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## Celtic subtleties : Brian Friel's appropriation of the O'Donnell clan.

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<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/1331>

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“CELTIC SUBTLETIES”: BRIAN FRIEL’S APPROPRIATION OF THE O’DONNELL  
CLAN

By

Leslie Anne Singel  
B.A., University of Dayton, 2006

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School at the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2008

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A Thesis Approved on

April 9, 2008

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the McGarry family

and to

Roger Casement

## ABSTRACT

### “CELTIC SUBTLETIES”: BRIAN FRIEL’S APPROPRIATION OF THE O’DONNELL CLAN

Leslie Anne Singel

April 11, 2008

This thesis is a literary examination of three plays from Irish playwright Brian Friel, *Translations*, *Philadelphia*, *Here I Come!* and *Aristocrats*, all of which feature a family of the O’Donnell name and all set in the fictional Donegal village of Ballybeg. Written during the late twentieth century but set over the course of 150 years in rural Ireland, these plays have yet to be—and need to be—studied as a cycle series rather than strictly individual works. In examining the three plays as a testament to a single ancient Irish family name, one may see how Friel comments upon the later twentieth century’s preoccupation with modernization, both in the forms of the local becoming globalized and through the characters’ gradual emigration, but also the decline in education and communal ties. When studied in order of chronological setting, rather than initial performance, the O’Donnell families of these plays increase in social status and material wealth yet become increasingly distanced from the land and local identity.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the 1980 play *Translations*, whose central nuclear family includes impoverished but highly intelligent O’Donnell men. As the play ends in eviction at the hands of British forces, the reader can quickly move to 1964’s *Philadelphia*, *Here I Come!* Chapter two of the thesis discusses the growing mercantile pressures of this O’Donnell generation, as the protagonist Gar must decide between new

opportunities in America or a return to his communal roots in his native hometown.

Finally, *Aristocrats* is set in the late 1970's, as the O'Donnell family has achieved the social status it has sought but whose family members have scattered to foreign countries, unfulfilling professions, and deteriorating characters. In examining the O'Donnell cycle, one can see not only how a single Irish family in a singular setting react and adjust to the external forces but also how they react internally as a unit. The changes that ultimately demolish the O'Donnell family are, in essence, both uncontrollable and self-imposed.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Splendid is the one thing that neither you nor I are. We are many other things—extraordinary, clever, we could be said, I suppose, to be brilliant. We can attract people, we can make atmosphere, we can almost lose our Celtic souls in our Celtic subtleties, we can almost always have our own way...”.

~ F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise

Having published and produced plays for over forty years, contemporary Irish playwright Brian Friel (born 9 January 1929) is a household name in Ireland. He has even been credited with stimulating a revival in the Irish language, yet his work is infrequently studied and staged in the United States.<sup>1</sup> One plausible explanation for this neglect may be the perception of a preoccupation with insularly traditional Irish themes. This discernment has certainly informed Friel’s critical reception, as each play has been dissected by assorted international scholars for Irish themes, atypical viewpoints, and political motivations. Particularly since the formation of the Abbey Theatre in 1904, Irish playwrights have found that they do not “have to write for Broadway or West End

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<sup>1</sup> That is to say, even though his plays have often migrated stateside and even achieved revival on Broadway, the critical reception is less exceptional than Ireland and Britain. In fact, a third revival of *Translations* premiered on Broadway in early 2007, in an attempt to finally achieve the popularity it has experienced abroad (to no avail). As for criticism, most Friel scholars reside in Britain and Ireland, and the average graduate student or professor of literature in the United States is only vaguely familiar with his name. Besides his overwhelming success of the nostalgic *Dancing at Lughnasa*, he has yet to be established stateside as strongly as he is elsewhere.



audiences”; furthermore, this Irish situated theatrical reality “took root and, therewith, the stage was philosophically set for the recognition at home of the explosion of dramatic writing” especially during the second half of the twentieth century (Nowlan 24).

Despite its association with Irish themes, Friel’s work is anything but parochial; while his most accessible plays emphasize the rural agenda and the advent of modernity in Ireland, his concern for issues of identity, particularly identity within a local setting, have a broader, more universal appeal. In fact, as Friel states in a 1970 interview: “this business of seeing oneself as an Irishman writing in an Irish tradition I would find very limiting and perhaps oppressive” (Russell 107). His literature reaches beyond the confines of nostalgic Irish writing, particularly because he has been relegated to that description since his initial appearance on the theatrical scene. Despite the critical assumptions, Friel has consistently produced works that allow him to disengage conventional Irishness and instead question and complicate the provincial ideals that he approaches.

This thesis examines three plays, *Translations* (1981), *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), and *Aristocrats* (1979), all of which concern a branch of the O’Donnell family and all of which simultaneously confront and contrast the relationships between more local identities and anxieties connected to the physical landscape with the inevitability of global pressures. No prominent scholar, particularly a Brian Friel scholar, has attempted to examine the three plays together.<sup>2</sup> While each individual play presents a unique reflection of and upon the provincial, yet fictional, Irish town of Ballybeg and the

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, most Friel scholars examine his plays in “eras” rather than by a family name: his early plays are provincial, character-driven pieces, his middle era produced several intensely political plays, and his most current era of the 1990’s and beyond generated very complex, ritualistic plays.

characters' relationship to the community, the three plays are best understood as a collective unit. This thesis will demonstrate the need to consider and scrutinize the plays in conjunction, not as the "O'Donnell plays" but indeed as the "O'Donnell cycle," meaning that they speak to one another in turn beyond the shared traits of common family name and setting locale, despite Friel's own hesitation to term them in that manner.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, one will find that Friel's ultimate intention is not to advocate a return to pre-industrial rural lifestyle on account of the nostalgic setting and family-centered community. Rather, this cycle calls attention to the false binary between local and national that has appeared in the late-twentieth century, the binary that Friel attempts to disprove in his literature. The three generations of O'Donnells that appear within these plays display how the individual's affiliations with the community, both local and global, are in need of re-examination, and Friel, as a dramatist about Ireland rather than strictly of Ireland, is the author prepared to step forth and complicate a deceptively approachable relationship.

In order to conceive of these three plays in a cycle, they must be considered in terms of chronology of historical setting. Friel published and premiered *Philadelphia*,

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<sup>3</sup> Upon approaching Friel's O'Donnell cycle in this manner, one must inevitably address the issue of authorial intent. Did Friel, in fact, intend to create a family line through his work that reflects the growing anxieties of Ireland in the mid- to late-twentieth century? Friel himself has changed his opinion on the matter. In a 1965 interview with Graham Morison, around the time of the *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* premiere, he stated that he does not believe in the theory that scholars or audiences may recognize underlying themes or connections that the author did not intend upon his or her composition. He says, "[i]t could be true. But a certain arrogance keeps me from accepting it...I would like to think that I was fully conscious of every nuance of meaning that goes into everything I write" (qtd. in Murray 7). However, by the twenty-first century, he had changed his opinion. When asked how the Tom and Daisy of his 1997 play *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* related to the Tom and Daisy of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, he replied, "There is no connection...as far as I know" (personal correspondence). Those final five words indicate that he recognizes the life of his work outside of his own hands; he accepts the fact that "outsiders" can recognize what even he, as the author and creator, cannot.

*Here I Come!* in 1964, essentially generating the middle piece before proceeding to establish the bookends. Only two years after premiering *Aristocrats*, Friel generated an “origin” of the family by setting the O’Donnells in pre-famine 1833. A chronological reading gives the reader insight into Friel’s development as a writer, but the setting provides a more complex dramatic vision of the increasingly discontent and disengaged generations of a single family line. Similarly, one can see how Friel attempts a postmodern technique of meddling with an ancestry, formulating a line of descendants from one of the most famous historical Irish figures in order to illustrate his point.

Over the course of the three plays, covering roughly 150 years, the O’Donnell characters transform from impoverished scholars to middle-class merchants to wealthy but aimless landowners; with this transformation continues a particular sustained unhappiness and discontent with surrounding circumstances, mostly attributed to their increasing estrangement from the land. Indeed, just as Stephan Watt writes that Friel “creates a strong sense of several characters’ profound ill-suitedness for the ascendant social order and the changes it promises,” these three branches of the O’Donnell family reveal how money and status cannot expunge the social and familial unease (Watt 17).

*Translations*, which is arguably Friel’s masterpiece, has been often hailed as “an Irish drama almost universally admired” (Greene 35). Published twenty years after the onset of his successful career, this play veers from his usual structure by its setting: Friel’s usual setting of Ballybeg is changed to its pre-Anglicized name of Baile Beag and exists in 1833, long before any of Friel’s other plays occur. In terms of chronological setting, the play’s action transpires before the others, utilizing a Hibernian name of Hugh O’Donnell for its patriarch and creating an intricate family of two additional sons whose

relationship to each other is as intricate as the Irish relationship to land and language. Whereas Friel famously stated that the play “has to do with language, and only language,” it encompasses infinitely more as a starting point for the O’Donnells of Friel’s cycle, namely, that the family appears as the representation of the impoverished intelligentsia of the time, those more concerned with the education of themselves and others within their unblemished parish than with the material gain and imperial organization that penetrates the setting at the beginning of the play. This emphasis upon education, and setting the play within a school room, is no accident; five out of the six founding members (including Friel) of Field Day, the theatrical company whose first production was *Translations*, were or are educators themselves (Richtarik 193). Friel himself remains slightly embittered toward his own strict education of “parts” rather than “wholes”:

[T]he little, little grudge I bear is directed at those men who taught me the literature of Rome and Greece and England and Ireland as if they were pieces of intricate machinery created for no reason and designed for no purpose... [we] never once suspect[ed] that these texts were the testimony of sad or happy or assured or confused people just like ourselves... I made the modest discovery for myself that literature wasn’t... a kind of [British] literary monopoly invented by critics and academics for the torment of students. (“Self-Portrait” qtd. in Delaney 102)

Because of his background, education functions within Friel’s plays as a means of highlighting the characters, rather than vice versa. Education, especially as instruction that prepares his characters for discovering the environment and operating usefully within

it, is emphasized to combat the concept of the intellectually-inferior peasantry as well as the technologically/economically-driven age of modernity.

By the close of *Translations*, the family has transformed into a complicated rebellion against “the rape of the local culture by the imported one” (Greene 35). In this sense, the first O’Donnells represent the Irish spirit of resistance, whether physical, educational or psychological, a spirit that deteriorates and disappears in future generations, and a resistance that comprises their land-centered local identity. The events surrounding the play are historically accurate, yet the characters are mere representations of a particular category of the pre-famine peasant: immensely intelligent polyglots and educators who are looked upon by the English colonizers as inept and illiterate invaders. By representing this 1833 O’Donnell clan as the intelligentsia, Friel not only contends with the British notions but also generates the traits that the future generations of his O’Donnell families will surrender in their pursuit of social status. Anthony Roche observes that the play “dramatizes this key transitional moment when Irish gave way to English” and when the culture finds itself amongst a completely new “linguistic landscape” (Pelletier 68). Similarly, it can be said that this play captures the moment in Irish literature in which an ancient Irish historical family transcends into the literary realm; the Irish emphasis on scholarship gives way to prosperity, which continues to manifest itself in the following plays.

The second installment of the O’Donnell cycle is 1964’s *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Considered Brian Friel’s first major success on the stage, *Philadelphia* was originally produced at the 1964 Dublin Theatre Festival and quickly went on to experience successful productions in New York (1966) and London (1967) (Maxwell

200). The play confronts the issues that plagued the younger Irish generation at the time: emigration, family relations, romantic relationships, and economic station. However, the underlying connection to *Translations* is what makes the play most intriguing: the two O'Donnell men, father and son, become the descendants of the Hugh O'Donnell of *Translations*, maintaining particular qualities but forsaking others. The majority of scholarship on this play focuses upon the father/son relationship, the split protagonist (portrayed by two actors as "Public Gar" and "Private Gar") or upon the fact that it was Friel's first successful production; yet my focus concerns the middle-class life portrayed in the play as more indicative of the O'Donnells as a (d)evolution from *Translations*. The split character is one of the most captivating techniques in Friel's oeuvre, but many fail to notice how this dichotomy emphasizes desire for social status, fame, education...in general, a life beyond the middle class, or what Friel emphasizes as the "death-in-life that comes from fixity and routine" (Andrews 90). By distinguishing the two branches of the family in this way, Friel accentuates the importance of comprehensive intellect and the undesirability of placing one's life upon an economic situation that disregards local community and culture.

Finally, the last in the generational line, *Aristocrats*, opened at the Abbey Theatre in 1979, won the New York Drama Critics Circle award for best foreign play in 1989, and then faded from the forefront of popular contemporary drama (McGrath 146). In this instance, Friel utilizes the O'Donnell family to create an image of a wealthy but highly dysfunctional unit. The O'Donnells live in the "Big House," which was traditionally more aligned with Protestants than Catholics; they therefore exist quite separate from their ancestors by choosing to live "at a considerable social remove from the immediate

environs” of the common setting of Ballybeg/Baile Beag (Roche 42). The O’Donnells of this play exceed their forbearers in terms of wealth and status, yet the play centers around a reunion that proves the extent of the characters’ individual misfortune. Scholars such as Francis McGrath have argued that the play contains an overall theme of decline within itself, a theme that is manifested strongly in the physical deterioration of the patriarch as well as the slow rotting of the Big House, or Ballybeg Hall (McGrath 146). This thesis argues that, that while the decline exists within *Aristocrats*, it extends far beyond this setting and was ignited when the British forces evicted the tenants of *Translations*. Only by returning to the historical roots of the degeneration can the blame be placed; furthermore, because Friel wrote *Translations* shortly after *Aristocrats*, he recognized the need to conceive a tangible heritage for the O’Donnells and a more comprehensive explanation for their pursuit of waning social values.

Scholars of Irish drama have focused upon common themes within Friel’s work, namely the invasion of modernity, formation of community, ritual, and, most importantly, language. Yet, these scholars have failed to examine these historically- and culturally-bound details in a larger temporal framework, specifically because Friel’s plays, especially the three plays examined here, encountered differing degrees of reception: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* was hailed as a decent success for a “new” playwright, *Aristocrats* was a modest achievement that is often overlooked today, while *Translations* continues to enjoy the most acclaim from both critics and audiences. Nonetheless, the three plays share a collective bond: not only addressing pertinent Irish issues of their respective times, but also all utilizing a branch of the O’Donnell clan, thereby simultaneously uniting and juxtaposing the changes in the Irish national landscape with

the continuity of a familial name. The three plays as a communal unit reveal more about the state of Irish identity than each individual work is able. For instance, non-verbal characterization signals the eventual decline that pervades all three pieces, yet only in examining the works as a cycle can this be differentiated: whereas Hugh O'Donnell completes his brief ending monologue of *Translations* upon the landing of the stairs—also the highest point of the *Translations* set, the grown O'Donnell children of *Aristocrats* complete their final stay at their family home upon the ground, or sitting just above it. They are not only demonstrating their decline in eminence but the sustained proximity to the earth and the terrain itself, albeit too late to make a difference (Burke 14).

