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**DEVISING AN OFFSTAGE:  
THE DRAMATURGY OF BRIAN FRIEL  
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**M.Phil (Research)**

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**ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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## ABSTRACT

In some theatre there is a sense that what you see is all you get; in, for instance, circus or many plays of Samuel Beckett or most plays of Frank McGuinness. But on the other hand, there is another mode of theatre, where what you get is always more than the action of the immediate moment onstage. This is evident in the theatre of Jean Racine, the late plays of William Shakespeare, the late plays of Henrik Ibsen and in many of the plays of Sean O'Casey. Brian Friel belongs to this latter tradition and it is from this perspective that his work is studied in this thesis.

*Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, because it was Friel's first big theatre success, is regarded by many critics as his springboard. Although I refer to that play in my thesis, it is his second play *The Loves of Cass McGuire* that is taken as his seminal work. *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, which was the first play that Friel wrote for Broadway for the internationally renowned American actress, Ruth Gordon, is a play that relies heavily on the verbal technique of audience address and it is this device that will be the focus of my first section in which offstage action is examined. Chapter I analyses the way in which the audience address in this early play gives flexibility to the dramatic form of Friel's work by allowing Cass to address the theatre audience in a way that flits between the world of thought, which concerns her remembrance of the past, and the present world of action onstage. Chapter II investigates how Friel reworked and reworked this device of audience address in plays after *The Love of Cass McGuire* so as to evoke not only real but also imagined and invisible audiences.

The second section considers the way in which offstage time and spatial margins are demarcated by verbal and aural techniques. In Chapter III, the stage window - as an object of the fourth wall - becomes a spatial marker and provides a view on offstage activity, which is conveyed verbally by the protagonist that peers through it. Friel's experimentations with the window in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, *The Gentle Island*, *Translations* and *Dancing at*

*Lughnasa* is compared to its use in the work of the 1960's Avant-Garde Polish theatre director, Tadeusz Kantor.

In Chapter IV the aural fabric of music is examined as Friel uses it to highlight boundaries between on and offstage space and the time frames of the past and present, so that a double perspective is offered in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, *Aristocrats*, *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Performances*.

In Chapter V, the time frames of the past – of necessity and indeed by definition, offstage - and the present action that takes place onstage are distorted through the oral vehicle of remembrance and reportage. The discrepancy between what the audience sees and hears contributes to a plural rather than singular perspective in *Lovers*, *The Freedom of the City*, *Volunteers*, *Faith Healer*, *Living Quarters* and *Afterplay*.

Moving away from stage devices, my last section considers the built-in metaphor of blindness in Friel's late play, *Molly Sweeney*. The play's monologue structure obliges the audience to engage with verbal and aural perceptions, to focus on what is offstage to make sense of what we simply see. The ensuing theatrical experience is therefore one whereby what you see is only the beginning of what you get.

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## REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

The bibliography at the close of this thesis provides a full list of those works by Brian Friel and other writers on whom I have drawn while developing this thesis. For works cited in the body of the thesis, full bibliographical details are given in the footnotes at the end of each page. However, in the case of frequently cited plays by Brian Friel, I have adopted a system of abbreviations followed by page references, immediately after the passage cited. These abbreviations relate to the following texts and editions:

- EW*      *The Enemy Within* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1979)  
*LCM*     *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1984)  
*L*        *Lovers* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1984)  
*CF*      *Crystal and Fox* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1984)  
*GI*      *The Gentle Island* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 1993)  
*V*        *Volunteers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979; Dublin: Gallery Press, 1989)  
*T*        *Translations* (London, Faber and Faber, 1981)  
*SP*      *Selected Plays*, introduced by Seamus Deane (London: Faber and Faber, 1984)  
*DL*      *Dancing at Lughnasa* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990)  
*P2*      *Plays 2* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999)  
*TPA*     *Three Plays After* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002)  
*P*        *Performances* (Dublin: Gallery Press, 2003)

## INTRODUCTION

Of the Stage: 'this world, when seen from backstage, is artificial, cheap, disposable ... Penetrating behind this "magnificent" imitation and "facade", we reach the "BACK" – A True Stage. This stage is huge, awe inspiring, and as if laying in wait'

- Kantor<sup>1</sup>

Brian Friel is a dramatist who pays as much attention to action that takes place offstage as that which takes place onstage. In this thesis, reference to 'offstage' space and action will be understood as that which does not take place on the main stage space. There are three main situations when there is such action that is invisible to the theatre audience. Firstly, action may be offstage because it takes place in another theatrical space, such as the backstage, or even in the auditorium. Secondly, action may be heard taking place during the immediate moment of the play from the wings or backstage but without visual spectacle in the main performance space that corresponds to it. This has the effect that the audience's attention is diverted away from the visual world onstage. Thirdly, action may be situated in a past that is imagined as having taken place before the immediate time of the play, and such action can also be considered as that which takes place offstage because it is not visually perceivable by the theatre audience.

By limiting the audience's vision of the play's action, Friel may appear to undermine the visual spectacle that is theatre. But his decision to experiment in his work with invisible action and stage space need not be regarded as a stubborn disrespect for the conventions of theatre nor a convenient way of

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<sup>1</sup> Kantor, Tadeusz, *A Journey through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990*, trans. M. Kobiałka (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), p. 135.

avoiding scenes that may present problems of staging if they were incorporated onstage. On the contrary, Friel can conceal action from the audience for very positive reasons, as when, for instance, he wishes to highlight the importance of what Daisy in *Give me your Answer, Do!* calls the 'necessary uncertainty'.<sup>2</sup> Offstage action can spark intrigue and mystery, and it can twist and distort any singular view of events that take place onstage with the result that a plural representation is enabled. Moreover, by placing action outside the main stage, seemingly stable spatial boundaries become fluid.

This thesis aims to explore ways in which Friel constructs offstage boundaries and action through dramatic devices. Interestingly, there has been little critical attention devoted to the stage devices that Friel has been experimenting with in his dramaturgy from the beginning of his career; with the exception of a few critics such as Klaus Birker<sup>3</sup> and Ruth Niel,<sup>4</sup> and there has been little or no examination of action that takes place offstage. Instead, a number of critics such as Richard Kearney, Seamus Deane, Elmer Andrews and F.C. McGrath place emphasis on language and Friel's verbal theatre. Andrews<sup>5</sup> points to Friel's contradictory view of language in allowing progress, invention and possibilities on the one hand, and on the other acting as a vehicle of deception and illusion. McGrath<sup>6</sup> places the linguistic structures of Friel's work in relation to the two Catholic and Protestant communities and cultures of Ireland and like Andrews he addresses Friel's work from his position as a post-colonial writer. Friel's identity as a Northern Irish playwright from the minority Catholic community is also stressed by Ulf Dantanus who pays

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<sup>2</sup> *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Klaus Birker explores how the position of the audience is affected by Friel's technical devices in 'The Relationship between the Stage and the Audience in Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*', in Harmon, M. (ed.) *The Irish Writer and the City* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Niel focuses on Friel's employment of a variety of 'epic' techniques such as the commentator, monologue, abandonment of chronological events and the direct address to probe how Friel creates original plays in 'Non-Realistic Techniques in the Plays of Brian Friel: The Debt to International Drama', in Zach, W. & Heinz, K. (eds.) *Literary Interrelations: Ire, Eng & The World, 1: Reception and Translation* (Tubingen: Narr, 1987), p. 349-359.

<sup>5</sup> Elmer Andrews, *Neither Dreams Nor Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> F.C. McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post) Colonial Drama: Language, Illusion and Politics* (USA: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p. 125.

attention to the implication of the Irish political landscape and Troubles on Friel's work; he claims that

the typical thrust of Friel's later plays approaches today's tortured reality through the historical perspective of the Irish past.

He adds that Friel's plays offer an angle from 'which Ireland can be surveyed'.<sup>7</sup> Friel's Northern Irish background has generated heavy debate about the political aspect of his work. Tony Coult believes that Friel's plays must be viewed as political in nature because he is responding to 'the political and cultural entity of Ireland'.<sup>8</sup> Seamus Deane also states in his 'Introduction' to *Selected Plays* that 'it would be wrong to... describe Friel's work as being wholly political in its motivations'.<sup>9</sup> But Deane's comment would in fact imply that Friel's work is largely political and this emerges because he still considers Friel's work to be political to a degree in its search for an alternative to politics through language. Meanwhile, Fintan O'Toole holds the thought-provoking opinion that 'politics ... may well floor Friel's house, but they do not contain the drama that happens in that house'.<sup>10</sup>

Interesting and no doubt crucial though linguistic, social, political and perhaps even autobiographical viewpoints are to understanding Friel's work, it is also fundamental to consider other unavoidable elements of his dramaturgy; he writes for the stage, not radio. The dramatic devices that he employs place emphasis on the visual and non-visual as much as the verbal and linguistic aspect of Friel's theatre, and in this regard, it is just as important to acknowledge the dramatic as the linguistic and political structures, and the subtle and elusive as well as the high impact aspects of his work. Many critics who tend to avoid dramaturgy appear to lack understanding of how Friel

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<sup>7</sup> Ulf Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study* (London: Faber and Faber 1988), p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Coult, *About Friel* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Seamus Deane, *Selected Plays*, 'Introduction' (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Fintan O'Toole, 'Marking Time: From *Making History* to *Dancing at Lughnasa*', in Peacock, A. J. (ed.), *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993), p. 205.

develops it to stage his work. In not so many words, Richard Pine indirectly admits defeat in trying to comprehend Friel's dramaturgy, when he claims that

all his plays are problems ... [because] of his stagecraft, the way he relishes the demands that he places on his interpreters.<sup>11</sup>

However, the point remains that rather than poetry or prose, Friel deliberately chooses drama as his medium to address whatever social, political and linguistic issues that critics have highlighted, and without drama, there would be nothing for these critics to consider. In this respect the dramaturgy of Friel's work comes first, rather than the concerns that critics identify, as Friel reiterates in 'Extracts from a Sporadic Diary' that

questions of craft and form begin to take precedence over questions about the play's identity.<sup>12</sup>

An appreciation of the dramatic devices that Friel employs in his work allows the stable boundaries of theatrical space to be redrawn, and only when spatial boundaries are understood can the action of the play be conceived because

The fiction of drama becomes "reality" through "space", its characteristics, and its action<sup>13</sup>.

