lombard is attempting to prescribe onto O'Neill through his biography. One such facet is a strictly Gaelic heritage. O'Neill deliberately inserts a contradictory narrative into a discussion between Archbishop Lombard and his advisers, Harry Hovendon and "Red Hugh" O'Donnell, in which they discuss their plan to use the idea of the Irish nation to unite the quarrelsome and notably separatist Gaelic chieftains. Their conversation reflects the singular "Gaelic-ness" prescribed by national myths as a requirement not just for O'Neill but also for an "authentic" Irish identity. Lombard, Hovendon, and O'Donnell's ideas of the nation also recall the misguided zeal of many Irish nationalists, especially during the Gaelic

Revival, who often incorrectly saw Gaelic Ireland as a mythical nation that was united until England's imperialism, rejecting any British or Anglo elements of Irish identity. Friel's O'Neill recognizes the destructiveness in this essentialist view. In Friel's play, O'Neill is a consummate politician who understands that the unification of the chieftains based on a nation that does not yet exist is not a logical strategy to recruit the locally focused chieftains without showing them how the rebellion will specifically benefit their immediate interests.

O'Neill's disruption in this moment, then, is intended to challenge the notion of a united Gaelic heritage. O'Neill is notably silent for nearly four pages during the conversation, after having participated frequently. O'Neill finally cuts into the narrative in progress with the exclamation, "I got married last night" (Friel 262). Here, O'Neill refers to his marriage to Mabel Bagenal, the sister of Henry Bagenal, the British army marshal in Ireland. O'Neill's disruption attempts to force the myth-making authors to face the truth that he is not simply a Gaelic hero with no English ties. Additionally, O'Neill wishes to show that this marriage does not preclude him from leading a successful military campaign against the English. O'Neill's disruption also reveals his vision for a new Irish national identity that is much more inclusive than his advisers' view that seeks to preemptively erase any connections with the English. The virulently negative reactions of O'Neill's nationalist companions, who describe Mabel as "sister of the Butcher Bagenal," demonstrate the jarring power of O'Neill's counter narrative and the quick reinforcement of myth's authority by the machinery which creates it (Friel 263). For O'Neill's companions, especially his biographer, who "struggles to process this information, wondering how it will fit into the heroic narrative of O'Neill's life," the English Mabel's story represents a chapter that cannot possibly fit into the narrative of the great Gaelic hero Hugh O'Neill (Hohenleitner 245). The conscious erasure of Mabel repeats itself throughout the play to neutralize the power of O'Neill's interruption and reinstate the authority of the nationalist book of myth. However, O'Neill's disruption does not stop the creation of the national mythological narrative from creating a vision of a purely Gaelic Ireland.

O'Neill's next insertion of a counter narrative targets another major aspect of Lombard's prescribed mythological identity for him: a singular devotion to Catholicism. While O'Neill's companions are celebrating the news of Spain's long-awaited commitment to the Irish rebellion, Lombard seizes the opportunity to concretely situate this event within his heroic narrative, gleefully exclaiming that the Spanish alliance turns O'Neill's campaign into "a holy crusade," which in turn makes O'Neill a Catholic crusader (Friel 291). While Lombard and his other advisors crow about this holy war, O'Neill interrupts with a lengthy monologue tenderly describing his boyhood with the Protestant Sidney family, calling Sir Henry Sidney "the only father [he] ever knew" (Friel 291-292). O'Neill's calculated interruption of the creation of the holy war myth reveals its historical inaccuracy. While the historical O'Neill did in fact "adopt the Catholic cause and present his struggle as a religious crusade in the restoration of traditional Catholicism," later historians saw this adoption of the banner of Catholic nationhood as a political move rather than purely religiously motivated (McGurk 9). Through this interruption, Friel's O'Neill expresses discomfort with the notion of the rebellion as a religious crusade and the knowledge that this characterization leaves out much of the truth of the conflict, especially the brilliance of the political maneuvering only made possible through his dual English and Irish heritage.