Interestingly enough, the three plays were published within three different decades, respectively in 1964 (*Philadelphia, Here I Come!*), 1979 (*Aristocrats*) and 1981 (*Translations*). However, the three are set in different eras of Irish socio-culture: *Translations*, set in 1833, approaches the pre-Great Famine era, complete with a rapidly increasing population of pro-Home Rule citizens which emerged during a time of strict penal laws against the Catholics. *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is set the same year it was published, 1964, one of the last years before “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland exploded in a fit of strategic bombings, hatred, and street violence. Finally, *Aristocrats* is ambiguously set in the 1970's, at a time when “The Troubles” continued to rage, yet the Irish economy began to expand, both in the North and in the Republic. Throughout the course of Friel's composition of these plays, the Irish were still a peasant people, and as such, were “characterized by two main attributes, a passion for land and a ‘paranoic individualism’” (Murray 164). Friel approaches both these themes in his work, creating a



particular village and family of people whose tie to the community around them forms their characters.

The placement study of the O'Donnell cycle within historical chronology is warranted because the setting remains uniform, namely the small town of Baile Beag/Ballybeg in county Donegal, Ireland. Friel's tendency to use the same fictional setting and the same family name provides a kind of dramatic laboratory that "offers a way of showing how certain elements of culture need to remain fixed in order to allow for...changes between tradition and modernity" (Pelletier 158). With this in mind, his use of the O'Donnell name provides a subtle, yet traceable, chronology of family mobility, from scholarship to wealth, and from local priorities to global desires. The clan name is a familiar one in present-day Ireland, descending from the ancient chieftain family of the middle ages. The ancient clan was once so significant, that the land within the current county of Donegal (which is, coincidentally, the setting of most of Friel's plays) was called *Tir Chonaill* or land of the Connell and Donnell clans.<sup>4</sup> Since all three of these plays are set in the fictional town of Baile Beag/Ballybeg in county Donegal, Friel is purposefully placing his three generations of the family in the realm that once begat their ancestors. They become modern-day nuclear units that have emerged from the greatness of the past as well as the terrain that once bore their name. As his own name of Friel, meaning "man of valour" is rarely found outside the confines of county Donegal, he also relates to the homeland of his own ancestors, a territory he describes as "the wildest, most beautiful, and most barren part of Ireland," where "the people are almost completely untouched by

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<sup>4</sup> Coincidentally, the O'Donnell clan is not only prominent linguistically, but religiously as well: St. Colum Cille, or St. Columba, is known as patron saint of (among other things) the O'Donnell family (S.J. Connelly 424). As one of the three main patron saints of Ireland, along with St. Patrick and St. Brigid, St. Colum Cille's patronage of the O'Donnells proves that the family is heavily favored by the Catholic Church.

present-day hysteria and hypocrisy” (Dantanus 31, 42). Likewise, because the village is fictional, Friel emphasizes his relationship (and his characters’ relationship) to the “spirit of the place” rather than the physical reality of a particular location (Dantanus 25).

Yet, because the territory of Donegal was not always referred to as such, this linguistic distinction between *Tir Chonaill* and “Donegal” applies to Friel’s work as well. While Tirconnell (alternately spelled “Tyrconnel”) translates to “Land of Connell” or “Land of Donnell,” the name Donegal in Irish is originally spelled *Dun na nGall* meaning “fort of the foreigner.” The early-modern shift to the name *Dun na nGall* recognizes that foreigners had already arrived and settled in the area; yet, the name is finally Anglicized to Donegal once more foreigners, including the British engineers of *Translations*, had arrived (Jones 70). In other words, the O’Donnells’ linguistic connection to the physical landscape only takes them so far; before the O’Donnell cycle even commences with the action of *Translations*, the land has dropped its clan-related title in order to capture the presence of colonization. The O’Donnells, therefore, are already linguistically displaced by the imperial process before the audience or reader meets them.

The setting of the solitary pastoral village of Baile Beag/Ballybeg creates an atmosphere in which local identity and connection between community and land is essential to comprehensive survival; one becomes detached from oneself only in becoming detached from the local, land-centered community. *Philadelphia. Here I Come!* is the first Friel play in which the town name is used, referred to as “a small village in county Donegal”; by the play *Living Quarters*, it is “a remote part of county Donegal” or “in the wilds;” in *Aristocrats*, it’s called “a remote Donegal village,” and in *Translations*, Friel acknowledges that the village is coastal, being only twenty-three miles

from the actual town of Glenties (Corbett 71-2). By fashioning a fictional background that he employs in many of his plays, Friel constructs a constant with which the audience can measure the alterations in Irish communal life. His setting of Ballybeg contributes heavily to his overall message because his plays

...are excursions around ways of designating, in time and space, where one is. The intent of his characters is to make a place habitable, transmuting its possessiveness, which cannot be exorcised merely by leaving it, into a sense of belonging, and idea of 'home' at one communal and unconstricting. (Andrews 68)

In this sense, his consistency in characterization, in the form of the O'Donnell family, and his regularity of setting, in the form of Donegal's Ballybeg, contribute to one another's identity and underlying purpose.

Nonetheless, the recurring pastoral background functions in distinguishing, perhaps even exaggerating, the *generational* differences between the families, ultimately articulating certain ideas and values that belong "within the metropolitan milieu of its producers and consumers" (Greene 216). In fact, this pastoral backdrop becomes a "microcosm/macrocosm model of relationship" for the variety of audiences, symbolizing an area such as the "West of Ireland" for Dublin spectators and "Ireland" in general for audiences abroad (217). In this process, Friel demonstrates how this local identity overshadows a single family; he establishes that an individual "is more than the sum of the masks that he or she wears" but instead incorporates "communal histories which often surface as localized myth" (Kimmer 194). Likewise, Friel writes in answer to Ireland's growing awareness of globalization, emphasizing the need for local communities that

represent a worldwide landscape rather than transforming the community into a globalized venue. In speaking of the “city” atmosphere of Derry, Friel denied the cosmopolitan mentality of Irish city-dwellers, stating

We are all villagers at heart, or at best inhabitants of a market town. We have our industries but they haven't made us industrial. We have a port that sees ships from every nation, but we scarcely know what the word cosmopolitan means. We are concerned about the individual, and if we don't know him personally at least we know his brother or his wife's aunt or a cousin of his father's uncle. (qtd. in Delaney 18)

Friel's idea that “we are all villagers at heart” speaks to the idea of a communal Irish origin, or grounding within an similar background, particularly one that would be linguistically satisfied. For instance, the use of the word “clan” in the title of this thesis refers to the Irish word *clann*, typically used in the Irish vernacular to mean an enclosed family unit, or generations of that one family. However, Irish dictionaries offer multiple meanings, defining *clann* as “children, offspring; race, descendents” (*Foclair Poca*). In terms of original etymology, the word borrows from the Latin *planta*, meaning a plant or offshoot, an entire race of descendents by extension (S.J. Connelly 101). In traditionally Irish terminology, the word would denote a closely related group with a common interest in land ownership and the power “wielded by their head would was territorially based” (S.J. Connelly 102). Therefore, the O'Donnells become one inclusive *clann*, the children directly descending from the initial unit (in this case, the famous O'Donnell chieftains) but also forming their own race that is, in essence, *united* on account of a shared ancestry.

They are, therefore, representative of the Irish *clann* but also isolated in terms of attributes and tradition.

Additionally, Friel employs this cycle series in order to address the outward image of Ireland, both in terms of land and people, and both within the present and sentimentality/nostalgia for the past. In a 1943 St. Patrick's Day radio address, Irish President Eamon de Valera delivered what came to be known as "the dream speech," in which he painted a picture of Ireland centered upon the thriving of a rural utopia:

...a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry...whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that man should live. (qtd. in Corbett 91)

This description captures the *zeitgeist* of post-war Ireland, a country whose entire landscape was about to shift remarkably quickly. In fact, during the era in which the plays were written alone, Ireland had experienced dramatic changes and alterations to traditional Irish life...changes which Friel himself considered "a mixed blessing, conscious as he is in all of his plays of what is being lost alongside what is being gained" (Roche 2). Along with the more contemporary characters from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, figures from the historical clan have emerged in Friel's works as well; his re-write of history in *Making History*, in which the chieftain and patriarch of the family, Hugh O'Donnell, appears, cements Friel's connection to the clan and displays the unique qualities of the family that translate throughout his later plays. Yet, as the scholarship of prominent Friel scholars like George O'Brien, Anthony Roche, and Csilla Bertha substantiates, the meaning of the O'Donnell cycle series is more profound than

merely the drama of dynastic succession. Rather, it engages interpretive questions concerning socio-economics, education, history, and postcolonialism. Nonetheless, in order to observe these cultural intricacies in detail, Friel's plays have yet to be—and need to be—juxtaposed, as they are here, in order to understand his overall commentary on the state of Irish affairs, that is, how the local, rural world of Friel's creation will and has (d)evolved in an increasingly dynamic, industrial, and postcolonial environment.

Because of the prompt change that transpired during their respective conceptions, the three plays represent (or exist within) a moment of transition, or even translation, in regards to the Irish physical and/or spiritual landscape. Elmer Andrews writes, “[t]hat moment” captured in transition within these plays, “is elevated to become life’s eternal moment. Knowledge of life as perpetual process is the prerequisite of authentic experience” (Andrews 45). They equally reflect the deeper belief structures of the men who first brought them to the stage. The Field Day Theatre Company, founded in 1980 by Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea, and embracing fellow writers Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, and musician David Hammond, was created as an answer to the communal violence that has wracked Northern Ireland from the late 1960’s through the 1990s<sup>5</sup> (Richtarik 191). Additionally, the group hoped to call attention to the general dissatisfaction with the political process in both the North and the Republic and in regards to Irish culture; they aspired to be the voice of identity outside of the sectarian factions that were warring at the time (Richtarik 194). Friel, as the most senior member

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<sup>5</sup> This violence between the Protestant-supported Unionists and the Catholic Republicans, heavily concentrated in the metropolitan centers of Belfast and Derry, resulted in the deaths of over 3,300 people, many of them innocent civilians. The issue at hand was/is whether Ireland should be united as a single nation or should the northern portion of the country—that is, six counties in the Ulster region—continue to exist under the jurisdiction of Great Britain. As of August 1, 2007, British military forces stepped down from their mission to “keep the peace” in Northern Ireland, but negotiations continue to this day.

of the company at the time of its establishment, aimed to create a *theatrical* space similar to the *transitional* space of his drama. The founders of Field Day created a concept to do just that: termed “The Fifth Province,” this idea stems from an area outside of the four provinces of Ireland (Ulster, Munster, Leinster, and Connaught). Rather, the Fifth Province is “a place for dissenters, traitors to the prevailing ideologies of the other four provinces” (qtd. in Andrews 30). As Elmer Andrews explains it,

A writer who understands the artificial nature of reality is more or less obliged to enter the process of making it...[The Fifth Province] is the neutral realm of the imagination, where symbol may mediate between subject and object, where actualities need not be so terribly insisted upon as they normally are in Ireland. (Andrews 30)

This idea of an external dimension created to satisfy the unfulfilled needs of the national population also reflects the role of an individual within the nationalist community. Homi Bhabha suggests that “nationality must be seen as a narrative process,” and likewise, Jessica Berman insists that the same must be said for community (Berman 3). In other words, the community, as representative of the larger nationality, must be formed and, more importantly, observed as a narrative conveyed by its individuals; the process is ever-changing and the recognition of such is imperative to a larger understanding of identity formation. Friel, therefore, has become a spokesman for the communal narrative, positioning himself within the bardic tradition, or, in the more Irish tradition, as a *seannachie*. This convention extends beyond the function of relating information to the external world but also returning to one’s own community and culture to remind and

renew identity. Historians Fiske and Hartley, referenced by Conor McCarthy, argue that this bardic tradition concerns itself with *socio-centrality*, stating

The bardic mediator tends to articulate the negotiated central concerns of its culture, with only limited and often over-mediated references to the ideologies, beliefs, habits of thought and definitions of the situation which obtains in groups which are for one reason or another peripheral. (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p.89)

In addition to reflecting cultural concerns, the descendants of the bardic institution had (and perhaps still have in the case of Friel) inherited the power of the early shaman poets. These poets could both bless and curse; they might “symbolically form a marriage with the land itself, or, conversely, they could annihilate a ruler by satirizing him” (Bertha and Morse 13). In this manner, Friel has translated his work beyond that of the literary realm and into that of the socio-history and culture, as well as descending from an ancient and powerful position amongst the Irish people. McCarthy asserts that Friel has imagined himself in this way as well, and “one can see [his oeuvre] as a social history, or narration, of the nation from the early 1960s until the early 1990s” (McCarthy 45).

Not only does Friel assume the responsibility of the bardic tradition in order to convey his culture’s message, but he also draws upon his work to counsel his audience about the invasion of modernity in rural locations, the modernization within city life, and the raging ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy that sprang to life in the late twentieth century. The Celtic Tiger resulted from a strong political environment in the Republic of Ireland, widespread building across the country, and high levels of prosperity and employment (Keogh 321). However, the prosperity came at a cost; Seamus Deane asserts that the Republic “has surrendered the notion of identity all together” as the nation “rushed to



embrace all of those corporate, ‘international’ opportunities offered by the European Economic Community” (Deane 14). As a co-founder of Field Day along with Deane, Friel’s views on the effect of global economic modernity upon the Irish community are similar. Friel’s O’Donnell family exemplifies how the emergent economy contributed to wealth but ultimately harmed the traditional structure and ideals of the Irish family, namely the rural culture, and placed the local identity in conflict with the global agenda of Ireland at large. In his book *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams writes

The growth of towns and especially of cities and a metropolis; the increasing division and complexity of labour; the altered and critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a knowable community—a whole community, wholly knowable—became harder and harder to sustain. (165)

This concept of a “knowable community” shifts within Friel’s work as the contemporary world of Ireland reacted to the global community. And within the generations of the O’Donnell family, the loss of scholarship, rural culture, and connection to the physical landscape creates a vacuum that remains to be filled; in other words, their loss of character particularly functions in conjunction with the loss of a “knowable community” due to the invasion of modernity, resulting in their disconnection from the land as well as its disconnection from them.