In this thesis, a range of Friel's stage devices will be investigated to explore how he redraws spatial boundaries and probes what I will be calling the 'offstage world' that lies outside the main onstage performance space.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 224.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Coult, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>13</sup> Kantor, *op.cit.*, p. 149

In Chapter I, Friel's employment of audience address throughout his career will be examined. This technique allows a protagonist onstage to step outside the action of the play and engage with the theatre audience located in the offstage spatial domain of the auditorium. Particular attention will be devoted to the way in which an early play, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, the first play that the device was extensively implemented in, signalled a turning point for Friel because - having faced problems in his previous plays, in particular *The Enemy Within* - the device gave the dramatic form of his work more flexibility. Through Cass's frequent address to the audience, Friel can probe on and offstage space and reiterate the audience's role as an active participant in the performance: the authority of the addressee is highlighted as Cass flits between the world of action and the world of thought. Cass's audience address also creates a past and highlights the tension between on and offstage action, which is just one of the many tensions in Friel's work between reality and fantasy, past and present, fact and fiction; all these elements can be found in the four plays that heavily (and variously) exploit audience address, which are examined in Chapter II. In *Lovers*, *Crystal and Fox*, *Living Quarters* and *The Yalta Game*, Friel reworks and reworks this device to probe further multiple audiences and addressees, to postulate a future to accompany the imagined past, as well as to bring to light invisible space on and offstage; the development of the device in these works nevertheless traces back to its beginnings in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*.

Audience address is an anti-illusionistic device, openly reminding an audience of theatricality. My second section considers three elements that are generally seen as more or less within the frame of illusionism, and examines how they are reworked into Friel's dramaturgy to convey offstage perspectives. In Friel's handling, these become further devices that provide the audience with a plural rather than a singular, fixed perspective on events, actions, narratives and space. The stage window - as an object of the fourth wall since Victorian theatre - becomes in Friel's handling a spatial marker and a viewpoint on action that is taking place in the actual present time of the play but cannot be seen. In *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, *The Gentle Island*, *Translations* and *Dancing at Lughnasa* the audience relies on the protagonists to communicate

the action taking place offstage, which raises questions of the accuracy of the reportage. In addition to action taking place in a space offstage, later experimentations with the stage window allow Friel to disclose a protagonist's past that is not perceivable by the audience. Friel's experimentations with the window, which provide a view on the past, can be compared with the work of the Polish Avant-Garde theatre director, Tadeusz Kantor.

In Chapter IV, Friel's manipulation of music is considered in *Philadelphia, Here I Come! The Loves of Cass McGuire, Aristocrats, Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Performances* to investigate a double perspective on both the past, that has taken place offstage before the play begins, and the present moment onstage. The centrality of music in his work can at times bring him to suggest that music is more powerful than the spoken word.

The window is a tangible, concrete and visible part of the stage set. Music is more abstract because it is aural and requires perception rather than sight. Time, however, retreats further into the abstract and the last chapter in this section focuses on time shifts and conflicting narratives and reportage that are generally offered through memory sequences and commentators. Consequently, perspectives on the play's central offstage event become complex and distorted and the audience is left trying to distinguish between what it hears in the many versions of the story that it is offered and what it sees onstage. The tension between fact and fiction in *Lovers, The Freedom of the City, Volunteers, Faith Healer, Living Quarters* and *Afterplay* contributes to the wider tensions in his work between reality and fantasy, past and present, on and offstage action; it is these tensions which allow Friel to present a plural perspective on events rather than a fixed view, a philosophy that is implicit throughout all the works during his career.

In Friel's dramaturgy, audience address, the stage window, music, and time shifts all become devices through which the boundaries and action of visible onstage and non-visible offstage space can be explored. However in the final section, the late play, *Molly Sweeney* (1994), is examined in which Friel conveys offstage perspectives not so much through devices but rather through

built-in metaphorical resonances arising from Molly's blindness. The play's dramatic structure of monologue equates to blindness considering that there is no action corresponding to the offstage events that are disclosed in the narrative, and so the audience is left metaphorically blind to the action of the play. By placing the audience in the position of blindness and forcing them, like Molly, to rely on perceptions rather than concrete vision to comprehend a world that they cannot see, it can be argued that the non-visual theatre experience is more powerful, mysterious and elusive than the visual one. Art historians who have been concerned with optics and with the frame of the painting have already begun investigations down a parallel road. Bersani and Dutoit summarise the new impetus their work has given to our understandings of the painter, Caravaggio, by noting how his paintings

frequently direct our look to spaces outside ... , spaces designated as the necessary but unpainted extensions of certain formal elements within the work.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bersani, Leo & Dutoit, Ulysse (ed.), *Forms of Being – Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), p. 1.

## ‘THE ADDRESSES OF CASS MCGUIRE’

... the dramatist functions through the group; not  
a personal conversation but a public address<sup>15</sup>

- Brian Friel

Since the beginning of his theatre successes in the 1960's, Friel has employed audience address in his drama, a device often described as 'Brechtian' because the audience is reminded that they are watching artificial reality onstage. Audience address is the ability of a protagonist onstage to converse directly with the audience without the main action of the play being disturbed. Friel's decision to utilise the device has enabled him from early on to produce plays that are highly original and sophisticated in their structure but often criticism tends to undermine his early works and consequently there is a large cloud that hovers over the works after *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* until *The Freedom of the City*. F C McGrath and Seamus Deane yield to this tendency, the latter claiming that Friel 'rejected his early writing'<sup>16</sup>, adding that it was only after *The Gentle Island* that his plays were more ambitious and 'their form more flexible'<sup>17</sup>. Deane is certainly accurate in his view that Friel's dramatic form was restrictive, but such a claim can only be applied in particular to his first published play, *The Enemy Within*, rather than to the six early plays that followed. By undervaluing the importance of the early plays, Deane overlooks the fact that Friel was to learn a lot from both his experiences of writing *The Enemy Within*, and his subsequent visit to the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. In his next work, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Friel's experiments with the alter ego enabled the form of his play to be freer but in his third play, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Friel decided that he would implement audience address as the device to equip his plays with a lasting flexibility. Deane is therefore correct in his belief that Friel's form came to be more flexible but if there is a line to be drawn with regard to his dramatic

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Friel, 'The Theatre of Hope and Despair' (1967), in Murray, C. (ed.), *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Seamus Deane, *op.cit*, p. 17

<sup>17</sup> Seamus Deane, *op.cit*, p. 16

form, it is before *The Loves of Cass McGuire* rather than *The Freedom of the City*. Not only does audience address in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* liberate the dramatic form of Friel's work, it enables a protagonist's inner life to be disclosed other than through dialogue with other characters and it also reminds the audience that they are an active participant in the theatrical performance, even though they remain separated from the action onstage as they sit in the auditorium which is technically an 'offstage' domain. Arguably, it is the dominance of address in this piece that forces the audience to think of the play as being called '*The Addresses of Cass McGuire*'.

In *The Enemy Within*, Friel's first published play<sup>18</sup>, it is the inner life of Saint Columba that is explored rather than his public role as founder of monastic institutions and man of God. Throughout the play, Friel uses simple dialogue between characters to convey Columba's inner conflict – a conflict that dominates the play - between his instinctive loyalties to his family engaged in tribal warfare back in Ireland, and his loyalties to his religious vocation on Iona. Friel's reliance on dialogue alone to disclose the play's central theme of Columba's *Enemy Within* undermines the play's title because Columba never has a private conversation alone with himself and his inner battle cannot be within himself because the audience only learn of it through his conversations with others. In this respect, the play's problem resides in the fact that the dramatic form is limited by dialogue, so that when Columba tells his cousin not to 'wedge my frailties between my soul and its Maker!' (*EW*, p.31), his language seems out of context in its self-indulgence, much in the way that Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy would have been completely undermined if directed at another character in Shakespeare's tragedy.

Considering the limitations that dialogue presents Friel throughout the play, his title, *The Enemy Within*, is as appropriate in describing his own personal battle as a dramatist to weave the interesting subject of St Columba into a coherent style of play, as it is in reflecting Columba's inner struggle; Columba's difficulties are just a metaphorical extension of Friel's own. When

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<sup>18</sup> Friel wrote two unpublished plays and four radio plays prior to *The Enemy Within*, but has never acknowledged them as being of any value.

a messenger comes from Ireland to beg Columba to support and offer religious legitimacy to a war that his brother, Hugh, is fighting, Columba explains his dilemma, 'Listen to me! I love them, yes, I love them; and every hill and stream...but I am a priest, messenger, a man of God' (*EW*, p.30), and in the same way there is an echo in Columba's rhetoric that Friel is also passionate about the subject of his play but he is only a mere dramatist writing his first serious work (according to his standards) and is aware of his limitations to do adequate justice to Columba's dilemma much in the way that Columba feels that he is at a loss to help his family. Lacking the dramatic tools to overcome his limitations, Friel bestows Columba's spiritual advisor, Grillaan, and the insignificant messenger, Brian, with Columba's voice to express Columba's respective religious ties and responsibilities to his family. Columba stands silently between both men as they attempt to win him over to their individual cause, 'The last tie, Columba. Cut it now' ... 'They are your people. It is your land' ... 'A priest or politician – which?' ... 'All they ask is your blessing' (*EW*, p.34). Although the conflict according to the title of the play is Columba's own one within himself, Friel inadvertently turns it into an external one as Brian and Grillaan wage Columba's battle for him!

Columba's inner conflict regarding his vocation on Iona stems from his nostalgic reminiscing about the past in Ireland, and in this respect the play marks an important starting point for Friel because his subsequent works also deal with figures absorbed in the past. However, in keeping with a dramatic structure that is defined by dialogue and action, Friel continues to reveal Columba's past through his dialogue with the other protagonists which is why Columba tells Caornan that as he was out at the corn he almost believed that 'I was back in Tirconail; and Cormac was Eoghan, my brother, humming to himself; and that dog that was barking was Ailbe, our sheep-dog' (*EW*, p.20) and later as he reminisces about his past in Ireland, he tells Brian that 'never a day passes but I see the clouds sit down on Errigal' (*EW*, p.30). There is no other way that Columba's past is revealed other than through dialogue and it is important to keep this in mind when examining Friel's later characters who have at their disposal the freedom of audience address to disclose the past and their inner feelings.