Much like O'Neill's continued disruptions, Friel uses the dramatic structure of the play itself to insert a counter narrative into the mythological national discourse by blaming O'Neill's loss at Kinsale on the embrace of a singular Catholic Gaelic hero identity. Up until the point when O'Neill accepts Spain's assistance and turns the struggle into a holy war, the play has shown O'Neill's ambivalence towards a purely religious cause. Christopher Murray states that this moment "is a tipping point for O'Neill" in which he decides that he can "no longer play both sides" and must "claim his identity as liberator" (Murray 101). O'Neill realizes that, by siding with Spain, he will turn himself into the heroic Catholic figure that Lombard and his advisors have been trying to create. Mabel, O'Neill's English wife and the personification of his ambivalent loyalties, points out that the new war plan represents a perilous departure from his previous approach which worked precisely because he used the fullness of his experience to his advantage. Mabel characterizes O'Neill's previous strategy, informed by his English military experience, as marked by "calculation – deliberation – caution" in which "every important move [he has] ever made has been pondered for months" (Friel 296). Mabel insists that a quick decision to accept Spain's allegiance will cause England to "throw everything she has into this war," making it a war that O'Neill can no longer win as he lacks the resources and manpower (Friel 297). Mabel claims that he is "the most powerful man in Ireland" because he is "the only Irish chieftain who understands the political method" (Friel 297). According to Mabel, "the Queen is never quite sure" exactly how to deal with O'Neill because he is "the antithesis of what she expects a Gaelic chieftain to be" (Friel 297). Thus, it is precisely because O'Neill has not fully embraced a Gaelic Catholic warrior identity that he has been successful in his rebellion. However, O'Neill capitulates to the misguided jingoism of his advisors and accepts Spain's help.

Ironically, when Friel's O'Neill succumbs to the pressure of national myth, he loses the Battle of Kinsale and fails in his mission to liberate Ireland. As demonstrated in the play through Archbishop Lombard's biography, national myths claim that to be a good patriot, O'Neill must solidify his identity and reject his plurality. However, through O'Neill's loss at Kinsale, *Making History* argues that, in fact, O'Neill would have been most effective as an Irish patriot and liberator if he had continued to use the power inherent in his hybridity. In this way, Friel uses the dramatic structure of the play to disrupt the unitary vision for Irish nationhood and identity, showing that the nation benefits from embracing rather than excluding seemingly contradictory aspects of historical events and figures. Such a claim invalidates the notion that national unity and, more importantly, national strength, comes from a monolithic national identity and removes the foundation for the distrust and process of "othering" upon which sectarian violence is largely based.

The play's final scene shows an exiled O'Neill's continued but ultimately futile resistance against the unitary nationalist master narrative. Having lost the Battle of Kinsale and the Nine Years War, O'Neill is determined not to allow the mythological master narrative to erase his identity in future historical texts. He discovers the book in his apartment in Rome, where he fled after the end of the Nine Years War. The ominous book jarringly inscribes the authoritative mythological narrative upon his own home. At the end of his life, O'Neill must confront the hostile text which intends to erase the fullness of national identity. O'Neill's "sudden, fortuitous discovery" of this book is a striking inversion of Homi Bhabha's English colonial book in "Signs Taken for Wonders" (156). Just like the colonial subjects' encounter

with the colonial English book, O'Neill's discovery of the anti-colonial book is "a moment of originality and authority" in his life that reinforces the power of nation-building myth and its unwavering authority over the representation of his identity (157). For Bhabha, the English book is "an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline" that operates to "sustain a tradition of English 'national' authority" and create a "normalizing myth" of imperialism (157). Geoffrey of Monmouth *History of the Kings of Britain* and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* were such imperial books in O'Neill's time, working to establish the foundational myth of English imperial authority by tracing London's royal heritage to the survivors of the Trojan War. Lombard's book of the Great O'Neill functions inversely as an insignia of anti-colonial authority that stifles history's nuances to create a similarly "normalizing myth" to serve the cause of anti-colonial resistance (Bhabha 157). While the English book enforces an imperial narrative, Lombard's myth of Hugh O'Neill would be "repeated, translated, misread, displaced" in a larger nationalist, anti-imperial narrative, especially in nineteenth-century Ireland and in the early days of the Irish Free State in the 1930s (Bhabha 156). The weight of its authority over its discoverers and their totalizing effects on national authority, however, are the same. The book dominates the final scene of the play, an invader in O'Neill's home and the burden under which he ultimately collapses.