As a newly recognized global voice, Ireland has also recently come under scrutiny in regards to the proper “place” for its unique historical and cultural framework, particularly within the postcolonial debate. Irish scholars and participators within theatre have been one of the most vocal communities of critics against those who disregard

Ireland as a post-colonial or neo-colonial nation; they continue to emphasize that postcolonialism “is a discourse and not only a period” in order to address the idea that Ireland is “historically” unlike other postcolonial nations (Bertha 155), especially as Ireland is the only nation of Western Europe that experienced both an early- and a late-colonial era (Deane 3). Seamus Deane, in particular, has spoken out against the “Archipelago model,” an idea by revisionist historians that analyzes “the relationship between Ireland and England in terms of a peripheral region becoming integrated into a centralizing state system” (Pelletier 74-5). In this manner, Ireland’s 800 years of colonization are regarded as years of participation in the British Empire, as Ireland existed as a satellite nation to England itself.

Disregarding Ireland’s loss of language, religion, land and overall Celtic culture has proven that historians are viewing post-colonialism and neo-colonialism in a variety of ways; yet theatrical scholars demonstrate that Friel’s style, form, and themes wholeheartedly appeal to postcolonial ideals, particularly because they share a “common colonial and neo-colonial context” with authors from what others may consider non-European postcolonial nations, such as India, Pakistan, and Kenya (Crow and Banfield 169).<sup>6</sup> Within the course of his O’Donnell cycle alone, Friel addresses postcolonial concerns such as the “relationship between language and power,” the attempt to find

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<sup>6</sup> The relationship between the Irish nation and language is complicated, although the shift from Irish to English, in terms of prevalence, has occurred over the course of 400 years. According to *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, the Tudor conquest is responsible for gradually increasing the use of English. However, it was not until after the mid-1700s that the Irish language began its steady decline, as the English-controlled schools, including the national schools that made the hedge schools obsolete, taught only English and punished students who spoke Irish (317). Douglas Hyde, founder of the twentieth century Gaelic League, was the major proponent of a complete return to the Irish language. Even though that was not accomplished, Irish instruction is presently the official language of the country, as all teachers, students, and police must pass a language exam in order to participate in their activities.

one's voice in order to explain one's experiences, the power of "the mythic" and "the sense of being a victim of history determined from 'outside'" (Crow and Banfield 169). In addition to themes, he also has experimented with techniques such as fragmenting and unconventional stage realism, techniques highly favored in other post-colonial drama (Bertha 154).

In his introduction to *Brian Friel: Plays One*, Seamus Deane writes that Friel's plays present precisely how "the crisis of the language is expressed in terms of the crisis in a family," thereby making his work inherently political as it is "fascinated by its own linguistic medium" (Deane 21, 13). In the case of the *Translations*, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *Aristocrats*, a single family name translates into crises of the familial community and the global inevitabilities, creating a tension that ultimately destroys the family legacy and reflects upon the larger "sense of place" within the Irish landscape. In reading these three plays in conjunction, particularly in chronological order of setting, one can see how Friel intends to convey a sense of loss, failure, and inevitable demise for an ancient name and communal identity.

## CHAPTER I

### *TRANSLATIONS AND THE PEASANT SCHOLARS*

*Translations*, often considered Friel's best work according to many of his critics, premiered in September 1980 in Ireland and has experienced continuous commercial success, although much more so in Ireland than abroad (including performances in France, Germany, Prague, and Budapest) on account of its rich immersion in Irish history (Pelletier 66).<sup>7</sup> However, the play transcends beyond classical Irishness and the provincial community it encompasses. Written as the last of the O'Donnell cycle, the play is set first, long before the others, because Friel understood the need to create an "origin" of sorts for the other two generations. This initial generation roots *Philadelphia*, *Here I Come!* and *Aristocrats* in a clan that is linguistically linked to place even more so than the earlier plays. *Translations* creates a starting point, both for the decline of the O'Donnell family and local identity but also in terms of depicting the pre-industrial land-based community that has been absent in the subsequent plays. Friel understands that the reader or audience must see the derivation in order to appreciate the internal and external alteration that has transformed the same family and setting.

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<sup>7</sup> While a small handful of critics have stood apart on this issue and declared the monologue-driven play *Faith Healer* to be the most accomplished piece in Friel's oeuvre, Seamus Deane puts it best when he succinctly states that *Translations* is "widely acclaimed both in Ireland and abroad as Friel's masterpiece" (Introduction 21).

The play is set during the British Ordnance Survey, in which British engineers traveled throughout Ireland to survey the land in preparation for the production of an accurate map, and simultaneously “regulated” place names, most often converting the Irish-Gaelic names into English. Like the other plays in the O’Donnell cycle, this one takes place over the course of only a few days in the Donegal village of Baile Beag; schoolmasters Hugh and Manus O’Donnell must come to terms with the presence and exploits of the British soldiers, all while their son/brother Owen aids in the translations of the place names and Manus’s betrothed, Maire, falls in love with one of the British soldiers named George Yolland. The play concludes with imminent tragedy, as Maire’s love interest has suspiciously disappeared and the O’Donnell clan, along with their neighbors and friends, is threatened with eviction and ruin. Many critics have isolated the fact that Friel uses certain non-fictitious names to imply that his play is perfectly accurate in terms of Irish history; he claims this was never meant to be the case and rather the play should be read “not as a recreation of a real moment in Irish history, but as a distillation of elements that have run through the experiences of several centuries” (Sean Connelly 153). In this sense, one of the most famous lines of *Translations* is entirely fitting: “It is not the literal past, the ‘facts’ of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language” (BFP 445). *Translations* ultimately exemplifies the copious evictions that occur within a single event: the O’Donnell family and their neighbors are physically and linguistically evicted from the land, but their cultural eviction from their rural, communal identity is the most injurious to the future O’Donnell generations.

Brian Friel famously wrote in his diary while composing the play that it “has to do with language, and only language” (Friel 58). And, in fact, the influence of George

Steiner's 1975 book *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* resonates throughout the play by means of Hugh in terms of Hugh's own opinions of the linguistic landscape of place. He highlights the fact that the Baile Beag people are impoverished in material goods but wealthy in their cultural and communal tradition, saying to the British engineers that

[It is] a rich language. A rich literature. You'll find, sir, that certain cultures expand on their vocabularies and syntax acquisitive energies and ostentations entirely lacking in their material lives. I suppose you could call us a spiritual people...[it is] full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception—a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to...inevitably. (BFP 418-9)

However, despite Friel's concentration upon a single issue, language is far from an isolated anxiety within the underlying context. The play delves into language's often-vexing signifying powers: local identity, identification of land and landscape, and the loss of self within the transformation of one's name. In fact, while the connection between a culture's language and identity has been disrupted by colonialism and widely explored in postcolonial theory, language (and its loss) signifies what fellow contemporary playwright Wole Soyinka would term a "return to roots." Yet, the veritable extension of language and identity can never be entirely explored in this play, especially since it is a historical play; critics and audiences alike become fixated upon the political and socio-cultural implications of the history presented within the three acts, rather than the more subtle interplay between individual characters and rhetorical realities. Critic Marianne Pelletier assumes Martin Heidegger's view in saying that

language can never be wholly understood not translated, for each language exists within a particular historical moment (Pelletier 69). Hence, focusing upon the characters' intermediate status between language and land-centered identity will better explain their own self- and communal identity as Irishmen and –women.

The central focal point of this land-centered identity becomes the three men of the O'Donnell clan. The O'Donnells of 1833 are impoverished but exceptionally intellectual. While the village peasantry they instruct “have minds and...are alive to learning,” the O'Donnell men becomes the focal point of academic endeavor (O'Brien 103). Hugh, the patriarch, speaks multiple languages, composes poetry, teaches, converses on many a historical and political matter, and seeks to continue “filling what our friend Euripides calls the ‘*aplestos pithos*’...’the cask that cannot be filled” (BFP 400). Additionally, he is the first to truly understand what the British military operation means:

YOLLAND: [Hugh's] an astute man.

OWEN: He's bloody pompous!

YOLLAND: But so astute...He knows what's happening.

OWEN: What is happening?

YOLLAND: I'm not sure...It's an eviction of sorts. (BFP 419-20)

Manus, the elder son, is likewise a scholar, complete with knowledge of languages and with the soft hands of a gentleman. He, too, recognizes the British plan from the onset, accusing Owen upon hearing Captain Lancey's description that “There was nothing uncertain about what Lancey said: it's bloody military operation, Owen!” (BFP 408). Owen, the younger son (and based upon the historical translator of the Ordnance Survey, John O'Donovan), returns to Baile Beag as a translator between the English and Irish

forces after accumulating some wealth in Dublin. The setting of Baile Beag is apparently unblemished in its pre-Great Famine setting, yet becomes an “imperfect Eden, the corrupt smell of potato blight portending its other disasters” (Maxwell 210). Therefore, in character and in setting, the O’Donnells are not only the most aware of the future of their clan (and of their present circumstances) but also the most in tune with the physical landscape of their setting. Yet like their descendents in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *Aristocrats*, they face uncertain outcomes and potentially impending misfortunes.

In addition to their scholarly prowess, they also possess a certain sense of dignity and status within their position as scholars and/or educators. Apparently, Friel wanted to impart this especially with Hugh; at his first entrance, Hugh is described in the stage directions as possessing “residual dignity” and as becoming “expansive, almost courtly” among the British “visitors” (BFP 397, 405). Not only are his thoughts and comments pompous, but he is also, as noted in the stage directions, supposed to be portrayed as physically in possession of a shabby stateliness. In terms of his own language, he most obviously feels elevated above the rest. And despite his increased drunkenness throughout the play’s progression, his drunkenness is treated “with great indulgence almost as a grace rather than a disability” (Greene 39). Nonetheless, his overtly proud demeanor never manifests unless he is speaking directly about those outside the family or classroom. He refers to the English forces, both with their first arrival and upon the onslaught after Yolland’s disappearance, as *rustici*, or the Latin word for “peasants.” He does not recognize his own status as a peasant within the socio-economic landscape of pre-famine Ireland but instead appropriates the term and applies it toward those who are without education or culture, rather than those without money or class status.



This sense of dignity descends from the ancient chieftain name of O'Donnell itself. Although surnames occasionally play significant roles for contemporary audiences, the family name of O'Donnell is only mentioned twice within the course of the play, only in reference to Owen and Hugh once each. While the primary reference emits from Owen upon his return to Baile Beag ("Could anybody tell me is this where Hugh Mor O'Donnell holds his hedge-school?" [BFP 401]), the second reference comes from the mouth of the colonizer himself, Captain Lancey; upon issuing his orders of eviction and asking Owen to translate his orders into Irish, he snaps, "I'm in a hurry, O'Donnell" (BFP 439). At this point, Owen is tied to his family name, even at the point of his family's ruin, the exact moment his family learns they are to be forced off their land forever; this recitation reminds the audience that Owen has not simply returned to his family land but is of the land himself.

Rather than by family surname, most of the characters in the show are referred to by names of recognition, or nicknames. Characters names such as Nellie Ruadh ("Red-Headed Nelly"), Sean Beag ("Small Sean") and Hugh Mor ("Big Hugh") label the characters more often by their external attributes than clan name. The surname becomes inconsequential in the lives of the country peasants. Their identities, both to others and to the audience, are closely linked to their physical appearance. In other words, they are marked by what their community sees of them, becoming locally identified and self-identified by their physical place within Baile Beag.

Furthermore, this level of familiarity is excluded from the English: Captain Lancey's Christian name is never revealed, while only Owen and Maire refer to Lieutenant Yolland as "George" (Jones 69). Yolland's name is particularly significant in

this context; while there was a man named Yolland involved in the actual British Ordnance Survey, he participated in the survey years after this play takes place. The character of Yolland is actually based upon the historical figure of Thomas A. Larcom, one of leading lieutenants of the survey who, although he was not killed in the field, became a committed Hibernophile just like the character (Boltwood 160): Friel's decision to use such a name on a character who moves between the two worlds of the modern English and the ancient Celtic is more than arbitrary. The name "Yolland" is literally a mix between "old" and "land": "Yola" was the name given to the English language spoken by those settlers who eventually adopted Irish culture and language altogether (Jones 69). As Owen reports that Yolland "is already a committed Hibernophile" despite his brief time in Ireland, the name is additionally appropriate (BFP 407).

Despite Friel's claim that the play "has to do with language, and only language," he chose to publish the character names in the English language rather than in their Irish-Gaelic form. The name "O'Donnell" as it appears in all three plays and even in Friel's rewrite of ancient Celtic chieftom, *Making History*, is published in an Anglicized form; this decision to acknowledge the Irish heritage yet alter the time-appropriate spelling displays Friel's connection to his audience and their understanding of contemporary history. Likewise, by Anglicizing the O'Donnell name, Friel predicts the approaching mass-Anglicization of the region, linguistically constructing an ephemeral reality. Even the character of Owen exhibits a moment of self-Anglicization when he spells his proper name as "O-w-e-n" when Yolland misunderstands his name to be "Roland" (BFP 421). In spelling his name Owen instead of the Irish spelling of Eoghan or Eion, Owen confirms

that he has effectively assumed the role of subaltern and has already recognized the impending onslaught of the English language upon his land.

Yet a particularly understated association with the ancient Irish chieftoms is exquisitely executed. While the original Hugh O'Donnell was transformed into a fictional character in *Making History*, his characterization was broad, painting him as a simple patriot and even as a comic foil to protagonist Hugh O'Neill (Corbett 10). However, the most famous historical Hugh O'Donnell, Red Hugh O'Donnell, or Aodh Ruadh O Domhnaill, descended from the medieval chieftain lords of the Ulster province of Ireland. He was a brave and successful warrior, brilliant political leader, and, needless to say, far from a pompous village schoolmaster (S.J. Connelly 424). Friel's neglect to connect the character Hugh O'Donnell to the more famous Chieftain Hugh O'Donnell may appear to be a grand oversight but is instead a restrained observation on the fading relevance of folkloric myth and its cult of great men and heroes within early nineteenth century Ireland. By the next generation of his O'Donnells, in the 1964 play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, the name is no longer connected to the greatness of the past; in fact, the characters of that name are openly referred to as such and the name becomes a label for the well-placed and emerging merchant middle class.