Friel's employment of a steady pattern of dialogue throughout *The Enemy Within* to convey Columba's inner thoughts is something that he momentarily shifts from towards the end of the play, as Columba speaks in soliloquy instead of dialogue. Arguably, this is the first time in the play that Columba's plight is depicted in its freest and most convincing form. At this point Friel deliberately positions Columba alone onstage for a few minutes after his brother and nephew have disowned him for refusing to assist in tribal warfare in Ireland. According to a stage direction, Columba can be found standing 'alone in the centre of the stage' (*EW*, p.75) and it is here that the battle that Friel and Columba have been waging within themselves throughout the play finds some sort of resolution. Columba's passion is for the first time in the play completely real and convincing as he cries, 'Get out of my monastery! ...Go back to those damned mountains and seductive hills that robbed me of my Christ! ...Damned, damned, damned Ireland! – (His voice breaks) Soft, green Ireland...my lovely green Ireland' (*EW*, p.75). Columba's nostalgic sympathies for home gain the higher ground and Friel's adoption of soliloquy also gains the higher ground in successfully making the audience conscious of the fact that this is the first time in the play that there is no one else onstage apart from Columba, something that is exemplified by Friel's subsequent stage direction which requires a 'Long pause. Silence' (*EW*, p.75). Even though Columba shows no awareness of the audience it would still seem that at this point only in the play, Friel is beginning to touch on the audience address device that he would employ in his works after his return from the Guthrie theatre in Minneapolis.

*The Enemy Within* is an interesting, speculative account of Columba's inner life and can be viewed as a starting point from which Friel would go on to develop the theme of the inner life and absorption with the past in plays throughout his long career. However, in terms of stagecraft and in contrast to the plays that followed, even in the next five years, this first play remains limited by the confines of dialogue, when the freedom of expression that is later offered through the sophisticated device of audience address, is considered.

Having spent months observing Tyrone Guthrie's theatre in Minneapolis in 1963, Friel returned to Ireland and wrote *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* the next year. The play does not utilise audience address as such but in Friel's creation of Public Gar and his alter ego, Private, the beginnings of such a device can be seen to be in the making because the alter ego allows Friel to further his interest with the inner man and also his ties to the past, which are both characteristics of audience address. The alter ego is naturally invisible to the other protagonists - even Public Gar can only hear Private because 'One cannot look at one's alter ego' (*SP*, p.27). By employing such a device in his work, Friel places the audience in a powerful position because only they can perceive Private visually, and in this regard the play is an important starting point from which Friel would further probe the subject of audience authority in the succeeding plays that revolve around audience address. Friel's experimentation with the alter ego is also suggestive of the need to create a new method by which to reveal the inner life, given the limitations of dialogue in depicting Columba's inner 'Enemy', and therefore the play can be seen as the necessary stepping stone that Friel would have to take to realise the potential that audience address would present to his future work.

In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* the audience learns Public Gar's inner thoughts through the alter ego, Private. Private is not aware of the theatre audience and the other protagonists are not aware of Private's existence so that throughout the play Private indulges in humour, parody, memory, fantasy and private thought and yet the action of the play with the other characters is undisturbed because like an audience addressee, he operates independent of the main action. Although Private does not directly address the audience, he spends large portions of the play addressing Public or an imagined audience such as when he adopts a military stance and challenges Public: 'You are fully conscious of all the consequences of your decision?' (*SP*, p.32). Private's address to an imagined audience or Public is significant because it is an early indication of Friel's interest in different types of audience, particularly real and imagined ones which he would develop later in *Crystal and Fox* and *Living Quarters*.

An audience addressee has at his disposal the ability to flit between the world of action onstage and the world of thought, a trait that will become evident in looking at *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, but Public Gar and the alter ego, Private, can be seen as embodying each world respectively. Private's commentary and remembrance of unseen events of the past is indicative of his role as narrator to the action where Public's role is that of player to Private's narration, and arguably it is this distinction in roles which defines the two Gar characters (even though these roles are in no way rigid given that Private is still a key player in the main action). The audience also look to Private to gain an insight into the true manner of past events because they recognise the falsity of Public's rhetoric in his claim, 'I'm looking for; a vast restless place that doesn't give a damn about the past' (*SP*, p.79) when the opposite is obviously the case. Through Private's narrative, the audience discover the ghosts of the past such as Gar's memories of his dead mother: 'She was small, Madge says, and wild, and young, Madge says, from a place called Bailtefree beyond the mountains; and her eyes were bright and her hair was loose' (*SP*, P.37). Later, Private recalls a childhood memory of his father with a fairytale ring, 'the boat was blue and the paint was peeling...just the two of us...fishing on a lake on a showery day – and young as I was I felt, I knew, that this was precious' (*SP*, p.83), but although Private's tone is nostalgic, the audience do not doubt that such things took place. The audience trusts Private not just because he is in a position to disclose to the audience a past that they would not otherwise have learnt from Public, such as his memories of his mother, but Private feels no obligation to obliterate memories no matter how painful they are. He is, for instance, quick to remind Public of Kate Doogan - the girl he wanted to marry: '(Remembering and recalling tauntingly) By God, that was a night, boy, eh? By God, you made a right bloody cow's ass of yourself. (Public goes off right)' (*SP*, p.39), at which point the audience learn that when Public went to ask Kate's father for her hand in marriage, her father informed him of his hopes that their daughter would marry Doctor Francis King. Having been reminded of this painful memory, Public walks away from Public to distance himself from the past and to absorb himself in the present action

onstage. Gar's conflict in the two private and public interests - the desire to remember and the desire to distance himself from memory - remind the audience of Columba's inner conflict between his nostalgic yearning for home and the need to distance himself from the past so as to preoccupy himself with his vocation. But however much Public tries to escape the memories of lost love and past events by throwing himself into the action onstage, Private refuses to let the truth be brushed under the carpet, which is why he reminds a scornful Public that 'there was ... foolish, silly fun and foolish, silly laughing; but what it was all about you can't remember, can you? Just the memory of it - that's all you have now - just the memory' (*SP*, p.77) when Public rebukes his friends for spending the whole time bragging about their female conquests when they come to bid him farewell before he leaves for Philadelphia.

In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Friel manipulates the split character of Public Gar and the alter ego, Private, to give the dramatic form of his play more freedom, and it is a device that is successful in that Friel's two views of the one man can be portrayed without the flow of the play being interrupted. However, the big problem with the device is that Friel still views Gar as the one person despite Gar's alter ego and also splitting a character is simply not a sustainable device to constantly base a play's structure on - a dramatist cannot keep presenting an audience with two characters every time he wants to develop action onstage and disclose inner thoughts. It is for these reasons that in his next work, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Friel takes the split strands of public and private and weaves them into the figure of the audience addressee, Cass McGuire, so as to reconcile the many tensions in *Philadelphia*, such as public and private, past and present, reality and fantasy, narrative and action, on and offstage action. The perspective in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is consequently multiple but the subject is single. The play did not at the time, and has not at any time since been regarded favourably, perhaps because critics such as George O'Brien and Richard Pine are set in the widely held belief that *Philadelphia* was Friel's early masterpiece.<sup>19</sup> Ulf Dantanus also

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<sup>19</sup> 'Contemporary Irish Drama begins in 1964 with *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*', Pine, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

believes that the play is crippled by its 'difficult dramatic structure',<sup>20</sup> adding that the work never really appealed to regular audiences partly because its techniques seem so unstable. But what tends to be overlooked in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is the fact that this is the first time that Friel implements the technique of audience address in his work and it would go further than the alter ego in communicating the past and the inner life, as its reappearance in later works proves. Contrary to Dantanus's argument, Friel had found a device that offered flexibility rather than difficulty and the play must, on these grounds, be considered his seminal work.

In the stage directions of *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Friel requires that from the moment that Cass McGuire enters the play 'The subdued domestic atmosphere is suddenly and violently shattered by Cass's shouts. She charges on stage (either from the wings or from the auditorium) shouting in her raucous Irish-American voice. Everyone on stage freezes' (*LCM*, p.14). Friel demands that the response of the characters to this thunderstorm of a figure is to 'freeze', and he might well have extended this observation to the audience looking on. How else could they react to a figure that appears to be the very inverse of a normal seventy-year-old woman - not reserved, not accepting, someone not preferring a slower pace at their time of life. Moreover, not only is Cass still physically able to 'charge' on stage like a bull, she 'smokes incessantly', her manner is 'strong and resilient' and she speaks, 'loudly and coarsely' (*LCM*, p.14). As if the audience are not startled enough by their first glimpse of the play's title character and 'heroine' (if she could be called that), Cass's first line: 'What the hell goes on here?' (*LCM*, p.15) puts into question the very reason why the audience have come to the theatre and what goes on in such a place. Not only does Cass's inquiry display in a simple manner the ignorance of a curt, uncultured, self-made Yank but as Cass towers before the audience that innocently looks on, there is a hint that if Cass is anything to go by, all things crass and coarse 'go on here'.

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<sup>20</sup> Ulf Dantanus, *op.cit.*, p. 107.

No sooner has Cass ploughed onstage than she launches directly into addressing the audience. This has the combined effect of shattering the simple dialogue between the McGuire family that the play had opened with, as well as awakening every strand of consciousness in the theatre audience as they are ousted willingly or unwillingly from their position as simple spectators to active participants with the play's swift shift from dialogue to address. Ignoring her brother's protests about barging in, Cass explains to '*her friends*', the audience, 'I go to the ur-eye-nal for five minutes and they try to pull a quick one on me!' (*LCM*, p.15). Apart from the fact that Cass's audience address has the principal effect of breaking down the fourth wall of the theatre that normally keeps audience and actors apart, her address indicates the audience's weighty and involuntary responsibility of being Cass's 'friends, her intimates' (*LCM*, p.15). The title of 'friend' that Cass bestows on her audience is also reflected by her familiar tone but rather than being reassured, such a title makes the audience wary. In the first instance, Cass treats the audience as her best friend even though they do not know her and the telling horror in Alice's voice, 'Cass - !', coupled with the confrontation between Cass and her brother over the order the play will take, alerts the audience to the fact that Miss McGuire is a demanding and difficult character.

Audience address creates a certain amount of vulnerability and unease among the audience because they know that they are being watched. The audience has come to the theatre with the preconception that their role is to watch but to their confusion Cass is looking back at them as they look at her. Cass's stare reminds the audience of the principle reiterated by the Polish theatre director, Tadeusz Kantor, that 'A theatre piece should not be "looked at!"',<sup>21</sup> and the success of Cass's address in creating discomfort among the audience is dependent on this visual exchange between audience and protagonist, but such an effect would have been undermined if the play had never progressed past Friel's initial intentions to write the play solely for radio. The uneasiness achieved when Cass and the audience become locked in a two-way stare

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<sup>21</sup> Kantor, *op.cit*, p. 37

reflects a similar principle outlined by the director, Peter Brook,<sup>22</sup> who claims that if the audience applauds the actors and the actors applaud the audience back, confusion is caused. But then again it could also be said that the audience's discomfort at the start of this play has more to do with Cass herself rather than the audience address, especially when the second part of Friel's next play, *Lovers*, is considered because Andy Tracey's audience address creates none of the alarm in the audience that Cass's address manages to achieve!