As one individual, O'Neill is unable to stop his encapsulation in the national master narrative. Despite its completion, O'Neill continues to resist Lombard's anti-imperial book of mythology, calling this fight his "last battle" (Friel 326). O'Neill initially reacts to the book with astounded laughter upon reading that he is as "a man, glorious, pure, faithful above all," a "God-like prince," and "a dove in meekness" (Friel 319, 331). His amusement quickly turns to anger, as indicated by the stage directions that he "suddenly, violently, angrily" storms away from the book (Friel 319). O'Neill rages at Lombard's grandiose characterization of the Battle of Kinsale, which O'Neill deems a "disgrace" after which he and his woefully under-manned and out-maneuvered army "ran away like rats" (Friel 333). O'Neill bitterly admonishes Lombard that "there is no way [he] can make unpalatable facts palatable" (Friel 333). Swinging from rage into a pleading tone of despair, O'Neill laments that Lombard's book will "embalm [him] in … a florid lie" and makes an impassioned case for his true identity: "I need the truth, Peter … the schemer, the leader, the liar, the statesman, the lecher, the patriot, the drunk, the soured, bitter émigré – put it *all* in, Peter. Record the *whole* life" (Friel 330). Despite O'Neill's ardent pleas, Lombard reinforces myth's authority and insists that he must sacrifice the truth of O'Neill's "ploys and disgraces" for the salvation of "a colonized people on the brink of extinction" in desperate need of "heroic literature," a "narrative that has the elements of myth" with "Hugh O'Neill as a national hero" taking center stage (Friel 334-335). Lombard's re-inscription of the power of the myth upon O'Neill points to its later appropriation by various Irish nationalist movements.

In a final, desperate attempt to disrupt the authority of the now completed myth of his life, O'Neill's last lines of dialogue in *Making History* are that of attempted disruption. Once again, he inserts a contradictory narrative into the mythological text. Lombard reads the biography out loud to reinforce its authority over O'Neill. The stage directions indicate that Lombard performs a "public recitation" of the book's introduction, and O'Neill "speaks almost in a whisper in counterpoint," showing that although he barely has the strength to resist anymore,

he is continuing to fight for "his story" (Friel 338). Each man "recit[es] the text which he feels best represents the life of Hugh O'Neill" (Hohenleitner 251). Lombard's performance of the mythical text echoes Patrick Pearse's recitation at Wolfe Tone's grave. With both recitations, the "nationalist narrative is performative" and erases the hybridities of its subjects' identities (O'Brien 28). While the dead Tone could not answer back to Pearse's performance and reclaim his identity, Friel's O'Neill attempts to do so by interrupting Lombard's book recitation with the text of his surrender to Queen Elizabeth at the end of the Nine Years War. As Lombard recites outright falsities about O'Neill, such as that he was "brought up by the high-born nobles of his tribe," O'Neill quietly but forcefully disrupts the text of the myth and attempts to inscribe the multiplicity of his identity into the mythological book. He struggles, in vain, to earn co-authorship with Lombard. The mythological image of O'Neill in Lombard's text, "foretold by prophets and by predictors of futurity," appears in stark juxtaposition to the historical O'Neill in his written surrender, begging Queen Elizabeth for "mercy, most sorrowfully imploring [her] commiseration and appealing only to [her] clemency" (Friel 339). However, in reciting the text of his surrender, O'Neill also mournfully surrenders the battle for his identity as he realizes that he no longer has control over "his story." The authoritative national myth is complete. Lombard has the last words on O'Neill's story, which are once again false, and claims that O'Neill "will be a king for the span of his life" (Friel 339). The stage directions indicate that O'Neill is "now crying," and the lights go down (Friel 339). O'Neill's disruptions have ended, representing the knowledge that the truth of his identity will be lost to future generations. According to Richard Pine, O'Neill "crumples beneath the weight of a history which refuses to grant him the inclusive record of a complete man" (479). The price of the book, for O'Neill, is the fullness of his personhood, and the appropriation of his life into a national myth.