In regards to the *Translations* O'Donnell clan, the men are certainly the central focus, both in terms of language and local identity, but the fourth, and absent, member of this nuclear family is Hugh's wife/Owen and Manus's mother, who died at an unspecified time during the boys' childhood. Even when her name is mentioned once near the end of the play, Hugh refers to her by her maiden name, Caitlin Dubh Nic Reactainn; she, as well as Manus, wholly sheds the labeling of the O'Donnells even though she entered the

family upon marriage. This return to her individual name upon death signifies the importance of local identity in Friel's fictional village; she regresses to maiden and family name, the name Hugh knew her by previously, rather than the name that is forced upon her in the patriarchal system of marriage.

Friel's subtleties extend beyond the members of this O'Donnell family and into other characters of a similar name: the Donnelly twins. With the same root, Donnelly also descended from the ancient name of TirConnell. However, the Donnelly's epitomize the contrary of the O'Donnells; the twins, although they are the "[b]est fishermen about here," are never seen within the course of the play, as they create a ghost-like presence, nearby without materializing (BFP 413). Nonetheless, they perform a major role within the plot: not only are they the implicated murderers of Lieutenant Yolland, but Doalty implies that they will be staging a guerilla-style attack against the local British forces. Similarly, the twins are the unseen specters of the violence that is to come within that province; Nicholas Grene refers to them as "proto-Provos," meaning that they foreshadow the most violent guerrilla wing of the Irish Republican Army of the twentieth century (Grene 45). They are minor characters compared to the O'Donnell men, yet their actions link them to the land and local identity even more so, representing the violence that continues to grip Northern Ireland. They may have murdered Yolland and fled, but their legacy remained—and still remains—in Ulster.

The regional community in which the O'Donnell men are possibly prominent figures is not a dying culture, despite its economic poverty and antiquated technology and standard of living; it is not illustrated as defective until the British forces arrive and threaten the Baile Beag lifestyle. A "dying culture" is one that is defined to have ceased

“to make sense of the world in which it’s bearers live”; in the case of the pre-Ordnance Survey Baile Beag, the community is presented as “self-sufficient and organically complete” (Sean Connelly 156). The local identity only erodes on account of the linguistic conquest by the British. Small moments along the path of this conquest attempt to reflect the manner in which the local identity is struggling against outside forces; George Yolland insists that the crossroads retains its Irish name of *Tobair Vree*; even if few people remember the story behind the naming of the landmark, the retention of local distinctiveness via place names is one rebellion against its destruction. Likewise, the tale of *Tobair Vree* that Owen shares with George connects the power of healing to the landmark, symbolizing the emotional and psychological comfort the land provides for its residents.

The native community itself is heavily associated with the physical landscape of the parish. The name “baile” included in the title of the village, alternately translates as both “town” and “home” in the Irish language; in fact, the definition of “baile” in Irish dictionaries features the word “home” before “town” (*Foclair Poca*). Thought of as just a generic name for a fictional village, “small town” therefore also means “small home.” With the latter, the O’Donnells and their neighbors are not only residents of a given area of geography, but identified as family members in a common household. Interpreting this word choice in a postcolonial fashion, Csilla Bertha asserts that “the necessity of being at home in their own place...is disproportionately enlarged for a once-colonized, physically and spiritually disposed people” (Bertha 156). The entire Irish nation of the 1833 O’Donnells is occupied and colonized by the British; however, the Irish audience of 1980 would understand this overwhelming desire for a particular physical land, spiritual place,

and communal home because the occupation exists within living memory of the Republic of Ireland and continued within the North. Even though *Translations*' "sense of place is wedded to sorrow," it is nonetheless this *sense* that appeals to audiences (Lojek 186).

Likewise, the term "hedge school" creates a correlation between self-identity, landscape, and education. Hedge schools were initially created in the nineteenth century so as to educate the impoverished peasants, a practice that was against the law in the eyes of the British colonizers. Thus, classes were often literally held in hedges, or outdoor open space, placing education, along with the educators, directly hidden within the Irish rural landscape. As *Translations* opens, the audience notices that this particular hedge school operates out of the O'Donnell home, "held in a disused barn or hay-shed or byre" that is attached to the proper house; this particular space becomes associated with a practice that relocated from a natural, land-oriented rebellion (BFP 383).

Now that such a shift has occurred, the space becomes a threatened one, confirmed by Hugh's decision to teach Latin and Greek, thus "encouraging a cross-cultural conversation exclusively with dead civilizations" (Pelletier 67).<sup>8</sup> This choice foreshadows not only that the Irish language would soon be considered a "dead language" along with Latin and Greek, but also that the Celtic-based, rural culture would be obsolete fairly soon as well. Likewise, the English language is separated from the land and rather associated with economics: Hugh declares early on that only a few villagers

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<sup>8</sup> Several critics of (the popularity and reception of) the play have noted the discrepancies in the idea of intellectual peasantry, especially in a country that experiences high levels of illiteracy in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, eighteenth and nineteenth century observers and writers have often noted the possibility of poor county hedge schools offering education in Greek and Latin; in fact, a 1935 book entitled *The Hedge Schools of Ireland* supported the idea of "a classically educated peasantry" (Connelly 152). The connection between physical/spiritual place and education culminates with the official translation of landmarks into English; Hugh speaks for the rest when he says, "we must *learn* where we live" (BFP 444).

are able to speak English, “and then usually for the purposes of commerce” (BFP 399). Therefore, as the physical landmarks are identified in Irish, the growing economic system demands English.

The individual characters themselves are thoroughly attached to the land in a variety of ways, including those characters outside of O’Donnell family. Maire in particular, the initial love interest of Manus O’Donnell, becomes immediately naturalized at her first entrance: she walks in carrying a pail of milk, her payment for her school lessons, and one of her first spoken lines recounts that the time of the play has seen “[t]he best harvest in living memory” (BFP 388). With both her props and her words, Maire, even as a complex character, symbolizes the natural atmosphere outside the school; as an O’Donnell, it is no wonder Manus wants to marry her. Likewise, her appearance at the O’Donnell house after Yolland’s vanishing disconnects her from the land and her stability: she arrives at the hedge school with her milk can, only to find that her can is completely empty (Burke 18).

Maire continues to be associated with natural elements throughout the course of the play. As a student, she is only shown studying the map of America and brushing up on her geography skills. When Yolland attempts to communicate with her despite their linguistic differences, one of the ways she succeeds is in naming the elements: water, fire, earth. Within the same scene, she is typically dressed in earth tones, as George is usually depicted in his red military coat; once Sarah, in her green dress, interrupts their romantic embrace, the audience can immediately detect the disparity between the land-tinted clothing of the local women and the harsh, unnatural red of the British uniform (Burke 17).

Yet despite his superficial uniform, Yolland becomes a spiritual O'Donnell in a sense, if not in name, because he recognizes the importance of communal identity versus individual identity...a distinction that will eventually cause the clan's downfall in *Aristocrats*. Yolland, as the son and neighbor of Enlightenment thinkers and proponents of "the French Revolution's liberationist aims," rejects the individualism that comes with the movement as well as with British imperialism (Russell 117). He distances himself from his road-building imperialist father, appreciating the local beauty and community rather than paving over it. Instead, he aligns himself with the O'Donnells, choosing local identity—and the retention of such identity despite global initiatives—over the emphasis on the individual, just as Hugh reminds Jimmy Jack later in the play that they longed for their "older, quieter things" once they had left Baile Beag (BFP 445).

Even though Yolland associates himself with local identity apart from individualism, he also respects the spirit of the landscape that grounds the O'Donnells in community. In fact, he understands what is happening to the landscape (as Manus and Hugh do) before his military counterparts, but he also attributes his new personality changes to the environment. He informs Owen that "[y]our Irish air has made me bold" in regards to challenging Captain Lancey's direction, while he simultaneously considers settling in Ireland permanently because of its beauty (BFP 411). He does not absorb the notion behind renaming the land even when Owen seems to:

OWEN: Back to the first principles. What are we trying to do?

YOLLAND: Good question.

OWEN: We are trying to denominate and at the same time describe that tiny area of soggy, rocky, sandy ground where that little stream enters the sea, an area



known locally as *Bun na hAbhann*. (BFP 410)

Yolland's concept of the land extends beyond Owen's...at least that this point. It is only upon Yolland's disappearance that Owen comprehends the magnitude of the local identity and commits himself to fight for it.

On the other hand, the entrance of the Yolland's British colleagues and their modernizing surveying tools displays a reality that will "inexorably influence the parish's inhabitants to begin to conceive of themselves as workers and consumers, instead of members of an organic, caring community" (Russell 121). They lose this land-centered identity, not only through the alteration of their Irish-Gaelic names but also through their initiation into a colonial situation, becoming parts and statistics of a (capitalistic) whole, rather than individuals bound by community. The initial intrusion of the Irish peasants upon the culture of modernity does not last; Doalty's slow and methodical movement of the theodolite at the opening of the play in order to confuse the surveyors (resulting in taking "the bloody machine apart!" [BFP 391]) may "indicate...a presence" on behalf of the villagers, but it is no enduring resistance towards the juggernaut of modernity, larger than a theodolite, that will strike later (BFP 391).

Along the same lines, the British are continuously portrayed as more technologically-savvy, possessing tools and implements that not only distinguish them culturally but also distance them from the land-centered local community. The detachment of the British soldiers' perception of the land translates into their reliance on modernity, just as Captain Lancey, the leader of the British forces, is described as being skilled "with deeds, not words" (BFP 404). Because of this, Lancey commands his forces

with mechanisms that rape and ravage the land itself, especially upon news of Yolland's disappearance:

BRIDGET: And they're spread out in a big line from Sean Neal's over to Lag and they're moving straight across the fields toward Cnoc na nGabhar!

DOALTY: Prodding every inch of the ground in front of them with their bayonets and scattering animals and hens in all directions!

BRIDGET: And tumbling everything before them—fences, ditches, haystacks, turf-stacks! (BFP 434).

On the other hand are the machine-wary local peasants; and the O'Donnells, more so than the others, have suffered the most for the introduction. Upon hearing of the eviction order, Hugh replies, "Ah. *Edictum imperatoris*" (BFP 445). He acknowledges the news as an inevitability, a course of action that has leveled colonized states from centuries before. From that moment, he moves onto describe his short history of rebellion in his youth: attempted participation in the failed French-led Wolfe Tone Rebellion of 1798, in which he carried a pike, a farmer's tool, as a weapon. His monologue about this event categorizes the O'Donnells as accurately as possible: failure at battle, carrying the *Aeneid* in his pocket, and the heightened perception of the landscape around him making him yearn for "[t]he *desiderium nostrorum*—the need for our own" (BFP 445). Despite the parts of the community, agriculture and education, which are traveling with him, he ultimately requires the local community and land to confirm his identity.

Similarly, Manus's flight says more about his displacement throughout the course of the play than his fear of repercussions from Yolland's disappearance. The first scene is a pivotal one for Manus: he moves from the role of a significant educator and member of

the village (teaching Sarah to speak, organizing the school lessons when his father arrives late) to displacement by the British. He becomes “supplemented by Owen” as an O’Donnell and loses his chance to marry Maire because of Yolland (Corbett 33). He becomes dislocated from the land, education, and familial status, and Yolland’s disappearance gives him the opportunity to confront his displacement.

Finally, Owen O’Donnell shifts from being an enabler toward the British operation to a local fighter against eviction. Seamus Deane initially described the character as “an avatar of ‘the new Ireland’ who comes to value the old world that ‘he has helped to bury’” (Deane, *Celtic Revivals*, qtd. in Boltwood). Only too late does he realize that his job as “go-between” has disengaged himself and his neighbors from the land and local identity. Just as Manus is supplanted by the British operation in terms of human substitution, Owen becomes emotionally dislodged once he realizes the damage that he has helped to inflict. Only his physical commitment to the cause, which is doomed to fail, can redeem him in the end.

As the presence of the economically and militarily-centered British proclaims the loss of land-centered local identity, the departure of several characters symbolizes the beginning of the end of rural culture, particularly of the old Gaelic order: Maire desires to leave for America after learning English, a language that the Liberator, Daniel O’Connell, encourages and for which Hugh O’Donnell despises him. Manus’s departure is even more significant, as he leaves the Donnelly twins “to fill the vacuum left by the abdication and...the collapse of learning” (Murray 212). As one schoolmaster flees, one steps down, and the students are scattered by eviction, the education of Baile Beag comes to a sudden and tragic finale.

Therefore, outside of their names and situations alone, the central characters of the play represent what exactly is occurring in the 1833 days of harvest and how it will shape their descendents and parish forever. Upon discovering the actual objective of the Ordnance Survey and the deleterious role it could play in Ireland's future, George Yolland attempts to pinpoint "what's happening": "I'm not sure. But I'm concerned about my part in it. It's an eviction of sorts...Something is being eroded" (BFP 419-20). Yolland is quick to acknowledge what is just around the corner, directly after his own disappearance: a literal eviction for the O'Donnells, a linguistic eviction for their village, but even more importantly, an irreversible eviction of their local, rural identity. If the O'Donnells' identity is rooted in their surrounding agricultural community—and their position as scholars and educators—a relocation of all residents at the hands of the British signifies the danger not only of modernity upon this world but also of the global perspective upon the residents. They have no wish to assume the "qualitative experiences" of the British/Western European tradition, but rather savor (and end up losing by the time of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*) the quantitative lifestyle (Russell 118-19).

Friel's foremost commentary on the fate of the scholarly descendents of ancient royalty is that their initial fulfilling existence cannot remain so: Manus attempts to escape to Inis Meadhon, Hugh is undoubtedly evicted by Lancey's forces, and Owen's new warrior status jeopardizes his job and even his life. While already belonging to the lower caste within Anglo-Irish society, they are impoverished even more; nevertheless, their education, intelligence, and character are what remain behind the conflict. Once they have lost homes, jobs, and even friends, their dignity rests wholly in their characters. By

giving them the name of O'Donnell, Friel attempts to connect them to the larger landscape of Irish history, as well as provide the other families in the O'Donnell cycle with a dignified and educated foundation. Thus, their initial identity, tied closely to the place in which they live, shifts with the eviction order but maintains its strength of character and education. The image of their land, like their literary predecessors, transforms from a land-centered, first-person experience of community into a psychological affiliation with a past utopia, one that eventually and inevitably becomes ravaged by the imperial force.