By endowing Cass with the ability to address the audience, Friel is placing her in a powerful position because she can participate simultaneously in both the action onstage with the other protagonists and also the offstage action in the auditorium. No one else in the play enjoys such a position. The audience also cannot directly communicate with the play's characters and neither can the other characters - with the exception of Cass - make direct contact with the audience, something that becomes apparent when Trilbc looks at the auditorium and 'She sees no one out there' (*LCM*, p.29). Cass is consequently the link between the action on and offstage. By addressing the audience one minute and turning to Harry the next, Cass not only demonstrates the flexibility of her role but in shifting her personas from addressee to Harry's sister, she is explicitly exercising her authority, something that emerges when her brother tries to direct the play in chronological order and Cass retorts, 'The story begins where I say it begins, and I say it begins with me stuck in the gawddam workhouse' (*LCM*, p.15). Cass's effective position, certainly in Act one and to a lesser extent in Act two, derives from the fact that she is highly conscious of her various roles in various actions: she can address the audience, engage with her family and also the residents of Eden House, and not only is she aware of these roles but she also possesses the Pirandellian knowledge that she a protagonist in Friel's wider play, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, which is evident when she asks: 'What's this goddam play called? The Loves of Cass McGuire. Who's Cass McGuire? Me! Me!' (*LCM*, p.16).

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 84.

In *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Friel pursues the theme of exile that he had probed in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Enemy Within*. Cass has returned to Ireland after fifty-two years exile in New York only to be placed by her family into the residential home, Eden House, which understandably is a running sore with Cass from the beginning: 'I came back to Ireland and got such a welcome that, Jeez, I thought for ten minutes I was Santa Claus!' (*LCM*, p.36). Although Friel cleverly parallels Cass's exile from her family against Tristan's exile from Isolde in the Wagnerian drama,<sup>23</sup> it is also important to touch on the exile that stems from Friel's employment of audience address throughout the play. From Cass's initial entrance, she has been able to engage with the audience but by Act Three, Cass becomes exiled when she looks out to the auditorium and no longer sees her friends. The fact that Cass fails to see the audience gazing on at her is telling of the condition, blindsight (which will be investigated in a later chapter), whereby a patient is rendered blind because they are not conscious of what they see. However, Cass is unaware of the fact that it is not the audience that have moved but it is she instead that has slipped into a world of fantasy, but Cass, nevertheless, believes that the audience have abandoned her and the lure of Ingram and Trilbe's exiled fantasy world – which is emphasised by Friel's referral to it as 'otherness' (*LCM*, p.28) - becomes all the greater so that she can belong to something, someone or some place.

Cass, Trilbe and Ingram's exile in their fantasy lives is epitomised by the Winged Chair, which is significantly located down right because it remains exiled from the main acting space upstage where the Eden House action takes place. Friel is at pains to point out in the play's 'Author's Note', that the chair is never used throughout the play other than for the rhapsodies. Therefore, when the rhapsodists sit in the chair to deliver what is a fictionalised version of their life stories, it is as if they are individually transported to a place elsewhere that is inaccessible, hence the fact that when Trilbe recounts her story, a stage direction informs that '*Cass is not in their sphere*' (*LCM*, p.29). It might also be speculated that if the rhapsodists exist in a sphere of fantasy

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<sup>23</sup> Tristan was exiled from Isolde because he was meeting Isolde behind the King's back.

beyond the action of the main stage, there is also a chance that the rhapsodists address not just each other or the theatre audience but an imagined audience, which Friel would develop later in *Crystal and Fox*. In this regard, the theatre audience can be seen as becoming increasingly exiled throughout the play because they are not even addressed by Cass in the rhapsodies, and moreover, by Act Three, Cass becomes lost in her own fantasy world and stops addressing the audience, a move that completes the theatre audience's exile from the onstage action as they sit offstage in the auditorium.

Cass's audience address must also be viewed in terms of her attempt to keep check with reality, particularly as the play progresses and she becomes less sure of the boundaries separating reality and fantasy. When Trilbe tells her story about her husband, Gordon McClelland, Cass later asks Pat about Trilbe's past and when she realises that Trilbe's account has been fantasy, Cass assumes a light hearted voice and turns to the audience, 'Gordon! What d'you know! Almost had me fooled, too' (*LCM*, p.32). But there is also a strong hint of relief in the tone of this latter quote and it is clear that Cass is looking for some sort of reassurance in herself that she is still in her right mind. When she next appears at the opening of Act Two, Cass greets the audience with an official, 'Hi' (*LCM*, p.34), which acts as a stark contrast to the audience's first encounter with her in Act One when she charged onstage. Cass has certainly mellowed in that she is more at ease with the audience and even admits, 'I made damn sure to be in possession this time. I'll tell you' (*LCM*, p.34), a reference to the way in which she naïvely believed Trilbe's fantastical story at the end of Act One. To shield her embarrassment having confessed to being fooled, Cass swiftly changes the subject by expressing concern for the audience, 'And I hope you don't get the flu' (*LCM*, p.34). However, it is not long before fantasy preoccupies her again and before Cass knows it, she is educating the audience about Ingram's story - an indication that Cass is beginning for the second time to take fantasy at face value. Although Cass manages to restrain herself in the midst of reciting Ingram's story, '(Checking mentally: this has not occurred to her before)' (*LCM*, p.36), it is clear that she has startled herself and in an attempt not to make much of a fuss, she continues to address the audience to keep a check on what is real, 'I

ask you, what the hell was the hooper doing in the swank cathedral in the first place?' (*LCM*, p.36). But the irony is that before she realises it, she has trailed off again about Ingram's fantastical 'hooper', completely oblivious to Harry who expresses his delight at her homecoming. It is now that the audience realise that this time reality is completely lost to Cass. She may still be looking at the audience, but they realise that their rapport with her has slipped, and all they can do is sit back helplessly and wait until she no longer see them: '*Cass goes downstage and searches for the audience again. Finds no one*' (*LCM*, p.60). One possible theory behind Cass's inability to perceive the audience is perhaps that Cass subconsciously chooses not to see the audience anymore because they have simply not been enough to convince her that she needs the real world more than the imaginary.

A central problem that arises from Cass's audience address is that of place and space. If Cass can engage simultaneously with the audience and also her fellow protagonists, then what space does she inhabit? Even Cass seems to wonder this herself. At the end of Act Two, Cass retreats into the memory of her childhood by telling herself that she can hide in the signal box, but she suddenly checks herself and is confronted with the question, 'Where are you? Jeeze, where are you?' (*LCM*, p.50) adding later, 'where- what am I-?' (*LCM*, p.65). When Cass is involved with the action of Eden House or Harry's home she resides in the onstage space but when she addresses the audience that are sitting offstage, Cass stands downstage. However, the question of stage space is slightly further complicated when Cass looks into the auditorium in Act Three and '*searches for the audience again. Finds no one*' (*LCM*, p.60). At this point she retreats back to the Eden House space where she engages in a present-giving ceremony with Trilbe and Ingram and for a substantial period the downstage space remains vacant until Mrs Butcher, a new resident, addresses the audience for the first time. A space can only come into being through action but Butcher's address first creates the vital energy to bring the downstage space into being again, and secondly, her address links the audience, as they sit offstage in the auditorium, with the action onstage. Trilbe even remarks that Mrs Butcher's manner is difficult because 'She's still at that

stage' (*ICM*, p.68) which reminds the audience of the various spatial domains that a protagonist can inhabit onstage.

Audience address establishes a shifting, uneasy relationship between the protagonist and audience in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. First, the audience doubts whether it is Cass's 'friends' because it is a title that Cass has lavishly bestowed on the audience without much credibility given that she does not know them, hence, they are not her 'folks'. Presumably Cass calls the audience her friends because she is seeking the reassurance and support that she does not receive from her family who are more like strangers to her after she has lived for fifty-two years in New York. But even when Cass has built up a relationship with the audience through her addresses, she suddenly stops seeing them when she becomes preoccupied with the fantasy world of Eden house, so it would seem that Cass's relationship with the audience is not one based on loyalty.

Cass develops a relationship with the audience in the first place because she feels the need to be reassured, but difficulties arise because Cass's constant attempts to cover up her insecurities are so blindingly obvious. Cass tries not to show her affectation after her opening barney with Harry, but as a stage directions highlights, '*The past scene has disturbed her more than she would like to admit: her hands are shaking*' (*LCM*, p.17). Also when she suffers the crushing blow that the money she has been sending for years to Harry and his children for fear that they were struggling financially, has in fact been invested so that she will not be dependent on them in her old age, Cass is overcome by insecurity. If her own family can treat her in such a manner, she wonders if her other family, the audience, whom she refers to as the 'folks',<sup>24</sup> will do the same. To reassure herself she has to ask, 'You still out there?', adding in an unconvincing tone, 'Stick around and we'll have fun together. You'll see, lots of fun...(Looking around set) Where the hell is everybody?' (*LCM*, p.44). Paranoia is slowly getting the better of Cass as she succumbs to fantasy,

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<sup>24</sup> Cass's habit of addressing the audience as 'folks' has antecedence in both high art and low art in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, where the audience is also addressed as folks; but this practice is not out of place in pantomimes!

'Hi!... Stick ...stick around...This'll be okay, you'll see; this'll all sort itself out' (*LCM*, p.47) and for the audience such pretence is completely transparent. Cass tries to mask her insecurity and feelings of rejection by pretending that she does not care, so that when she looks out to the audience and sees no one there, she exclaims, 'And I could ov swore there were folks out there. (*Shrugs*) What the hell' (*LCM*, p.59). Even though the audience has not rejected Cass - she in fact has rejected them by succumbing to fantasy - this latter comment displays an attempt on Cass's part to play down the fact that she is actually hurt and feels rejected by her friends, the audience. Cass is a lady who appears as if she is beyond feeling and deflation due to her brash, impulsive 'Jack-the-lad' surface, but she is highly vulnerable and sensitive to others which is why she turns 'her back to the audience' (*LCM*, p.61) when she can no longer see the audience. Such a gesture is perhaps childish on her behalf but it is also her coping strategy and a means by which she can block out the pain of being rejected by the audience.