In his struggle against mythological narratives, O'Neill recognizes that it is not just his identity that is at stake. Rather, if an Irish hero can only be so if he is sanitized, uncomplicated, and monolithic, the process of identity erasure that must occur to create this hero will also alienate many of those who wish to honor him. O'Neill's patriotism is expansive, recognizing the strength inherent in his hybrid identity. However, Friel's Lombard, like the historical Lombard and other historical mythologizers created a monolithic O'Neill who only appeals to some of the Irish people. Thus, when Friel's O'Neill fights for his identity, he is part of a larger struggle against the calcification of Irish identity through mythologizing people and events. Through his refusal to be labeled as a purely Gaelic Catholic hero, O'Neill resists the strict codification of Irish identity into these categories as well. Rather, his preferred identity would encapsulate his relationships with English Protestants as well as his patriotic leadership of Ireland in its rebellion against England. In this way, Friel's O'Neill, through his disruptions against the solidifying of an artificially unified identity, rejects the ideological binarism underlying the sectarian violence of the Troubles and calls for a more inclusive version of Irish identity in which its heroes and heroic stories cannot be claimed by just one side of an identity binary. He has the potential to be a hero for all Irish people, nationalists and Unionists alike; however, while his disruptions momentarily destabilize the myth by inserting alternate narratives that offer a more complex view of national identity, the power of the master narrative is quickly reinforced by those who believe in its necessity to unite the Irish people in its most dire hours. O'Neill's defeat by the singularizing

totality of national myth represents an acknowledgment of the monolithic authority of national myth against any individual voice.

Making History in the Twenty-First Century

Essentialist notions of Irish national identity still abide. One must look no further than modern social media. Asian Irish woman and Kerry resident Úna-Minh Caomhánach created a collage of Irish people of varying ethnicities, races, and religions and posted it to Twitter with the hashtag #weareirish to celebrate Ireland's growing multiculturalism. Almost immediately, she experienced a swell of racist backlash from users affirming that Irishness is whiteness and either Catholicism or Protestantism (Wilson). Many used reactionary terms such as #whitegenocide in their responses. Additionally, when the British flag flew over Cork City Hall in solidarity with the victims of the Manchester terrorist attack, many Twitter users expressed support for the gesture's symbolic healing, but others reacted disgust and anger, referring to the British flag in terms such as the "butcher's apron" and other such sentiments (Staines). With the consequences of Brexit for the delicate peace in Northern Ireland yet to be determined, *Making History's* lessons on national identity could not be more relevant. *Making History,* through its character Hugh O'Neill and its dramatic structure, disrupts the foundations of national myth to show that attempts to create and solidify a monolithic national identity are exclusionary rather than unifying and take away rather than give strength to national communities. In its invalidation of these myths, *Making History* returns to the Nine Years War, whose aftermath engendered the plantation of the North and led to hundreds of years of sectarian bitterness that exploded into the thirty-year Troubles in Northern Ireland. Brian Friel's Hugh O'Neill, recognized as one of the greatest of Irish heroes, personifies the reality of a hybrid Irish identity erased by centuries of national myths. Hugh O'Neill's struggle for his identity is presented as a turning point in history, not only with the looming Battle of Kinsale but in the continuous battle for Irish identity. O'Neill and *Making History* disrupt mythological national narratives and demonstrate that the either/or binary in Irish national identity should, in fact, be constructed in an inclusive both/and/all construction in which seeming contradictions of identity should not be rejected but embraced.

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