Friel does not allow the line to end here, even though the men are, unlike Captain Lancey, skilled in words and not deeds. All three had or have attempted to be fighters in their lives, yet undoubtedly fail. Hugh turns back home from the "road to Sligo" after walking only twenty-three miles toward the uprising of the failed 1798 Wolfe Tone Rebellion. In the same vein, Manus's only moment of aggression occurs when he faces Yolland with a rock in hand with the intention "to fell him" upon seeing Yolland with Maire. Instead of acting violently, he turns away (that is, if the reader trusts Manus's own story) but must flee because of his suspicious involvement in Yolland's disappearance. Finally, Owen assumes the O'Donnell role of half-hearted fighter only at the very end of the play, implying to Doalty that he would support the Donnelly twins in an uprising against the British occupation. In using Jimmy Jack's own prediction, such an uprising would undoubtedly become another Thermopylae and young Owen would end up killed or executed.

Despite the significance of linguistic identities, both in terms of individuals and the parish locales, Richard Russell asserts that the "linguistic displacement is, in fact, part

of a larger attenuation to rural culture and epistemology about global modernization” (Russell 106). In addition to the attention past critics have paid in terms of the linguistic themes throughout the play, Russell illustrates how Friel uses certain techniques within the play, such as the British obsession with time and machines, to symbolize the onslaught of industry and modernization as a threatening, imperial force. The play is not simply about the oncoming, pre-modern industrial threat, but more so the “alarm at the loss of local community” and the individual’s local identity (Russell 106). It is no coincidence that “cosmopolitanism” became a more pejorative term near the beginning of the nineteenth century in British usage, as British imperialists and imperialist supporters became “almost always opposed to national identity and local community” (Berman 35).

The opening night of the play is a landmark in itself, not only for Irish theatre, but for the physical landscape of Irish politics and local identity. The play premiered in the city of Derry (known to the British and Unionists as Londonderry), located in British-occupied Northern Ireland. The city had long been a hotbed of violence and confusion, claimed on-and-off by the Protestant and English-heavy North and by the Catholic, Republican South. Because it remains under British jurisdiction to this day, yet maintains a heavily Catholic population, the era of “The Troubles” of Northern Ireland produced severe violence and destruction in this region of the county. Thus, the premiere of *Translations* in late September of 1980 was both a testament to the political vision and statement of Brian Friel’s theatrical company, Field Day, as well as a catalyst to additional violence in the North.

In fact, the week of its premiere ushered in one of the tensest eras of the region, including the initiation of a hunger strike that would kill ten political prisoners, one of

them the well-known Bobby Sands (Morash 234). The decision to open the play on such anxious ground signifies Field Day's attempt to "reclaim" the landscape of Derry for the cause of remembrance, in terms of Ireland's tumultuous past, and reviving the culture that was lost with the land. Just as "what we choose to remember is dictated by our contemporary concerns," Friel took upon himself the remembrance of an entire nation of people and attempted to facilitate their own memories (McBride 6).

Upon its initial production, the Sinn Fein weekly publication, *An Phoblacht*, wrote that *Translations* approaches issues of "language and identity, the meaning of education and its relation to political reality, colonial conquest through cultural imperialism" (qtd. in Morash 240). More importantly, Friel accomplishes this intricacy through the representation of one family and one family name; he connects the multiple O'Donnell generations not only in name alone, but in the unified and conflicting themes that tie them to each other, to the land of Baile Beag, and to the local identity they have created for themselves despite the emergence of modernity. Although Brian Friel is thought to have thematically "descended" from past Irish playwrights, such as Samuel Beckett and John Millington Synge before him, Friel constructs a similar pattern for his works, in content, style, and theme. *Translations* activates a family line which underscores that the ability of industrialization, structured class system, and emphasis on wealth and status to "diminish...humanity and the connection of humans with the natural world" (Russell 109).

Hugh O'Donnell's final monologue in *Translations*, from Virgil's *Aeneid* which begins "*Urbs antiqua fuit*- there was an ancient city which, 'tis said, Juno loved above all the lands..." is particularly appropriate as a closing to the play and a sealing of the

O'Donnells' fate. Hugh's connection between Rome/Carthage and England/Ireland in this example affords Ireland's "grim colonial history the amplifying dignity of a classical epic" (Greene 47). Even intoxicated and soon to be evicted, Hugh recognizes the continuous loss of place, memory, and culture that is associated with imperialism- a loss that extends from Virgil to himself. He acknowledges the change that is about to befall Baile Beag has emerged "from the citation and translation of classical precedent," both in language and in military conquest (O'Brien 107). The significance of the imminent change, and even more importantly, Hugh's recognition of it, encapsulates a rationale for a third part of the O'Donnell cycle, particularly one that was written last in the cycle but explains and designates the origins of the other generations. In completing the cycle with what is in essence a beginning, Friel brings his audience full circle by allowing them to view the next installment, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* with an understanding of its familiar and communal predecessors.



## CHAPTER II

### *PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!:* THE O'DONNELL MERCHANT CLASS

The first play written within the O'Donnell cycle, in terms of its original publication and premiere, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* was first performed at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre on September 28, 1964 (BFP 26). Considered Friel's first major success on the stage, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* confronts the issues that plagued the younger Irish generation at the time: emigration, family relations, personal relationships, and economic standing. The play focuses upon two members of the O'Donnell clan in the early 1960s: Gareth, the son about to immigrate to America for better opportunity, and County Councillor S.B., the painfully reserved and unemotional father and owner of a small general store. The play's action is limited to one day and early the following morning, as Gar divulges his reservations about leaving his hometown of Ballybeg (the Anglicized version of Baile Beag) through flashbacks as well as an "inner voice" and an "outer voice," represented by two different actors playing the same role. Ultimately, the play concludes without Gar's decision, leaving the audience with the impression that he may have turned his back on a new life in America to return to boredom and loneliness in the one place he has ever known.

At the time of the play's initial publication and of its setting, Ireland was experiencing a mass exodus in terms of emigration. Emigration was the highest in Ireland during the years of 1956-1961, in which the most people left Ireland since the 1880s (Murray 165). In other words, anticipating his subsequent period piece *Translations*, discussed above, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* has an implicitly historical cast, for its themes cannot help but evoke memories of this earlier Irish diaspora, which so transformed Irish identity. The play characteristically addresses this overwhelming exit of young Ireland, as the character of Gar must decide between a better life abroad and the magnetic yearning that ties him to his native village. Early on in the play, he jokes about the Irish impression of America as "a profane, irreligious, pagan country of gross materialism" despite the fact that most Irish often acknowledged that it offered more economic opportunity for the youth than Ireland (BFP 32). Likewise, the play contrasts the absent, but ever-present image of America by offering eccentric description of the village environment, the one which signifies Gar's identity and ultimately succeeds in hindering his escape. The majority of the action transpires in the O'Donnell household, yet Friel provides numerous references to village surroundings: "Mill Road, McLaughlin's Hotel, Loch na Cloc Cor, White Strand...fishing boats, farms, a carnival, a wake, the *Clarion* newspaper, Maggie Hanna...Charlie who owns the lorry," etc. (Jones 18). This continuous infusion of Ballybeg life into the O'Donnell household offers a setting beyond those four walls and a culture beyond Gar's individual perception.

Even though Friel has protested that the play is purely concerned with "an analysis of a kind of love: the love between a father and a son and between a son and his birthplace," it delves more profoundly into the intricate relationship between individuals

and community (qtd. in Maxwell 178). His use of the word “analysis” is noteworthy, especially because that is exactly what the play is: the plot is concise and minimal while the analysis of personal relationships, self-identity, and communal connection to the social environment is heavily explored throughout four chapters (Jones 15). Despite Friel’s simplistic claim on his creation, the play takes on a much more distinctive character once placed within the context of *Translations* and *Aristocrats*. Unlike the O’Donnells of *Translations*, Gar and his father exist as a smaller entity, physically because there are only two of them since the death of their mother/wife many years previous, but also because they have lost the intellectual ostentation and passionate showmanship of their 1833 family.

Instead, they emerge from two separate ends of the O’Donnell spectrum: at one end is the elder, S.B. O’Donnell, whose silent coldness toward his son is not only indicative of his years of repressed emotions after his spouse’s death but also of his fear to acknowledge the difference between them. The opposite end features young Gar O’Donnell, whose emotions run so high and divergent, that Friel creates both a Public Gar and a Private Gar in order to capture his personality. Ulf Dantanus expands upon this reflection of Freud’s concern with fragmentation, stating that with the emergence of modern society and “its general tendencies toward increased fragmentation, the twentieth century has gradually focused more and more attention on the individual” (Dantanus 90). While this explains the focus upon Gar and his individuality within the play, his ultimate fate is one decided by communal identity and attraction to the spiritual homeland rather than personal choice. Similarly, Gar’s split persona is his way of manifesting the anxiety of his decision within his environment; his doubling reflects what Anthony Roche terms

the “anti-hierarchical nature of postcolonial Irish drama,” in which “every pronouncement by the one is likely to be countered or questioned by the other” (Roche 59-60). As the lead role is equally divided, Public and Private Gar conjointly express the “lack of integrity in the silenced native, who is able to express himself only within himself” (Pelletier 159).

On the other hand, the character of S.B. O’Donnell, standing as the O’Donnell patriarch in this play, is far removed from his ancestors of *Translations*. He has maintained a successful small-scale business, dresses in a “good dark suit, collar, and tie” that distinguishes him from his male counterparts in the village, and is even able to keep a housekeeper (Boltwood 56). However, he is also notoriously thrifty and removed from his son’s personal life. Madge reports to Gar that “he said nothing when your mother died either,” indicating that S.B.’s stoicism is deeply ingrained and unwavering. From his first entrance, Friel wishes to convey a sense of integrity: the stage directions for S.B.’s entrance indicate that he not only wears “a good dark suit” but is also “a responsible, respectable citizen” (BFP 34). Since Friel provides few stage directions, most commonly in regards to physical appearance of characters or stage setting, this remark in regards to S.B.’s character is a striking contradiction to Gar’s emotions toward his cold father.

In addition, the absent mother/wife is once again presented, just as in *Translations*. And, like *Translations*, she is identified by her own ancestry rather than that of her husband. Caitlin Dubh Nic Reactainn might be identified in this sense only by her name, but Maire Gallagher is acknowledged by her own native past and her “peasant ethos” (Boltwood 58). Private Gar relates the story Madge has told him of his mother: she came from a land outside Ballybeg, called Bailtefree, and was a young, wild woman who

had loose hair and only wore shoes when approaching the village boundaries (BFP 37). She symbolizes everything that S.B. is not, everything that Gar has never been exposed to but yearns to know. In addition, her hometown, Bailtefree, implies that her peasant manners were compounded by her wild and “free” rural environment. Her death not only alters the course of Gar’s life, but also reiterates the idea that the old, peasant lifestyle had to die in order to pave the way for the economic growth of village life.

This branch of the O’Donnells is figuratively wedged between the families of *Translations* and *Aristocrats*, both in terms of economic situation, educational background, and relative role to the surrounding society. They have not settled in the agricultural segment of the village like their forbearers, nor do they possess the social position of the gentry of the generation to follow. However, their physical location throughout the play defines their spiritual identification: as Friel often “connects the most private and secret places of individual life with the plight of the whole culture” the structural connection between the O’Donnells’ house and the general shop suggests that the entire culture is becoming more concerned with economic status and viability (Bertha 156). The *Translations* O’Donnells’ house doubles as a school for the neighboring peasants, yet S.B. and Gar have chosen to transform theirs into a small business.

With that in mind, it is important to note that in Gar’s most emotional scenes, or moments in which he needs to remember or enact fantasies, both Private and Public Gar “go into the bedroom” in order to reflect upon the past together (Burke 16). In fact, the last scene of the play shows the two actors returning to the bedroom once again so that both Gars can attempt to understand the hesitancy in absconding. Since the O’Donnells’ shop is attached to the house, Gar’s bedroom provides the only “private” space available;

and in terms of the set design specified by Friel, it is also the farthest point from the more economic-minded section of the household. The bedroom, therefore, becomes representative not only of Gar's private space but also of his desire to distance himself from the growing mercantile environment of his surroundings.

While they have enough money to survive and exist as respected members of Ballybeg society, being merchants in an economically prosperous age, they are by no means passing for upper class. Gar especially suffers from this fate when he intends to marry the love of his youth, Katie Doogan, a character who symbolizes wealth to Gar just as Maire Chatach symbolized nature to Manus and Yolland. Gar subconsciously connects Katie to money directly after the first mention of her name: when reminiscing, he displays how he carries a picture of her in his wallet, closer to his money than his heart. As for Katie, she encourages this subconscious correlation. In fact, her first words to him onstage are "But £3 15s, Gar! We could never live on that" (BFP 40). Before the audience/reader even witnesses her affection for Gar, they observe her anxiety about their financial well-being. She wants to marry him and encourages him to ask her father for permission immediately, but she advises that "You'll have to see about getting more money" (BFP 40).

Her father, a lawyer and senator of good standing, manages to convince Gar that a marriage with his daughter would not be fortuitous; she must marry within her upper-class confines, which George O'Brien describes as a "coalition of personal impoverishment and social expectations" (O'Brien 48). Gar allows himself to be persuaded that his social rank is not respectable enough for the Doogans, despite the fact that Katie stands firmly behind the match and emotionally supports Gar in his

entrepreneurial endeavors. The intriguing part of his conversation with Senator Doogan is that the Senator closes with a hint at his true wishes:

DOOGAN: Katie is our only child, Gareth, and her happiness is all that is to us...

What I'm trying to say is that any decision she makes will be her own...Just in case you should think that her mother or I were...in case you might have the idea...

PUBLIC: (*Rapidly*) Good night, Mr. Doogan.

DOOGAN: Good-bye...Gareth. (BFP 44)

Mr. Doogan employs modest effort in convincing Gar of his unworthy status, adding that Katie has the opportunity to marry Francis King instead. Gar believes, perhaps before Mr. Doogan even speaks, that he will disapprove; and that there is no point fighting for the woman he loves on account of his lower status. Like Sarah in *Translations* (and later on, Uncle George in *Aristocrats*) Gar becomes a “non-entity when he loses his language” (Andrews 91). This example shows not only that the O'Donnells have yet to fulfill their material wishes (as they finally do prior to the opening of *Aristocrats*) but they have also lost the attempt at a fighting spirit that drove the O'Donnells of *Translations*. A “King” might be less of an emotional match for Katie, but, in this case, has more to offer financially than a descendant of the ancient Irish chieftains.