In addition to Cass's insecurity, the relationship between the audience and protagonist is further marred by doubt. When Cass doubts the audience, they start to doubt her, so that when Pat bitterly calls her 'a drunken aul' skivvy, living in sin with a dirty aul' Yank that kicked you out in the end!' (*LCM*, p.49), the audience begin to wonder if this is true. In Friel's later play, *The Gentle Island*, Manus Sweeney claims that 'every story has seven faces' (*GI*, p.22) and certainly the audience are confronted by multiple aspects of Cass's character which is why they are left questioning whether she is simply an old woman whose paranoia at losing touch with reality is to be pitied or, on the other hand, whether she is everything that Pat calls her. A domino effect is achieved because when Cass doubts herself, the audience also doubt both themselves and her as well. This trait becomes clear when Cass panics and exclaims, 'Where have all the real people gone?' (*LCM*, p.26) and in turn the audience doubt her sanity and sobriety when she later fails to see them. But if on the one hand the audience doubt Cass, on the other hand they also feel that they must have contributed in some way to Cass's feelings of insecurity and rejection when they consider how confident she was at the beginning of the play. Of course, it is silly for the audience to feel responsible for Cass's

insecurities when they have little power to influence the direction that the play is being steered in. After all, a play follows a pre-written text and in that text a protagonist has a fate to meet. Cass's fate will therefore be determined by fantasy, regardless of her interaction with the audience, and this is something that Friel stresses explicitly in the later play, *Living Quarters*, when the Butler family are powerless to prevent Frank from committing suicide despite their attempts to intervene. Any attempt by Cass to resist fantasy by clinging to the audience would undoubtedly prove fruitless, and when Cass finds herself caught in a battle of wills between '*the calling voice and the audience*' at the end of Act Two, the audience can be sure which force will win. It is only when Cass finally becomes '*more assured*' (LCM, p.65) when she embraces the fantasy world in Act Three, that the audience are finally unburdened with feelings of doubt and guilt. It is highly ironic that Cass addresses the audience in the first place for reassurance and yet as the play progresses, Cass and the audience are left doubting themselves and each other. The audience is left to wonder if the process of insecurity will repeat itself with Mrs Butcher whose rapport with the audience, like Cass's, also stems in the first place from '*her uncertainty*' (LCM, p.62/3) when she arrives at Eden House.

*The Loves of Cass McGuire* can be regarded as the great turning point of Friel's early career because he manages to free himself from the structural constraints of his early work, *The Enemy Within*. Friel also blends the tension between the worlds of imagination and reality, thought and action onstage through audience address so as to create a lively piece of theatre during which Cass ignores the conventions of the set and the audience is unceremoniously ousted from their position as spectators and are obliged to recognise their role as important participants in the artificial reality of the play as they sit offstage in the auditorium. Friel's employment of the alter ego in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* enabled him to portray Gar's inner life and past without disturbing the main action of the play, but by manipulating audience address in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Friel had hit upon a device - which can be traced in its origins back to works such as Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* - that would open up new territory in taking the focus away from the concentration of dialogue and action among the actors (evident in *Philadelphia* and *Enemy*),

so that the focus would instead turn on the audience. In this regard, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* paved the way for subsequent development and experimentation with audience address in *Crystal and Fox*, *The Freedom of the City*, *Living Quarters* and *The Yalta Game*.

## ADDRESSING AFTER 'CASS'

*The Loves of Cass McGuire* had been a critical turning point in Friel's dramaturgy because his decision to use audience address had opened new possibilities and he had liberated himself from the structural problems he had faced in *The Enemy Within*. Moreover, his initial experimentations in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* inspired him to revisit and rework the device again and again in subsequent works to probe further spatial boundaries offstage, question audience authority and investigate multiple audiences and the ensuing tension between real and imagined audiences.

Friel's next play, the two part *Lovers*, followed the year after *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. In the first part, *Winners*, the two Commentators, Man and Woman, narrate the events leading up to the deaths of the unlikely teenage couple, Joe, and his pregnant girlfriend, Mag. The young couple spend most of the play sitting on a hill overlooking the town of Ballymore, in a manner similar to Beckett's *Happy Days*,<sup>25</sup> however, both lovers remain completely unaware of Man and Woman who blankly report the details of the lover's pasts, the discovery of their bodies in the lake and the public reaction to their deaths. The couple's oblivion to the Commentators is understandable given that they inhabit a space that is 'slightly upstage', while Man and Woman can be found 'one down left and one down right, at the edge of the stage' (L, p.11). Like Cass, who conducted her address to the audience in a space downstage, the Commentators can also be found in the same position, and this is a trend that is apparent in most of Friel's plays that employ audience address, the obvious reason being that the action of the main performance space is undisturbed and separated while the addressee can obtain close contact with the audience.

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<sup>25</sup> It is not just the hill setting of Friel's play that brings to mind the mound that Winnie is buried in up to her waist in Beckett's *Happy Days*; Joe also remains largely passive to Mag's prattle much in the way that Willie is barely even conscious of Winnie in Beckett's play. In regard to Mag, Friel instructs in a stage direction that 'whatever she likes, she loves; whatever she dislikes, she hates – momentarily' (L, p.11), and this simplicity is also reminiscent of Winnie as is Mag's sudden declaration that 'I think this is the most important moment of my life' (L, p.22).

undisturbed and separated while the addressee can obtain close contact with the audience.

Although Man and Woman address the audience, the word 'address' seems perhaps too friendly a word to describe their exchange because it conjures up the expectation of a reply, something that seems unlikely when Friel's directions are examined: *'Their reading is impersonal, completely without emotion: their function is to give information'* (L, p.11). This latter quotation is designed to leave the audience in no doubt as to the role of these figures. They will simply provide the audience with the required information but nothing more and in a sense the audience are somewhat surprised by what appears to be their conscious decision to keep themselves as removed as they can from the people they address, particularly compared with the urgency with which Cass sought to communicate with the audience in Friel's previous play. Man and Woman's isolated stance makes the theatre audience somewhat suspicious of their intentions as they wonder if their version of events is to be trusted, especially when they compare the warmth of the young lover's discourse (despite their occasional differences) against the cold manner in which the Commentator's address is delivered. In a stage direction, Friel conveys the intimacy between the two lovers as Joe *'throws his arms around her and kisses her'*, but the audience's impression of their cosy lives is shattered immediately as it learns that *'As he does'*, Man reports, *'On Saturday, June 25, at 11.00 a.m. an inquest was held'* (L, p.45). The manner in which the young lover's warm exchange is paralleled against Man's chilling report of the inquest highlights to the theatre audience the underlying fact that *Winners* is a play that operates among tensions and polarities and everything has been taken to extremes. The warmth of the lover's dialogue sandwiched between the steely barks of the narrators allows for the play's many tensions to operate simultaneously in warped harmony: past and future, life and death, laughter and tears, love and hate.

In his previous play, Friel used audience address to reveal Cass's past and in the same way, Mag and Joe's past is deciphered both through the Commentator's address to the theatre audience and Mag and Joe's own

addresses to each other, despite Mag's insistence, 'I can't wait for the future, Joe', adding, 'The past's over!' (*L*, p.47). It is little wonder that Mag tries to deny the past any form of existence when it bears deeper and grimmer truths that emerge during their addresses. The audience learn that while Mag's twin brother died of cot death, causing her mother to undergo a nervous breakdown, Joe's mother slaves away in a factory while his father lives off the state. Ironically, Mag praises Joe's parents and Joe praises the relationship that Mag's parents have, but such praise is designed to cover over the likely fact that their own relationship has the strong likelihood of meeting equal gloom. Arguably, it is the lover's recognition of this eventuality that forces them to take their own lives to avoid such a fate.

In *Winners*, the two addresses between the Commentators and the theatre audience, and also the address between Joe and Mag reflect a partial desire for addressee anonymity. While Joe enacts the story how he went to Old Kerrigan, local abattoir and flat proprietor, to sign the lease for their new flat, '(Joe produces an imaginary document from his hip pocket) "Best flat in town. Hell, it's all blood now."' (*L*, p.17), Mag immediately assumes the role of audience and provides authentic sound effects to Joe's narrative: 'Bang! Bang!' (*L*, p.17). However, when Mag tells Joe a story, he is a completely unreceptive audience and remains absorbed in his books, hence the fact that in a stage direction, the audience learns that '*She is addressing Joe but knows that he is not listening to her*' (*L*, p.21). Joe is so engrossed with his studies that he does not pay attention to the important things around him - his future bride and mother of his unborn child - and in the same way, the Commentators are just as engrossed with the delivery of the information they have to impart that they have no interest in the thing that gives their art meaning - the audience before them. A bizarre trait seems to emerge from *Winners* whereby the protagonists only conduct an address when there is at least some certainty that the audience will not be listening, hence the fact that Joe only conducts a long address to Mag when he knows she is asleep. The desire for anonymity is perhaps the reason why the Commentators seem so impersonal because they are trying to do everything they can to discourage the audience from listening, but

unfortunately as Mrs Wilson proves in Friel's second instalment of the *Lovers* tale, there is always an audience listening.

In *Lovers*, Friel uses Andy Tracey as a means of developing the relationship created between audience and protagonists through audience address. When the curtain rises, Andy sits before us, staring ahead, '*watching nothing*' (L, p.51), through a pair of binoculars. The stage directions inform that '*when he becomes aware of the audience, he lowers the glasses slowly, looks at the audience, glances cautiously over his shoulder... and then speaks directly and confidentially down to the audience*' (L, p.51). It is evident from the latter directions that Andy regards the audience as his confidants. The audience are being entrusted with his story, a version of events spanning the four years ago from the time he started to court a middle-aged woman, Hanna, under the nose of her self-righteous and demanding bed-bound mother, to their ensuing marriage and Andy's subsequent revenge on his mother-in-law by finding evidence to prove that the saint that Mrs Wilson worships never existed. Like *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, there is a clear demarcation of stage space in *Lovers* which means that Andy's address to the audience takes place downstage, the main action takes place in the back yard and living room upstage, while the action of Mrs Wilson's bedroom operates offstage behind a screen that is removed accordingly. Andy's downstage address allows him to get as close to the audience as he physically can, and provides him with a better position from which he can confide in the audience.

In contrast to Cass, Andy is less demanding and lacks her insecurity and need to be reassured by the audience. The audience's job in this play is simply to listen and be entertained rather than offer any solution to Andy's predicament, and like the Commentators in the first part of the play, Andy does not expect anything from the people he confides in. At most, his relationship with the audience is of a more removed and simple nature because the audience is free of the demands that are placed upon it by figures such as Cass. Moreover, an audience would recognise that audience address is simply a device in this play through which Friel can reveal Andy's feelings and also the past, and an

audience would also realise that when Andy voices his frustration at his mother-in-law, he demands no response from them.