Gar's concentration on wealth, particularly in regards to Katie, emphasizes his initial replacement of emotional appeal with monetary. Not only does he plan to assure her father of his viability by disclosing his “egg business,” but his final exchange with her before his alleged departure returns to money: Katie assures him, “You'll do well, Gar; make a lot of money, and come back here in twenty years' time, and buy the whole

village” (BFP 78). This statement shows that Katie either recognizes Gar’s primary objective in emigrating, or, sadly shows that she misunderstands Gar’s true priorities. He answers with what he thinks she would like to hear: “I’ll come home when I make my first million, driving a Cadillac and smoking cigars and taking movie-films” (BFP 78). Either she knows him better than the audience does or simply perceives his desire for money superficially. His hesitation at the end of the play confirms that she misunderstands his need for money; he may yearn for additional prospects, but even that does not entice him enough to desert his home.

Gar’s loss of Katie due to his own feelings of inferiority also signifies his relationship to Ireland as a whole. The name “Katie” or “Kathleen” carries more weight in Ireland than in other countries: the mythical figure of Kathleen ni Houlihan is the representation of Ireland in the form of a woman, especially a woman for whom men sacrifice and often die, specifically captured in William Butler Yeats’ 1902 one-act play, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (Jones 49). Gar’s eventual distance from Katie but his lingering emotions for her represents Gar’s equally conflicting emotions about his relationship to his home country.

In addition to a sense of class failure despite a comfortable position in the merchant class, Friel places the family in a situation of imminent demise or destruction, as he often does with his characters near the end of his show through foreshadowing; although this time, the sensation continues throughout. The characters never state it overtly, but there are hints that the future of the privately-owned grocery shop is ambiguous and quite possibly doomed to failure. A seemingly insignificant exchange



about orders between father and son indicates that modernity and globalization has already landed:

PUBLIC: I bought six [cans] off them.

S.B.: They'll not go to loss.

PUBLIC: They wanted me to take a dozen but I said six would do us.

S.B.: Six is plenty. They don't go as quick as they used to- them cans.

PUBLIC: They've all for cookers and ranges and things...they don't buy them now because the open fires are nearly all gone.

S.B.: That's it. All cookers and ranges and things these times. (BFP 93)

While Ireland was enjoying an economic boom at the time of this play's publication, the advent of the large corporations, especially corporations from across either side of the water, was just around the corner. Friel acknowledges in this play, through the family's fragile status as middle-class merchants, that this lifestyle is undoubtedly ephemeral once Ireland looked abroad for better and cheaper resources. Gar even jests about the fact that his father dabbles in multiple sales, telling a fake interviewer that S.B. has

what you would call—his finger in many pies—retail mostly—general dry goods—assorted patent drugs—hardware—ah—ah—dehydrated fish—men's king-size hose—snuffs from the exotic East. (BFP 35-6)

Although he mocks his father's sales, Gar demonstrates the number of "pies" that S.B. has to keep "his finger in" in order to create a successful business in a rural village.

Despite these economic changes in his hometown, Friel hints that Gar's stay in America, should he choose to leave, may present him with exactly the material wealth that is lacking in Ballybeg. America offers opportunity, namely of an economic nature.

Gar's Aunt Lizzy attempts to convince him to immigrate by listing the material comforts of her home first, saying

we will meet you at the airport and welcome you and bring you to our apartment which you will see is located in a pretty nice locality and you will have the spare room which has TV and air-conditioning and window meshes and your own bathroom with a shower. (BFP 59)

By cataloguing material advantages first, Lizzy and Con confess what is more appealing, or what they assume is most appealing, to their nephew.

Gar not only receives economic offers, but also receives advice on more psychological advantages of immigration to America. Upon the entrance of Master Boyle, the local schoolmaster, Gar gathers the most honest opinion from the man. Admitting that Gar is only of "average intelligence," Master Boyle states that America might be what he is looking for, since it is "a vast restless place that doesn't give a curse about the past; and that's the way things should be. Impermanence and anonymity—it offers great attractions" (BFP 52). Even though Boyle paints this alternative as an affirmative one, at least for himself, the description he lends is contradictory to that of Ireland. Boyle thinks that is just what Gar needs: a completely unfamiliar environment, in which he can "[f]orget Ballybeg and Ireland" and completely shed his local identity (BFP 54). It is just this type of portrayal, one so disconnected from Ireland, that allows Gar to hesitate in his decision at the end of the play, as he is "equally mindful of the vulgar materialism of American city life" as he is of the "paucity of life in Ballybeg" (Jones 53). In fact, since the audience never sees him depart, one may assume that the thought of a new beginning in a distant, anonymous land is more frightening than the prospect of a

retaining his identity within his continual middle-class life centered on work and community.

The discord between the “logical” reasons for departing and the “emotional” reasons for staying plague Gar continually, as Private Gar switches backward and forward between encouraging and discouraging Public Gar’s exodus. Both Public and Private Gar often disrupt the action of a tense moment by repeating a common refrain throughout the play: “It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision” (BFP 36). While this phrase may appear to be nonsensical to the reader or audience member, Friel utilizes his skills of subtlety in placing these lines within the plot. These words are, in fact, the opening to Edmund Burke’s *Reflections of a Revolution in France*. Written in 1790 as, according to Seamus Deane,

Edmund Burke’s famous apostrophe to the *ancien regime* of France...[Burke was] an Irishman who had made the preservation of ancestral feeling the basis for a counter-revolutionary politics and for a hostility to the shallow cosmopolitanism of the modern world. (Introduction 14)

While the audience might assume that this work is something Gar came across in his schoolwork, Friel bets on the fact that someone might recognize it as Gar’s statement of personal rebellion against the invasion of change as well as the pressure to go in search of it (Jones 24). The phrase may function as a mantra, as Gar attempts to convince himself that rebellion is the only way to motivate his advancement.

In terms of Gar's individual methods of self-persuasion, Friel also continually comments on mercantile existence through Gar's ever-shifting perspective. From the start, Gar rants against his father and his father's "stinking bloody shop" (BFP 33). While his father carefully manages the agenda of the store and addresses Gar only in business terms, as an employee, Gar sees beyond the necessity of centering one's life on economic prosperity. However, S.B. tells Madge near the end of the play that this was not Gar's original mindset. As a child, Gar refused to go to school, stating "I'm not going to school. I'm going into my daddy's business" (BFP 96-7). Not only does this confirm Gar's lack of interest in scholarship but also his preliminary views on the business world. While it appears as drudgery during the four chapters, S.B.'s memory of Gar's past verifies that business was once more appealing than any alternative; in fact, it was his dream.

Despite the economic changes within Gar's standpoint, he ultimately rejects the opportunities with which he is presented through his unwillingness to depart; whether he gets on that plane or not matters little when it comes to his local identity. His indecision alone proves that he remains closely tied to Ballybeg and his family regardless of his clandestine musings. In fact, the reason he remains devoted to his family/father may be purely because of the land-centered Ballybeg: near the end of the play, Gar reveals to the audience his finest memory of his motherless childhood, in which his father takes him out on a lake:

The boat was blue and the paint was peeling and there was an empty cigarette packet floating in the water at the bottom between two trout and the left rowlock kept slipping and you had given me your hat and had put your jacket round my shoulders...between us at that moment there was this great happiness, this great

joy...then for no reason at all except that you were happy too, you began to sing.

(BFP 83)

Gar's memory not only substantiates that he shared a joyful period with his father in the past (even though his father does not recall the situation in the same manner) but also that escaping the mercantile life in order to commune with nature on the Lough na Cloc Cor provides Gar and S.B. the memory that the audience may believe is his rationale for deferring.

The shift in family relationships between setting is definitive of the O'Donnell-land relationship, but the intellectual difference between the two O'Donnell families of the past and present remains unaltered: the *Translations* O'Donnells not only lose what little land they have but are also stripped of their intellectual outlet in the form of the hedge schools. They inevitably suffer the loss of their material possessions but may retain their intellects to be used elsewhere. The *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* O'Donnells, however, never possessed the education to begin with. Gar states openly that he is twenty-five years old but has only attended "one year at University College Dublin" before deciding it was not for him; there is no mention to the elder O'Donnell's education, as he most likely would have never had the chance to attend any university for want of funds (BFP 35). Therefore, with little to no formal education or desire for intellect on a more individual level, continuous demonstration of emotional restraint or repression in an outward fashion, and an increasing chance that the middle class merchants will suffer the most during the looming Celtic Tiger, the *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* O'Donnells are even more unfortunate than their predecessors. They have the

wealth at the moment, but they have lost the mental abilities that the *Translations* generation had valued above all else.

By distinguishing the two branches of the family in this way, Friel demonstrates his intentions toward the importance of education and the undesirability of placing one's life upon an economic situation along with the necessity of maintaining one's connection to local community and land. Gar especially symbolizes the growing concern over money and material objects along with the disregard for local community; in all the instances in which he is acting out a scenario with Private Gar in the privacy of his room, he focuses on his desire for money, popularity, fame, and power within a more global framework: he desires to be, among other, a cowboy, a Hollywood star, an American Senator, and a world-renowned classical musician. However, he never once fantasizes about status within his own community. Nonetheless, it is his local identity affiliated with the community that becomes his reason to stay in the end; Private Gar finally fantasizes about an imaginary conversation in which S.B. O'Donnell says, "Gar, you bugger you, why don't you stick it out here with me for it's not such a bad aul bugger of a place" (BFP 49). Gar inevitably longs for a place to live in which he is not only comfortable in the community but easily convinced of such a status by his only family.

The shift in name usage also symbolizes the change between the two generations of O'Donnells: whereas the former are referred to by first names and connected to the names of their parents or distinguishing words in the Irish language that identified them to their local, rural neighbors (which was the traditional form of identification in nineteenth century Ireland), the latter feature many instances of abbreviation of formal naming. For instance, the elder O'Donnell is continuously referred to as "S.B." only. The

audience does not learn of his actual given name until the Canon arrives for a visit and calls him “Sean.” Similarly, the main character, Gar, is called by a shortened version of his given name of Gareth for the majority of the play. He is only referred to as “Gareth” by outsiders, first by Senator Doogan, contributing to his separation from local identity and self-identity. As names hold a distinctive significance in the plays of Brian Friel, the abbreviation of the names indicates a desire for the mainstream; shortened names places less emphasis on a particular heritage or Irish pride. It eliminates others’ assumptions on class-based names and allows the O’Donnell men, coincidentally both malcontent with their situation, to exist in society without any particular distinction.

Similarly, even those connected with the O’Donnell mercantile economic status appreciate the change in names. Gar’s aunt, the sister of his deceased mother, marries an American, lives a comfortable life there...and has altered her name, changing from “Lizzie” to “Elise.” As her Irish friends and relatives know her as the former, and her American friends as the latter, she demonstrates how one’s name is affected by social status. Private Gar dismisses this change in name, lamenting, “‘Elise’! Dammit, Lizzy Gallagher, but you came up in the world” (BFP 59). The exclamation is less a statement of understanding for her change in condition, but more of a biting remark for her shame in her heritage. Little does Gar seem to realize that both he and his father have done the same, perhaps also unintentionally. Lizzy’s change of name speaks to a loss of local identity and even signifies a shift from the life “inside” the community (or “tribe” as Brian Friel would say) to a presence within the “outside” world. In this case, Lizzy must change her name to Elise, and risk losing her tie to the community, in order to function in the world removed from her own.

Even though Lizzy Gallagher lends a disservice to Gar's wishes in modifying her name, she functions as an outsider toward the O'Donnells for the reader. After offering Gar her home and a job in Philadelphia, she admits that the Gallagher girls, she and her sisters were always "either laughing or crying...you know, sorta silly and impetuous, shooting our big mouths off, talking too much, not like the O'Donnell's—you know—kinda cold..." (BFP 65). Shortly after this statement, Gar laments that his aunt called him "an O'Donnell—'cold like'" (BFP 67). By depicting the O'Donnells as contrary to the fun-loving and joyous Gallagher's, Lizzy Gallagher reveals precisely how the O'Donnell men are regarded from the outside; and Gar, who never considered himself comparable to his father now perceives that he is recognized only by his family traits, not necessarily by his individuality. It is an ancient name, but each generation is linked together, whether they wish it or not.

Like Lizzy Gallagher, the other characters surrounding the O'Donnells consistently draw upon or challenge their identity as members of the community. Many of the Ballybeg figures characterized are authority figures or symbols of Law: a Senator, a Schoolmaster, a Canon, and a County Councillor (Andrews 85). However, they are most particularly ineffectual representatives of authority; they can offer Gar no genuinely valuable counsel that would resolve his dilemma. Instead, they merely remind him of all that he dislikes, but what he would be especially loathe to leave, if he chooses to emigrate. As Elmer Andrews put it, "however much [Gar] fulminates against Ballybeg, he is tied to it by bonds of sentiment not even he understands" (Andrews 86). It is so intimately connected to his identity that he even has a difficult time recognizing it throughout the play.



The conclusion of Part II of the show leaves Gar's fate undetermined, yet the tentativeness of Gar's final scene indicates that he has little choice but to stay where he is:

PRIVATE: God, Boy, why do you have to leave? Why? Why?

PUBLIC: I don't know. I-I-I don't know. (BFP 99)

With such a equivocal response, Gar insinuates that he sincerely has no viable reason for leaving Ireland. The final line of the play

...sums up the frustration felt by the intending exile. Gar knows that there may be reasons enough for leaving his poor and future-less existence in the village of Ballybeg for the wealthy promise of...Philadelphia. But he knows too, that the same conditions that may motivate his departure inevitably bind him to home and his native soil. (Dantanus 94)

In Richard Russell's article on *Translations*, he highlights the philosophy of the Agrarians, in which labor-saving devices are thought to evict the labourers, rather than free them (Russell 110). Just as the O'Donnells of *Translations* are literally evicted from their land because modern devices are brought onto it (thus commencing a dangerous chain of events), the following generations suffer eviction of a socially-appropriate manner, particularly because the introduction of a new cultural element continues to evict, rather than free, the residents. Whereas *Translations* represented a moment in Irish history of dispossession of the family from the ancestral land, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* represents a moment of emotional eviction. The main O'Donnell protagonist is not forced from his home by imperial agents, but instead considers leaving willingly because the only family he has, as well as the friends who have "formed his only

society,” do not proffer sustaining possibilities (Boltwood 53). Therefore, the second O’Donnell family in Friel’s timeline, or the middle unit of the cycle, has earned a place in the merchant class, socially above the *Translations* O’Donnells, but have sacrificed personal and collective relations along the way. Gar finds himself in an uncomfortable position: economically superior the land-tied peasants of *Translations*, yet too disjointed from his local identity that he attempts to locate a new one abroad.

While the play has received the most attention over the years for its unique characterization of Private Gar/Public Gar or for its themes that endear it to the larger audiences in the United States and Great Britain, the underlying affiliation with *Translations* is what makes the play most intriguing: the two O’Donnell men, father and son, become the descendants of the Hugh O’Donnell. Similarly, the O’Donnell link to the territory and local identity maintains itself in an indirect fashion, despite the overwhelming positive aspects of traveling abroad. D.E.S. Maxwell notes the parting sense of imminent unhappiness when he says

Here, as we shall see in the fuller consideration of Friel’s plays, an unmistakably parochial accent, idiom, landscape, translate themselves into images of estrangement, loneliness, hopes (and their frustration) of understanding and intimacy. Their effective home is an Irish village. (Maxwell 178)

By concluding his descriptive catalogue with the short simplistic statement of setting, Maxwell indicates that such a complexity of emotion (and eventual despair) can find its place nowhere but an Irish locale. In this sense, Gar has no choice but to stay behind in his native home; his local identity is so thoroughly immersed in the psychology that governs the landscape, that he cannot nor will not extract himself. While Private Gar

represents his “potential, rather than...reality,” *Public* Gar is the one who ultimately makes the choice to vacillate (O’Brien 50). Similarly, critics have argued that Gar considered emigrating because his father shows little emotional regard for him. However, Scott Boltwood argues that Gar’s flight is less about rejection of his father and more about his search for his mother’s spirit, a mother whose being symbolized the wild, peasant landscape and whose only living relative resides in America (Boltwood 54). In the end, though, even this unspoken claim and curiosity about his mother cannot liberate him from his native land.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CATHOLIC *ARISTOCRATS* ON THE HILL

Friel's final installment in the O'Donnell cycle is *Aristocrats*, a 1979 drama that achieved critical acclaim but has suffered scholarly neglect in comparison to *Translations* and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* While composing *Translations*, Friel kept a journal not only of his ideas for the play itself but the thoughts behind each character and the motivations with which he was instilling them. Concerning the most victimized characters, he wrote

The victims in this situation are the transitional generation. The old can retreat into and find immunity in the past. The young acquire some facility with the new cultural implements. The in-between ages become lost, wandering around in a strange land. Strays. ("Extracts from a Sporadic Diary" 1979, qtd. in Murray 75)

This extract is particularly poignant; not only does he underscore a universal component largely overlooked in his work, but he might easily be speaking of the victims of *Aristocrats*, the adult children of the last great O'Donnell generation. In fact, he wrote *Translations* very soon after publishing *Aristocrats* and therefore recognized the necessity of fashioning the first O'Donnells *immediately* after concluding the dying chapter of their lineage. He (and his audience) observed these remaining O'Donnells

evade all association with their native village, living apart from their neighbors both in location and in self-interest. In fact, the character of Eamon admits their experiences of “a fairly rapid descent,” indicating that family’s collapse transpired more quickly than anticipated (BFP 295). Friel appreciates the relationship between a community and the local world—versus the individual against the modern world—thereby linking the 1833 O’Donnells with a more deep-seated awareness of communal ties.

Irish scholar David Nowlan writes, “Brian Friel...has written several original works whose theatrical forebears could plausibly be argued to be Chekhovian. *Aristocrats*...is probably the most obvious example...” (Nowlan 26). Indeed, the Chekhovian-style play, which premiered at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin on 8 March 1979, is set during several days in the mid-1970s at the familial and aristocratic Ballybeg home of the O’Donnell family. The four grown children—Judith, Casimir, Alice, and Claire—are gathered for Claire’s upcoming marriage to a fifty-something greengrocer widower from the village. Throughout the course of three acts, the children, along with Alice’s husband Eamon, a villager named Willie Diver, and an American academic named Dr. Thomas Hoffnung who is studying the history of the family, reminisce and squabble about their respective lives. When the patriarch of the family, Justice O’Donnell/Father, dies at the end of Act Two, Claire’s marriage is postponed. Casimir, Alice, and Eamon make plans to return to their homes abroad immediately, as Judith announces that she will be selling the family home due to lack of funds. As the funeral becomes the central focus of the family gathering, rather than the wedding, the O’Donnell family’s final decay is represented in one overwhelming display of dramatic irony (Brown 193).

In the opening stage directions, Friel indicates that the play is set in the home of Justice O'Donnell, known as Ballybeg Hall. Given that the house is named after the town itself, instantly indicating the family's local status, Friel contrasts the *title* of wealth with the expectation that the director of any given production should provide "sufficient furnishings to indicate when the Hall flourished and to suggest its present decline" (BFP 251). Therefore, Friel particularly notifies the reader straight away that this formerly-distinguished family, honored house and all, is presently undergoing the deterioration he had predicted in his previous O'Donnell plays. Near the end of the play, Judith, the child who manages household affairs, details all that has gone awry within the once-grandiose residence:

From now on there's no money coming in. Last October when the storm lifted the whole roof off the back return I tried to get an overdraft from the bank. The manager was very sympathetic but he couldn't help...the floor in the morning-room has collapsed with dry rot...and every time there's heavy rain, we have to distribute...seventeen buckets in the upstairs rooms to catch the water. (BFP 317)

The specification, or cataloging, of the decay at this point of the play not only convinces her siblings that the house must be sold since the repairs are too costly, but also assures the audience of the same. As far as the reader or audience knows, this is the first occurrence in the O'Donnell family in which the members must abandon their entitlement because the "household repairs" are now beyond their monetary abilities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> That is, those unfamiliar with the other components in the O'Donnell cycle. And considering that this thesis is suggesting an alignment between the three plays that no other scholar has yet proposed, this idea of the audience or reader "in the know" considers the *future* audience, more so than the present one.

The decline in the family *legacy* is likewise uncovered during a conversation between Eamon and Tom:

And of course you'll have chapters on each of the O'Donnell forebears: Great Grandfather—Lord Chief Justice; Grandfather—Circuit Court Judge; Father—simple District Justice; Casimir—failed solicitor. A fairly rapid descent; but no matter, no matter; good for the book; failure's more lovable than success. D'you know, Professor, I've often wondered: if we [he and Alice O'Donnell] had had children and they wanted to be part of the family legal tradition, the only option open to them would have been as criminals, wouldn't it? (BFP 295)

Eamon's tone, though conveyed in a bitingly facetiously manner, reveals that the O'Donnells not only occupy a crumbling manor but also a disintegrating, formerly-prestigious legal history.

In terms of Irish socio-cultural history, the "house," particularly an imposing one that overlooked more lowly housing, holds distinct significance, if not resentment. For centuries, the rural Irish society and economy functioned in an accepted approach: one wealthy Protestant family of English origin or heritage bought or was "given" a large plot of land, usually by the English monarch or government. They hired tenants, mostly impoverished Irish Catholic peasants, to tend the land in small plots. These peasants lived on their plot and relinquished the majority of their production to the Protestant landlord as payment for tenancy. These Protestant lords customarily resided near the top of the hill, in a house known as the "Big House," while the peasants lived along the hill, continuously gazing upward toward their lord and master. The play *Aristocrats* dismisses this tradition because the "Big House" is Ballybeg Hall, or the house of a wealthy *Irish*

*Catholic* family, instead of an English Protestant family. This unique situation is sociologist Tom Hoffnung's purpose for scrutinizing this group; his proposed paper is entitled "Recurring cultural, political, and social modes in the upper strata of Roman Catholic society in rural Ireland since the act of Catholic Emancipation" (BFP 265). While the O'Donnell children joke that the title is simply a mouthful, its wording presents the O'Donnells not as contemporary individuals but as a collective unit that exists as part of a whole and as members of a larger social and cultural modification.

The O'Donnells' physical removal from the village setting within the generation signifies the final decline, the distance from the land—and more significantly, their *desire* to be detached from the land. Not only is their house isolated from Ballybeg proper, but they become spiritually absent as well, believing themselves superior to the villagers. Alice admits this when she states why they have not abandoned Ballybeg hall entirely: "The moment you've left the thugs from the village will move in and loot and ravage the place within a couple of hours" (BFP 318). Similarly, as Tom continues to interview the O'Donnell children about their lives, their social status, or how they *perceive* their social status, their underlying perspective becomes more evident:

TOM: When you were growing up, did you mix at all with the local people?

ALICE: We're 'local people'.

TOM: Sure; but you're gentry; you're big house.

ALICE: Eamon's local—Eamon's from the village.

TOM: But as kids, did you play with other Ballybeg kids?

ALICE: We were sent off to boarding-school when we were seven or eight. (BFP

271)



This brief passage discloses that Alice feels little emotional connection to her exact station nor can she distinguish it; in fact, she appears to evade the fact that they were far removed from the “local people,” defending her point only by protesting that they have/had one acquaintance among the villagers.

Unlike the O’Donnells of *Translations* who live at the heart of Baile Beag, and the *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* O’Donnells who own and operate a notable village business, these “aristocrats” divulge that they do not associate themselves with the common people that their ancestors were. As Tony Corbett puts it, “the house overlooks Ballybeg; it is not a part of it” (Corbett 81). In fact, Justice O’Donnell previously considered the village to be “his village, his Ballybeg...that’s how he thought of it” (BFP 309). His sense of ownership over the land confirms the family’s loss of reverence for the surrounding environment. They contribute nothing to a community that was originally founded and guided by the previous generations of the O’Donnell clan. As Ballybeg was originally called O’Donnellstown (or so the reader/audience is led to believe in this play), the original town has lost its name but also all of its “historical significance” (Dantanus 170). The action of the play endeavors to span the difference without immediate success: Claire’s forthcoming marriage to a village greengrocer is postponed, perhaps indefinitely, as it attempts “to sanction a supposedly integrative, but in fact nullifying, ritual” of marital unity (O’Brien 94).

Although distant from the village, the house provides context for comprehending the role of each member within the family. In regards to this play, critics have most often examined the manner in which Casimir interacts with the household, or, more precisely, the household items. He claims that most of the items found within the formerly-

imposing residence remind the family of their relationship to notable figures, such as William Butler Yeats, Cardinal John Henry Newman, and Gerald Manley Hopkins. His insistence that his tales are true, despite the fact that he could not have possibly remembered visits by nineteenth century figures, identifies the society that the O'Donnells crave, or in which they used to partake. The "personal landmarks" throughout the house "delineate the topography of their home and establish a cultural niche that they have been lacking" (Kimmer 204). Because they are separated from the rest of the village and from their Protestant counterparts, Casimir invents a suitable society within which they could wholly participate.

Justice O'Donnell is by far the most socially esteemed of the O'Donnell patriarchs, but, like the house, is now on a decline. Willie reports to Tom that "he hasn't been down the stairs since the stroke felled him" (BFP 258). His physical presence is absent from the majority of the play, yet his voice over the baby monitor still generates a sense of fear and threat for the children, even in reducing "traditional authority to a disembodied voice through a baby alarm" (Andrews 149). Justice O'Donnell's corporeal ailments explicitly signify the emotional and financial ruin that has permeated his children's lives. In particular, the wealth that once pervaded throughout their family is now far removed from their reality. Claire, soon to be married, captures the loss of wealth and esteem when she tells Tom Hoffnung that,

On the morning Grandmother O'Donnell got married the whole village was covered with bunting and she gave a gold sovereign to every child under twelve...And the morning mother got married she distributed roses to everyone in

the chapel. I was wondering what I could do- what about a plastic bag of vegetables to every old-age pensioner? (BFP 274)

Through the material decomposition of the grand house and the physical decline of the O'Donnell patriarch, Friel indicates that the O'Donnells had achieved the social peak they had been working toward through *Translations to Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and have no place to go but down. In fact, Friel recorded his first impressions of the play he was about to write in a diary, stating, "the play that is visiting me brings with it each time an odour of musk—incipient decay, an era wilted, people confused and nervous" ("Extracts from a Sporadic Diary 1976-1978" qtd. in Murray 63). This decay signals the starting point of Friel's composition process. Conspicuously it influences the children: not only are they psychologically damaged and displaced from the family's history in relation to the rest of the village, but they find themselves struggling to make themselves presently relevant in the changing society (Boltwood 131).

Eamon, while talking to Tom Hoffnung, describes the O'Donnell family as "a family without passion, without loyalty, without commitments; administering the law for anyone who happened to be in power" (BFP 294). According to Eamon's viewpoint, the foremost hindrance to the family is that they lack "tribal loyalty"; as Catholic, they are isolated from the Protestant tradition of ascendancy, yet as gentry, they are geographically and spiritually isolated from the remainder of Ballybeg (Corbett 81). While Eamon immediately pigeon-holes every family member as a subject of this description, Casimir himself as "the only son of the house" particularly represents the moral decline of the O'Donnell family, continuously elaborating and downright lying about the family's past (BFP 254). In regards to the house, he depicts a sharp contrast to

the present state when he says that he always thinks of Ballybeg Hall in a certain way: “the sun shining; the doors and windows all open; the place filled with music” (BFP 256). His memories articulate more about his false sense of remembrance than the relatively quick corrosion of the house.

In fact, because no other characters directly confront and/or challenge him about the obvious elaborations he verbalizes, the audience has a choice whether to allow Casimir to persuade them about what has or has not happened (Maxwell 201). Thus, Casimir becomes the collective memory for the last-standing branch of the O’Donnells. He reverts to his predecessor of *Translations*, Hugh O’Donnell, in his manner of exaggerating; however, Casimir is without the education or the peasant skills and scholarship to wholly convince the reader as Hugh does. Judith might represent the *reality* of the house and family decline, but Casimir is the more vocal representation of what was and what could be (Andrews 44).

His attention to the world beyond Ballybeg, and in truth, the world beyond that of fact, reflects the O’Donnell obsession with myth and mythic reality; however, his stories imply falsehood, shifting the focus or purpose of myth itself. In this manner, Casimir is merely a representative for his nuclear family, those who “have sought to shore up their uncertain sense of self, their lack of political and cultural importance, by developing a mythology” (Roche 50). Perhaps they do so, not only because they indirectly envision themselves of the aftermath of a historic, land-oriented family dynasty but because they suffer from a “double isolation”: removed from the village and villagers of Ballybeg because of their social status but also removed from their aristocratic status in the Big House by not being Protestant (Roche 50). Interestingly enough, Casimir is named for a

famous Polish prince, sharing a name that means “Proclamation of Peace.” However, he identifies more closely with another Polish figure, Chopin, whom, like Casimir, was exiled from his homeland and his sense of belonging (Andrews 155).