Like Cass, Andy is in a position of power since he can flit between his direct address to the audience and the action that takes place onstage. This means that although Andy recalls to the audience his memories of the 'rare times' (*L*, p.56), when Hanna and he would recite poetry to stop her mother upstairs from thinking they were up to anything immoral, Andy's nostalgic reminiscences are interrupted when Hanna enters for the first time, where upon he slips immediately into the action of the main performance space by asking Hanna about her mother. In this respect, Andy is a Gar figure rolled into one person, in that he has both public and private personas at his disposal. Moreover, it is through Andy that the audience's first impressions are imposed which means that the audience automatically sees the story from his perspective, where with Cass the audience is provided with an insight into her character by her family before Cass comes onstage. Through Andy's initial address, the audience discover a lot about the past such as the death of Hanna's father, her mother's subsequent heart problems forcing her to take to her bed, Hanna and Andy's marriage and in this opening address there is even a hint of trouble in the lover's relationship given that Andy is sitting out in the backyard staring at nothing. This information allows the audience to form certain impressions and expectations about Hanna and her mother before they appear. In the second part of this early work, Friel employs Andy's address to the audience to create a build-up and provide insight into action before it happens, raise the audience's expectations and impressions of characters before they appear, as well as guide the audience through the events of the past that are not visible onstage.

Having alternated between the world of thought - through audience address - and the world of action onstage in a similar manner in the two parts of *Lovers*, Friel adopts a different approach for his next play, *Crystal and Fox*. Although

Neil Corcoran claims that *Crystal and Fox* is 'a baffling play whose apparent generic shifts make for an ultimate uninterpretability, even unintelligibility',<sup>26</sup> the play can be seen as following a steady course of action and dialogue until the final episode when the main protagonist, Fox Melarkey, directly addresses not the real theatre audience, but an imaginary audience. Before looking at the play's end, it is important to draw attention to Fox's address throughout the play to the invisible audience that have come to see the Melarkey travelling show. The real theatre audience cannot see the audience inside Fox's tent that watch the travelling show but the important thing is that Fox can. He is therefore in a position of power because he is the lead player to two audiences that cannot see each other - the audience in the tent and the theatre audience that sit offstage in the auditorium. The effect of such is somewhat alienating for the theatre audience because they are removed from another action that takes place offstage in the present time of the play. Also, if two audiences are addressed, the question arises, who is the real audience? The audience are confused and even wonder if they are being parodied by the crowd that loom offstage in the Melarkey tent with '*uncertain enthusiasm*' (CF, p.16). In Friel's previous play, the audience found themselves in a position of insight due to their role of confidant to Andy Tracey, but in *Crystal and Fox* such a position is completely turned on its head as Friel manages to alienate the theatre audience because they are aware that they are being juxtaposed with the other audience that Fox addresses inside the tent.

As well as employing the tent audience that looms offstage throughout the play, in the final episode of *Crystal and Fox*, Friel probes the idea of imaginary audiences. Fox has sold his travelling show and both he and Crystal are sitting in the middle of nowhere trying to hitch a lift to anywhere, when suddenly '*Fox is moved by a strange elation: not so much joy as a controlled recklessness...But he is aware – and Crystal is not- that it has also a cold, brittle quality, an edge of menace. He gives the rickety wheel a sharp turn, and addresses an imaginary audience*' (CF, p.58). Friel's directions are significant because Fox's address to an imaginary audience shows a desire to

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<sup>26</sup> Neil Corcoran, 'The Penalties of Retrospect: Continuities in Brian Friel', in Peacock, A. (ed.), *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992) p. 22.

rebel not just against responsibility and reality but also against the structure of the play by interrupting the play's unbroken pattern of dialogue with address to an imagined audience at such a late stage. The theatre audience have had their suspicions about Fox and his involvement in Pedro's dog's death and it is at this point that their suspicions are confirmed, leaving them to consider just how dangerous this seemingly harmless showman really is. Moreover, at this point, the theatre audience are thrown into momentary confusion because they realise that Fox is in the middle of nowhere and there is no audience to address now that the travelling show has gone. The theatre audience become highly conscious of themselves and even wonder if Fox is trying to turn his old jargon on them because he has '*the desire to play up to an easy audience*' (CF, p.58), and what could be easier for Fox than playing up to the theatre audience that are sitting before him. But it must be remembered that Fox cannot see the real theatre audience however much he appears to be addressing them; his address is to an imaginary audience, an indication that reality has become clouded for him as it did for Cass, so that a retreat into the past and fantasy is his only resort.

Fox's retreat into the fantasy role of performer and addressee to an imaginary audience is cut short when he is suddenly diverted by the prospect of re-marrying Crystal, the sound of a passing car, and Crystal's revelations that she knew all along that he had deliberately tried to put an end to the show. The accepting manner in which Crystal has made these revelations to Fox gives him the confidence to admit that he handed their son, Gabriel, over to the police so that he could claim the money that the police had offered as a reward for information about Gabriel's whereabouts after he had robbed and beaten a shopkeeper. Crystal cannot believe that a father could so betray his own son, gathers her belongings and runs off. Fox is left alone onstage calling after Crystal and seeing that his explanations are fruitless, he turns the rickety wheel and is transformed once again into the role of performer to an imaginary audience. His showman rhetoric is temporarily marred by declarations of his love for Crystal as he taunts 'Red, yellow, black, or blue, whatever it is that tickles your fancy... I love you, my Crystal, and you are the best part of me'

(*CF*, p.64) before he addresses his imaginary audience one last time by assuming his 'fairground voice' (*CF*, p.64).

In *Crystal and Fox*, Friel has seemingly reversed the role of audience address conveyed in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* because in the latter, Cass addresses the audience to keep check with reality but when she can no longer see the 'real' world of the audience, she slips into the fantasy world upheld by Eden House. In contrast to Cass, Fox's audience address to the imaginary audience offers him the chance to retreat further into fantasy rather than keep touch with reality. But although Cass and Fox address the audience for different ends – Cass addresses the theatre audience (unsuccessfully, in the long run) to retain a grasp on reality where Fox addresses them to access fantasy – it must be remembered that the audience that Cass addresses is most often the real one in the theatre, where Fox's audience at the end of the play is imaginary. It is clear therefore that different audiences serve different purposes, so that imagined ones reiterate fantasy where real theatre audiences reinforce reality. In *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Friel hints at an imaginary audience address in the delivery of the rhapsodies but the distinction between the possible imagined and real audience is never made explicit. However, in *Crystal and Fox*, Friel furthers his experiments with the audience address technique to explore imaginary audiences for the first time properly in his career. Having toyed with addresses to the theatre audience in both *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and *Lovers*, and addresses to an imagined audience in *Crystal and Fox* and also to an extent in *Cass*, Friel can be seen as combining the tensions between these various audience addresses in *Living Quarters*.

In *Living Quarters*, the play opens with Sir who sets the context of the ensuing play by addressing the audience from the 'down right' (*SP*, p.179) stage space: 'The living-quarters of Commandant Frank Butler...It is here on May 24<sup>th</sup> some years ago that our story is set' (*SP*, p.177) when Butler is honoured for his bravery in war in the Middle East. Although Friel does not actually require audience address in the play's stage directions, Sir's downstage position at the play's opening is suggestive of his role as audience addressee, considering that this is the space from which audience address is delivered in the plays

previously inquired. Having addressed the theatre audience, Sir rises from his downstage position and as he moves centre stage, he explains to the audience his dual roles as narrator of the ledger and 'Ultimate arbiter, the powerful and impartial referee, the final adjudicator' (SP, p.177-78) before he proceeds into another space, the living room, 'and addresses the family off' (SP, p.178). In this respect, *Living Quarters* is little different to *Lovers* and *The Loves of Cass McGuire* where different stage spaces are devised to communicate distinct actions and addresses.

Sir's status as a narrator to the main action - which is suggested by his initial address - would imply a return on Friel's part to the figure of Private Gar in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Private's role, as mentioned earlier, could be defined as that of narrator while the other protagonists, including Public, play to Private's narrative. When, in the early play, S.B enters the kitchen, Private narrates his actions, 'The pert little apron is detachable- (*S.B removes apron*) - thank you, Marie Celeste' (SP, p.47) adding, 'Repeat slowly after me: another day over', which S.B goes on to repeat almost automatically. Like Private, Sir narrates the chain of events contained in the ledger and like S.B, the Butler family play to his narration so that when Miriam enters, Sir briefs the audience, 'She has three children. She is thinking of them' (SP, p.183/4) and immediately Miriam, who is thinking aloud, reflects, 'They should be arriving home from school about now' (SP, P.184). Friel had also attempted to develop the narrator figure of Private Gar through the Commentators of *Winners*, but Sir can be more specifically linked to Private because he is endowed with multiple roles. Sir has the power to narrate action in his audience address and also play a key role in the re-enactment of May 24<sup>th</sup>, which takes place in the main performance space.

Like every story that has seven faces (according to Manus Sweeney in *The Gentle Island*), Sir has many dimensions to his character, and not just his obvious role as narrator. As the play progresses, Sir's multiplicity of roles starts to emerge and it is his complete awareness of his diversity which leads him to compare himself in a cocky manner to 'a human Hansard who knows those tiny little details' (SP, p.178). He has, firstly, the power to address the

like to do is organize those recollections for you, impose a structure on them' (SP, p.178). Finally, Sir is in a position to engage personally with the Butlers outside his role as arbiter of the ledger.<sup>28</sup> But it is not just Sir that has many sides to his character. The Butler family's main role is to enact the events of May 24<sup>th</sup> but they also have to be viewed like Pirandellian characters<sup>29</sup> outside May 24<sup>th</sup> in their wider context as figures that exist and communicate with each other in the present moment that the theatre audience occupy. Therefore, *Living Quarters* is a play in which singularity of roles is undermined because roles tend to bleed into one another, and the multiplicity of a protagonist's roles is in line with an objective that is evident in all Friel's work throughout his career regarding multiple representation on characters, actions and events, something that will be focused on in the next section.

In *Living Quarters*, Sir's combination of roles as player, narrator and addressee endow him with enormous authority. Through his initial address to the audience, Sir determines the audience's first impressions of the Butler family before they appear, just in the way that Andy Tracey had the advantageous position of shaping the audience's first impressions of his mother-in-law through his opening audience address in *Losers*. But although Sir is a powerful figure, he also abuses his position as interpreter of the ledger's events by taking great pleasure in jeering and undermining the Butlers, hence the fact that he is quick to remind Uncle Tom that "they go to him for advice, not because they respect him, consider him wise" (SP, p.180), something which sparks immediate indignation in Tom who insists that the Butlers love him. Sir ignores Tom and tells him to get on with performing his role, leaving the latter to accept that Sir controls everything. Sir also takes pleasure in undermining and doubting the others which is why he antagonises

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<sup>28</sup> Sir's engagement with the Butlers outside his role of narrator is evident in Act Two as Miriam recalls a story from her childhood when Ben accidentally drank Uncle Tom's whiskey at a family picnic at Portnoo. As she does so, Sir 'listens to the story and reacts to it as the others do' (SP, p.223), a sign that at this point in the play, Sir has cast off his role as narrator and arbiter, something that is reiterated as he tells Charlie that he will ignore the fact that they have 'taken a few liberties' (SP, p.225). Sir even joins the family in offering his own opinions on Portnoo, 'A pretty place, Portnoo' (SP, p.226). But the family are wary in Sir's presence when he tries to act friendly to them, and consequently they insist on beginning the action again.