This isolation translates an implication of exile from the local community into the “outside community” much more than the preceding plays. Whereas the *Translations* O’Donnells were cultured for speaking English as well as Irish, Greek, and Latin, and the O’Donnells of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* were cultured for having the opportunity to immigrate to America, the O’Donnells of *Aristocrats* continuously exhibit their knowledge of music and global trivia. While Alice and Eamon have moved to London (where Alice refuses to participate in English society in any capacity), Casimir is named for Polish royalty and allegedly has a family in Germany, a family that has never once visited Ireland and who do not even speak English. He works in a sausage factory, a line of work that is far removed from the undertakings of his elite family and which functions as an “insignia of the crass commercialism of the modern society that the O’Donnells have already begun to get used to” (Dantanus 166).

Similarly, voices from the “outside,” those absent from the existing surroundings, either engender troubles or require significant consideration. Primarily, Justice O’Donnell’s voice is heard from his sick-bed on the second floor of the house at multiple points. Even though his body and mind are as decayed as the family name, his booming presence, even when talking nonsensically, instigates violent, fearful outbursts from the children. Similarly, Justice O’Donnell is affected himself by another voice from the outside: Anna. His daughter, a nun in Africa for twenty years, provides a cassette tape with her spoken greetings; however, this voice from the past and from a foreign country,

brings him out of his sick-bed and immediately to his death. Finally, Uncle George, Justice O'Donnell's brother who lives with the family but has not spoken for years, lends a second-hand voice through Eamon; Eamon contends that on his wedding day, Uncle George shook his hand said, "There's going to be a great revolution" (BFP 293). Uncle George might be disregarded as a senile figure to the O'Donnell children, but these words encapsulate the fate of the O'Donnell family; the revolution of change from the outside has and will continue to modernize Ballybeg and exile the O'Donnell descendants from their local land and ideology.

Unlike the other O'Donnell plays, *Aristocrats* also emphasizes the "deficiencies" of each family member. Besides Casimir's pathological lying, Justice O'Donnell has a past history of Machiavellian dominance, Mrs. O'Donnell committed suicide, Claire suffers from anxiety and possibly manic depression, Alice is an alcoholic married to an abusive husband, Judith is considered to have committed a "[g]reat betrayal; enormous betrayal" for being a Republican and bearing an illegitimate child, and Anna has defected altogether to become a nun in a foreign land (BFP 257). Therefore, even though they belong to the most financially and socially profitable division of the O'Donnell clan, they have cultivated qualities that prevent their conscientious social membership. Their subsistence within the Big House has essentially bred nothing more than isolation, madness, alcoholism, suicide, and loneliness (Brown 195). With this comes additional Friel commentary: they may possess the respectable family name and the Big House, but they are continually dissatisfied and unfulfilled because of their individual decisions and personalities.

Friel also uses the O'Donnell children of this play to illustrate the shift in education over the generations. In *Translations*, the O'Donnells were highly educated in languages, history, and literature, so as to effectively teach the local peasants in the outlawed hedge schools. In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, the O'Donnells were less educated but knowledgeable in a more practical sense, through business, even having the opportunity to educate themselves at university and through personal experience abroad. However, in the *Aristocrats*, the O'Donnells appear to be conversant in completely impracticable ways. For example, Claire can play a wide variety of classical piano pieces, and the other children can identify the song almost instantly; yet, they possess no other skills that would help them succeed in a world beyond their privileged one. Judith even attempts to cure Alice of her alcoholism by encouraging employment, but as Alice replies, "none of us was trained to do anything" (BFP 298). Alice, instead, remains isolated and bored in her small English flat rather than retaining the useful education that would motivate and classify her within the rural spaces of her native land.

They also retain a minor amount of traditional "book learning." Manus O'Donnell confesses that he spends his minuscule income on books, and even though Gar O'Donnell was not particularly inclined to higher education, he undertook a year at University College Dublin. Casimir, on the other hand, "always hated books" according to Alice (BFP 271). He attempted law, most likely because it was considered a suitable profession for a young man of privilege, but promptly abandoned law school and tried working "various 'genteel' jobs" (BFP 271). With this adjustment in education over the generations, one may discern a more substantial reflection upon education over time: as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have progressed, students were taught fewer

scholarly subjects and more pragmatic skills in order to compensate for the advent of modernity, yet the functional education bypassed the privileged students, who received only elite, useless knowledge that hindered their ultimate success.

Additionally, musical education comes into play within this family more so than the other generations. In fact, the children's extensive classical education—expanded to the point at which Claire can play a few bars of classical movement upon the piano and Casimir can guess the source—displays not only their advancement in what is considered an “impractical” education for rural Ireland but also their removal from the ideology of the common Irish. Only sporadically through the action of the play are more popular songs approached, including both Irish folksongs and popular music of the later twentieth century. From Act Three, the classical music becomes replaced with the popular folksong, including the tune “Sweet Alice.” At another point, in Act Two, Eamon sings “So Deep is the Night,” a popular 1960's ballroom song, at the same time a Chopin etude is resounding from a cassette player. The combination of the two forms of music simultaneously attempts to highlight the disparity, if not an attempt to bridge it; “both social worlds,” as Patrick Burke puts it, “are thus adumbrated” through the snippets of song (Burke 21). More so than dual representation, this repositioning away from the classical as the play progresses symbolizes a change from

highly individual self-expression, as it was for Casimir, to the democratic music of the folk-song. The movement from classical, elitist music to the more popular melody underscores the decline of the Big House and its social pretensions and snobbish isolationism, and the acceptance of diminished realities and a more ‘plebian’ future. (Andrews 157)



In essence, the folk music symbolizes what is in store for the family, just as the classical education attempts to capture what existed in their past.

The O'Donnells also modify their views of political action and ideas. The aristocrats have forsaken the fighting spirit of their ancestors and instead consider politics to be unseemly for people of their rank. Alice reports that "politics never interested" her father, the patriarch of the family, following that with the statement that "politics are vulgar" (BFP 272). The only connection this O'Donnell family has to politics is through their daughter/sister Judith, the "betrayal" of the family; she participated in the violent and bloody Battle of the Bogside that involved a skirmish between poor Irish Catholics of the Bogside neighborhood in Derry against the British forces occupying the city. This involvement is even more shameful than her affair and subsequent pregnancy by a Dutch reporter. Similarly, their dismissal of politics once again distinguishes them from the other Catholics in their village; Eamon, their only self-professed family friend and husband/brother-in-law from the village, is very involved in the politics the rest of the family evades. Alice tells Tom how Eamon

[Was] poised for a brilliant career in the diplomatic service when...the civil rights movement began in the North in '68. The Dublin government sent him to Belfast as an observer and after a few months observing and reporting he joined the movement. Was sacked, of course. (BFP 272)

Eamon exists somewhere between the Ballybeg community and the O'Donnells': not wholly local but not entirely concerned with international experiences and universal awareness. Eamon is focused upon Ireland's global identity as an independent nation rather than his individual one. He has accomplished, while in his youth, what the

O'Donnells of any generation are unable to do. Eamon has married into the family, after “lust[ing] after each of the three O'Donnell girls in turn” and has thus become a member of the family by extension (BFP 275). He remains one of the most complex characters in the play, perhaps in all of Friel's work, because he lives so exhaustively within both worlds.

The villagers are additionally embodied through the character of Willie Diver; he symbolizes the villager who works for the family from the outside, serving them in a variety of menial capacities but never penetrating the confines of the spiritual house. He says that he attempts to farm “the land all took from Judith,” doing a favor for her more than increasing his own wealth of land (BFP 259). However, Willie also represents the material wealth, or the possibility of that wealth, that has entered the village setting. Eamon reports that Willie has “five-hundred slot machines all around the country...he'd be worth a fortune if he looked after them but he never goes near them!” (BFP 276). This inactivity demonstrates how Willie, as a representative villager, is less concerned with material affluence than land. He renounces his possible fortune in order to stay in his hometown and retain social relationships. Nevertheless, Willie, along with Eamon and Claire's greengrocer fiancé all represent a “new species of survivor” in the Irish landscape; because their economic and social situations have begun to change, they have, in turn, (d)evolved as well in order to compensate (McGrath 155).

More than the other plays, these aristocrats signify the rapidly mounting emphasis on modernity and status in late-twentieth century Ireland, namely the growing schism between rural and urban. Within Friel's oeuvre, only two pieces, *A Doubtful Paradise* and *The Freedom of the City*, are set within the urban confines of Derry; the rest remain

within a rural setting and a local community (Dantanus 36). However, beginning in the 1960s, “the ‘prevailing ethos in Ireland ceased to be that of the strong farmer’ and became that of ‘the suburban bourgeois’” and Friel addresses this dichotomy through the shifting identities of his O’Donnell characters (Murray 179). Even though a few members of the O’Donnells have remained in Ballybeg in this generation, the emigration of the others (Casimir to Germany, Anna to Africa) represents the globalization of rural Ireland. These O’Donnells no longer possess the obsessive fixation to the landscape but instead crave the status that comes with a journey beyond the land of “the strong farmer.”

The aristocrats confront the modernity that has penetrated the O’Donnell family and Ballybeg as well, but they also represent the *mythology* of such an aristocracy. Eamon says that looking up toward the Big House year after year resulted in his nurturing of a mythology about their lives, about “the life of the ‘quality’” that was being lived inside those walls and within that family (BFP 276). Even in degrading his own background, he manages to explain (albeit in a facetious way) why the ideal of aristocracy appeals to the Irish peasant, as the aristocrats and what they represent contrast “all that is fawning and forelock-touching and Paddy and shabby and greasy peasant in the Irish character” (BFP 318). By doing so, he receives “a permanent pigmentation” in regards to his own existence and perspective on local, rural life (BFP 276). Even though Eamon instructs Willie to use his “peasant talent for fantasy” by imagining a wine bottle full, it is really Eamon who never lost this peasant talent (BFP 301). In fact, Eamon continues to object to Tom Hoffnung’s study of the family and its socio-historical position because he assumes that Tom, as an outsider cannot “possibly appreciate Ballybeg Hall’s symbolic worth” (Andrews 42). This is not new to the Irish literary

landscape; Garland Kimmer asserts that the “real impact” of the Ascendancy, be it Protestant or Catholic, is their effect upon “the Irish imagination” (Kimmer 198). Just as W.B. Yeats drew inspiration from Coole Park, Eamon shows how he has drawn a regional individuality from the Big House of Ballybeg.

The play *Aristocrats* ultimately confirms the need for a “mythic sense of place”: between the children, between the generations, and between the O’Donnell family and Ballybeg. This “sense of place” connects the residents “who made, defined, and inhabited the land with those who remake it” (Kimmer 206). Similarly, it reaches throughout the generations of the O’Donnells up until this point that are rooted not only in the physical setting of Ballybeg Hall and its immediate confines, but also within Donegal; Helen Lojek stresses that the adult O’Donnell children are secluded spiritually, physically, and intellectually because of the position of their “space,” yet they are also “nurtured, enriched, enfolded” by the people they love within this space (Lojek 184-5). Therefore, their *sense* of place is the only link they still have to bond them to each other; all other connections to place have been lost in the past. Even Casimir, the pathological liar of the bunch, understands the ultimate difference between physical and spiritual place when he says “I find that I can live within these smaller, perhaps very confined territories without exposure to too much hurt” (BFP 310). His sense of place is thereby more limited than the other characters because of his mythic mentality; his imagining is in itself a psychological longing for “home” and a “sense of belonging” (Andrews 154).

As a playwright, Brian Friel is forced to speak through the voices and actions of his characters rather than speaking directly for himself: near the beginning of this play, Justice O’Donnell, in a delusional state, asks Judith, “Where’s Judith? Where’s Claire?”

Where's Casimir? Where's Alice?" (BFP 256). While the audience may take this to be his growing state of disconnection from reality, his inquiry essentially mirrors Friel's own observations. The children are present in their family home, but they have all become lost in terms of local identity and connection to their native home. They have become exiled in multiple ways, not only as colonized peasants or as possible immigrants to America. As the final chronological installment of the O'Donnell cycle, *Aristocrats* attempts to answer the questions that arose in its predecessors, yet succeeds in closing the book on an intricate, ancient family legacy; it is, as Eamon claims to be the family motto, the "greed for survival" that has only brought the family this far.

## EPILOGUE

In 1972, Brian Friel worried that “[w]e are rapidly losing our identity as a people. [...] We are no longer even West Britons; we are East Americans” (Pelletier 163). However, only eight years later, in an interview with Paddy Agnew upon his first production of *Translations*, he acknowledged that Irish playwrights were leading the way in Irish artistic autonomy, stating

...apart from Synge, all our dramatists have pitched their voices for English acceptance and recognition... However I think that for the first time this is stopping... We are talking to ourselves as we must and if we are overheard in America, or England, so much the better. (qtd. in Grene 5)

Richard Russell stresses that *Translations* suggests the fragility of the agricultural environment and the lifestyle that comes with it (Russell 113). However, in examining all three plays of the O’Donnell cycle, one may suggest that this fragility is not limited to the pre-modernized rural setting of *Translations*. Just as the earliest O’Donnells suffer the delicate and ephemeral claims to hedge school education and agriculture, the *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* O’Donnells are subject to the unstable environment of the mercantile class. Finally, the trend continues almost until the end of the twentieth century, as the *Aristocrats* find themselves in a rotting house, alongside a crumbling

dynasty and name. They have no initial investment to exhaust but rather submit to the ultimate vulnerability of what their ancestors had constructed in the first place, relinquishing all local connections. However, the methods or motives of local alienation differ: while the *Translations* O'Donnells became disengaged from their land because of an "intervention of government," the *Aristocrats*' separation was self-imposed (Sean Connelly 150).

In examining the O'Donnell cycle, one can see not only how a single Irish family in a singular setting react and adjust to the external forces but also how they react internally as a unit. The changes that ultimately demolish the O'Donnell family are, in essence, both uncontrollable and self-imposed. However, Friel is insistent that he does not advocate an absolute return to the rural lifestyle and economy of the nineteenth century, nor does he wholly condemn the industrialization of Ireland. However, he believes that certain communities, and the collective identity that accompanies them, function as "an antidote to industrialization and a dehumanizing humanity" (Russell 120). By aligning these three plays as a cycle, linking them elementally, Friel reveals the hazard his homeland—and all nations—confront in relying upon a modernization that has obliterated local identity between individuals and communities. Yet, Friel also offers a sense of hope in his works, encouraging readers and audiences that a remembrance of the ideals of past rural communities will reinforce the culture and unify the nation altogether.

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