<sup>29</sup> In Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* the characters are aware of their roles in Pirandello's wider play as well as the inner play in which they re-enact their life story.

him for advice, not because they respect him, consider him wise" (SP, p.180), something which sparks immediate indignation in Tom who insists that the Butlers love him. Sir ignores Tom and tells him to get on with performing his role, leaving the latter to accept that Sir controls everything. Sir also takes pleasure in undermining and doubting the others which is why he antagonises Helen by suggesting that her 'discipline may not hold' (SP, p.183), and there is also something sneering about the way that '*Sir looks at the audience and spreads his hands*' (SP, P.184) when Miriam exclaims that the children would love some of the ice cream she has just bought. However, the miraculous thing is that the Butler family generally accept Sir's autonomy, and like lapdogs, they become wholly dependent and subservient to him: 'You're in command Sir' (SP, P.207). Therefore, any attempt to rebel against Sir is usually short-lived, which is why Anna eventually finds herself following Sir's orders to 'do it later exactly as it's here [in the ledger]. Now go back to your room,' (SP, p.203) when she tries to disrupt the order of the play. Even in Act Two, when Friel instructs in a stage direction that '*none of the characters obeys the conventions of the set*' (SP, p.217), their dissent is again silenced with the arrival of Sir. The patronising and demeaning way in which Sir addresses the other protagonists forces the audience to question whether Sir is ultimate arbiter or simply ultimate bully and abuser of power. Moreover, it is also worth considering if Friel's portrayal of Sir is a hint at his own personal feelings on the tyrannical position of the director in the theatre at large.

If the protagonists in *Living Quarters* have various roles in various actions, Friel pushes another convention of the theatre by shattering the perception of a single audience being addressed throughout the play, something that he had started to probe in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and *Crystal and Fox*. Sir claims that 'There are no spectators, Charlie. Only participants' (SP, p.181) as Charlie tries to sneak onstage and watch the re-enactment of May 24<sup>th</sup>. Not only does Sir's statement remind the theatre audience that their function in the theatre is to participate rather than spectate, but there is also the indication that many audiences participate in the play whether it is the theatre audience, Charlie himself, or the other protagonists in the play who all act at various times as an audience. For instance, when Frank asks Helen for help with an

after-dinner speech, Helen rhymes off an improvised speech during which Frank assumes the role of audience by responding to her jests, "to this country and our own illustrious army.", 'Hear, hear; hear, hear.', "As for my own paltry part-", 'Silence! Silence!' (SP, p.194). This latter dialogue reflects Sir's belief that an audience must participate, something that is again highlighted as the Butler family gather around and play audience to Tom's stories about Canon Bradshaw in Act Two. Later when Frank discovers his wife's adultery, he states, 'I'm not addressing you, Sir; I'm not addressing them; I suppose I'm not addressing anyone' (SP, p.240), a sign that there are many audiences that could potentially be addressed. In addition to various real audiences, the audience can also be imaginary, such as when Ben rehearses to an imaginary audience what he will say when he sees his father after a long estrangement. But whether the audience is real or imaginary Friel is determined to stress that everyone is a player and a participant in the action of the theatre which is why Sir asks Charlie to leave when he tries to defend himself as a guilty spectator, 'Fascinating to watch people- observe them, you know... as long as you're not involved yourself' (SP, p.209). *Living Quarters* stands out among the other plays analysed because there are always various real and imagined audiences being addressed by a range of addressees in various stage spaces, where in other plays examined there is, generally speaking, just one protagonist addressing their audience.

Throughout the plays discussed in this chapter, it is clear that Cass, Andy and Fox's audience address allow them to voice the past and there is an extent to which audience address in *Living Quarters* follows the same pattern because audience address in Act One is also defined by remembrance of the past. Despite Helen's insistence (in tones similar to Cass), that 'The past's over, Father. And forgotten' (SP, p.194), the Butler family's remembrance of the past always appears to be a dominant concern of audience address whether it is Sir's address to the theatre audience or Helen's after-dinner address to an imaginary audience played by Frank. Even Sir reminds the Butlers that 'it is the memories of those lost possibilities that has exercised you endlessly since' (SP, p.206). Remembrance of the past can also be seen as going beyond May 24<sup>th</sup>, bearing in mind that Act One is littered with Frank's daughters'

memories of their mother and their childhood escapades – events which could be regarded as offstage given that the audience never witnesses them onstage.

The concern with the past in the audience addresses of Act One - and also in the other works that have been discussed so far - is somewhat undermined in Act Two of *Living Quarters* as Friel reworks audience address to voice a future. The addressees disassociate themselves from the past by preoccupying themselves with the future as the action builds up to the play's climax when Frank shoots himself, having discovered that Anna, his new wife, has had an affair with his son while he was in the Middle East. Not long into the act, Anna tells Ben that she will move to New Jersey and then onto San Francisco when he asks her what she will do 'when it's all over' (*SP*, p.218). This sudden concern for the future is somewhat disorientating for the theatre audience because they are unsure as to what the 'it' refers to, before they find out that Anna and Ben are talking about life after Frank's suicide and also life after the re-enactment of May 24<sup>th</sup> has been recreated. Memories of the past are increasingly shunned when Sir and Frank silence Ben despite his attempts to describe his own memories of a childhood picnic, and even Ben himself rejects the ties to the past in his reference to the Butlers' 'bloody boring reminiscences' (*SP*, p.229). The most obvious abandonment of past recollections comes from Anna as she explains to Frank the reason for her affair with his son: 'I tried ... to maintain you in my mind...but you kept slipping away... and then I could remember nothing' (*SP*, p.238). Anna's speech implies the limitation of memory as a means of keeping the past real, which is why she embarks on an affair with Ben so as to repossess, unsuccessfully, her memory of Ben's father. The final repudiation of the past in favour of the future is highlighted when Sir concludes the tale of May 24<sup>th</sup> by imparting how 'Helen and Tina flew to London, where they now live in different flats and seldom meet ... Ben ...has been jailed twice for drunk and disorderly behaviour. Father Tom ...is living in a nursing-home... has difficulty walking and spends most of his time in bed' (*SP*, p.245). By the play's end, the Butlers' future is arguably as grim as that which both sets of *Lovers* face but the Butlers' concern with the future is in complete contention with the focus on the past in the play's re-enactment of May 24<sup>th</sup>. Friel

deliberately uses audience address to demarcate various time frames, so that while the device represents the past in Act One, the future is the concern of the addresses in Act Two. Moreover, the tension that is created by the play's representation of past and future can be viewed as just another tension in addition to the many tensions in the plays discussed between past and present and on and offstage. It is these tensions that contribute to Friel's philosophy of a plural rather than singular perspective on action, time and space.

*Living Quarters* is a play that puts into question the singularity of action, audience and the protagonist's roles, but it can also be viewed not just as a play about performing a play, but a play concerned with the act of audience participation, and in this respect, the play explores audience consciousness just like *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. Friel also presents the theatre audience with a mirror image of the theatre so that as they watch the play, they are aware of their participatory role as one of many audiences that are being addressed.

Before leaping forward in time and looking at the late play, *The Yalta Game*, I want to stress that one of the prime functions of audience address is to communicate the past. In some cases a visual representation of the past accompanies the address, such as the Butler family's May 24<sup>th</sup>, Gar's courting of Kate Doogan and Andy Tracey's difficulties with his mother-in-law, which are all acted out onstage. But the past that is conveyed through address can also be offstage and cannot therefore be visible to the theatre audience, such as Cass's fifty-two years in New York, Mag and Joe's fatal boat trip or Frank Butler's service in the Middle East. In *The Yalta Game*, the final play in this examination, Friel pursues this latter preoccupation with invisible action but reworks it to give it a new twist and in doing so he takes invisible action, which is normally a characteristic of offstage theatre, to new limits by placing it onstage.

In *The Yalta Game*, Friel considers invisible action in the present that takes place not offstage but instead onstage, something that becomes immediately apparent when the stage set, which is almost Beckettian in its sparseness, is considered – a table and a few chairs. The minimal set forces the audience to

imagine that the town square of Yalta lies before them as Gurov opens the action by addressing an invisible waiter. Notably, this is the first time in a Friel play that invisible and visible merge so explicitly onstage as a real protagonist addresses an imaginary one, where up until this point in Friel's career, invisible action can essentially be regarded as offstage territory. Throughout the play, invisible action continues to bleed into visible action as the audience are asked to imagine the protagonists in other imaginary settings in addition to the town square, such as a waterfall and train station. Moreover, unlike the other plays examined, with the exception of *Crystal and Fox*, audience address does not take place in the usual downstage position but instead both dialogue between the play's protagonists and address to the audience takes place simultaneously upstage. But despite appearances, Friel is not so much abandoning in this late play the stringent spatial distinctions between on and offstage and visible and invisible action that have characterised most of the plays in this chapter; instead he is trying something new, playing about with the now well established technique of audience address to further push theatrical boundaries.

Not only does Gurov's address draw attention to Friel's assay with visible and non-visible space, but it also has the effect of throwing the audience into crisis because they cannot figure out whom he is talking to when there is clearly nobody there. Considering that Gurov has addressed an imaginary waiter, the theatre audience even wonder if the audience that he speaks to is not themselves but an invisible one just like Fox Melarkey's offstage tent audience in *Crystal and Fox*. However, the confusion caused amongst the audience is relieved when they discover that Gurov is simply demonstrating to them 'The Yalta Game'. In this game, Gurov scrutinises and makes up fictions about the lives of Yalta's tourists from the comfort of his coffee table, but as Gurov watches his fellow tourists, the theatre audience watch Gurov's romance unfolding with another tourist, Anna, a young wife holidaying alone. The dramatic irony is that by watching the action in front, the theatre audience are themselves seriously participating in the Yalta Game by observing and

scrutinising a world that is not real – both the world of Yalta<sup>30</sup> and also the wider world of the theatre. Gurov reminds the audience of this by naming Anna's 'imaginary dog' (TPA, p.9) Yalta, because like the place, the dog is not real. By using 'The Yalta Game' as a metaphor for the activity of watching a theatrical performance, Friel is therefore pursuing the agenda of *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and *Living Quarters* by making the audience aware of their role as an active participant in the play.

*The Yalta Game* can also be compared to *Living Quarters* because there is more than one protagonist that addresses the audience as both Gurov and Anna have this device at their disposal. Audience address is used in the play to explain the transition from the world of action and dialogue to the world of thought so that when Anna first enters, she calls to the imaginary waiter, '**One coffee, please. Black**', before confiding to the audience, 'I sent my husband a telegram when I got here two days ago: DEAR NIKOLAI, ARRIVED SAFELY' (TPA, p.9). The protagonists direct address to the audience also allows for a change in time and place so that one minute Anna and Gurov are sitting in the town square delivering their private thoughts to the audience, and the next they are engaged in dialogue with each other at the Oreanda Waterfall, as Gurov demonstrates: 'But the beginning is always...joyous. And who can resist that? Why should it be resisted? (loudly) **Isn't it an impressive waterfall?**' (TPA, p.14). Gurov's direct address in this latter quotation not only provides the transition between two places - the square and the waterfall – but it also connects the time periods of the present time at the waterfall with Gurov's thoughts of a past as he reflects on the joys of the early stages of his current and past affairs. In this respect, audience address in *The Yalta Game* is little different to the other plays considered in emphasising the past in the present time of the play and marking the distinction between action and thought.

Audience address in *The Yalta Game* is little different to *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and *Winners* because it places the audience in a position of power

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<sup>30</sup> Friel's Yalta is an unreal place because it is not actually visible to the theatre audience and is only known to the audience through Gurov's fictions.

and insight when the addressees confide their inner thoughts and feelings to them. A case in point is the morning after Gurov has spent the night at Anna's hotel, when the latter is overcome with regret and is convinced that she is a fallen woman. During her outburst, Gurov is sympathetic and reassures her but his true feelings about her emotional state surface when he addresses the audience, 'the emotion was genuine. Completely. Maybe a shade... theatrical' (*TPA*, p.18). Gurov's address not only indicates that he thinks Anna is overreacting, but the audience are also quick to detect the irony in his statement because it is only natural that Anna's reaction is 'theatrical' when she exists as an unreal entity in the world of the theatre. Gurov's inner thoughts are imparted to the audience later when he confesses, 'how could I tell her that this would come to an end one day?' (*TPA*, p.31), and in return the audience witnesses Anna's inward conflict between her doubts and simultaneous infatuation with Gurov. Anna and Gurov's addresses are crucial in providing the audience with perspective on events that would otherwise be impossible.

Although addresses in the other works considered in this chapter provide vision into the inner life, it could be argued that there is a particularly striking parallel between the couple in *The Yalta Game* and Gar O'Donnell's Public and Private persona in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* The reason for this is that unlike the audience addresses in the other plays that have been examined, Gurov and Anna's addresses demarcate very specifically the black and white dimensions of their public and private personas, and despite Gurov's insistence that such realms are 'never as distinct as we think' (*TPA*, p.30), the distinction in public dialogue and private address seems even more marked because they are the only two characters in the whole play, or at least the only two that are actually visible to the theatre audience. By contrast, Cass, Fox and Sir still play up to their confident public personas even when they address their audience, where Gurov and Anna's address, like Private Gar's, always reveal, '*the man within, the conscience ... the secret thoughts*' (*SP*, P.27), and it is only when the dialogue resumes between them that the public front resurfaces. Gurov's address is most telling of a return by Friel to the alter ego of his early career when he reveals that everything in the whole play has been

an illusion: 'there never was a Marino Hotel. You're joking...no town square. No town square? All a fiction. All imagined. Oh come on!' 'was there ever an Anna?...That's unfair to her and to you. Is it?...You're a callous bastard, you know that? I do know that' (*TPA*, p.23/24). The battle between two selves in Gurov's latter dialogue mirrors Gar's inner conflict between Public who longs for a new life in Philadelphia and Private who cannot cut the ties with home.

From this comparison between an early and late play, it seems that there is an enormous temptation to conclude that Friel has come full circle in his employment of audience address by simply regurgitating the figures of his early career in a bid to address his audience in his late work with the same impact that Gar 'supposedly'<sup>31</sup> made on the critics in 1964. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Firstly, although Anna and Gurov's public and private sides are reminiscent of the Gar figure, it must also be remembered that unlike the latter, Private never actually addresses the theatre audience and it was not until *The Loves of Cass McGuire* that such a device was properly implemented. Secondly, the play can be seen as bearing elements of most of the plays considered in this chapter and not just *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Like most plays, including the ones that have not been mentioned such as *The Freedom of the City*, *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*, audience address in *The Yalta Game* can be traced back to *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, in which the audience are made highly conscious of themselves because they are not sure at the play's opening if Gurov is addressing them or people in the Yalta Square. Moreover, like both parts of *Lovers*, the structure of *The Yalta Game* also follows an unavailing alternation between audience address and dialogue, while Gurov's address to an imaginary audience in the Yalta Square reminds the theatre audience of Fox Melarkey's address to both his travelling show audience and the imagined audience at the end of *Crystal and Fox*. Thirdly, *The Yalta Game* can be viewed as departing from any former ground by pursuing an exploration not only of action that takes place offstage but also invisible action that cannot be perceived onstage.

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<sup>31</sup> Critics such as Pine and Deane who focus especially on *Philadelphia* as Friel's first international success have, relatively speaking, given little attention to the play that immediately followed it.

In the last chapter the view was put that Friel's decision to implement audience address in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* had been the great breakthrough of his early career and the fact that such a technique has been used by Friel for nearly forty years after the first production of *The Loves of Cass McGuire* on Broadway in 1966 is evidence alone of its centrality to his dramaturgy. In his later experimentations with audience address, Friel reworked the device in an attempt to push further theatrical boundaries so that in addition to the theatre audience, various audiences such as imaginary and invisible ones were addressed onstage, particularly in *Crystal and Fox*, *Living Quarters* and *The Yalta Game*, while the audience addresses in all the plays considered can be seen to mark the transition from the world of action to thought. Meanwhile, in *Living Quarters*, Friel is keen to stress that there is not just one character addressing the audience, even though first impressions of Sir appear contrary, but in accordance with Friel's belief in plurality rather than a fixed, singular representation, all the characters can be regarded as addressees in their own rights. Also in *Living Quarters* the concern for the future in the addresses of Sir and the Butlers demonstrates a break with previous plays where a character addresses the audience to specifically disclose a past. In the late play, *The Yalta Game*, the audience's surveillance of the theatre performance is mirrored by the protagonists who also divulge the lives of the invisible Yalta tourists around them, while audience address is manipulated by Friel to highlight the spatial boundaries and tension when invisible action, which is typically an offstage characteristic, takes place onstage. In all of these works, audience address navigates between the tensions that it creates between past and present, action and thought, reality and imagination, visible and invisible action and on and offstage space. Finally, by permitting his protagonist to directly address the audience, Friel is reminding the audience in all the works discussed that as they sit offstage in the auditorium it is they that give the dramatist's art meaning, otherwise there would be no performance. All Friel's later experimentations with audience address can be linked back in their origins to *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. The technique, which permits a protagonist to ignore the conventions of the play

by stepping out of their roles and the play's action, was first used as a device to:

make the audience participate actively in what was happening on stage and in the performance'<sup>32</sup>

as they sit offstage in the auditorium, and in this regard, Cass's audience address meant that Friel could explore various spaces outside the main performance space onstage. It is from this perspective that the technique was developed and remodelled in subsequent works.

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<sup>32</sup> Kantor, *op.cit.*, p. 139.

## THE LOOKING GLASS

The invisible fourth wall that separates the theatre audience from the main stage can be seen as something of a window through which the world of the theatre can be seen. But through the single object that is the stage window, Friel is able to further explore the limits of on and offstage space in his drama, much in the way that Beckett had employed the window in *Endgame*.<sup>33</sup> Friel has experimented with various devices to explore offstage space - for instance the baby alarm of *Aristocrats* - but since the early work, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, the onstage window has been used to demarcate rather than dissolve the boundary between visible onstage and invisible offstage space. The spatial divide created by the window means that the audience are restricted in their vision of the play's action and have to depend on Friel's protagonists to communicate action that takes place offstage in the immediate moment of the performance.

*The Loves of Cass McGuire* was the first play that featured a window as an object designed to differentiate stage space. The directions for the stage set require that 'The back wall consists of glass and French windows which open out to a formal garden where a Cupid statue (illuminated) is frozen in an absurd and impossible contortion' (LCM, p.8). The window is used to make another world visible beyond the main stage space, to the theatre audience as well as to the play's protagonists. The fact that the theatre audience can see into this garden space means that the space is not actually 'offstage', however, this garden beyond the window can still be viewed as an outer space removed and partitioned off by glass from the action of the main stage so that while two actions of the outer and main performance space are being revealed to an audience, the two spaces do not bleed into each other. Friel's decision to reveal a garden outside the boundaries of the main performance space is fitting because a garden is a fixture of the outside world as well as a symbol of the

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<sup>33</sup> In *Endgame*, two small windows on the back wall of the stage divide on and offstage space. The audience therefore relies on Clov's 'brief laugh' at the start of the play to indicate what may be in the offstage space (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p.11.

natural world but the irony is that this garden has been formalised and the absurdity of the statue would imply that man's intervention is not always for the good of nature. More to the point, the garden may appear to have been artificially constructed to represent an Eden paradise, in keeping with the residential home's title - Eden House - but instead the garden is a reflection of ridicule and vulgarity on closer inspection.

The Eden House garden located on the back wall of the main stage might seem like a somewhat vulgar device by Friel in that there is every hint of a desire to explore offstage space but yet it is undermined by two things: firstly, the audience can actually see this offstage space, and secondly, a space can only come into being if there is action taking place in it but this garden space is only used on two occasions throughout the play. Attention is first drawn to the window that looks onto the garden when Cass is sitting in her bedroom after her opening barney with Harry and '*Ingram appears outside French windows. After a few seconds he is joined by Costello*' (LCM, p.17). This is the first time in the play that the garden space is inhabited even though the audience have still been able to physically see the garden from the beginning of the play. It is significant that the first time the audience perceive Trilbe and Ingram, they can be found standing outside the main stage space because it indicates that they inhabit a world of fantasy that Cass does not belong to, or at least not just yet. Trilbe and Ingram's occupation in a separate space that none of the other protagonists can access is reiterated by the fact that no other protagonists except Ingram and Trilbe appear behind the glass window in this outer garden space throughout the play. The point is further proven when the space is used for a second time at the end of Act Two when Cass goes back into the common room after Pat Quinn, a fellow Eden resident, verbally assaults her and '*Through the French windows we can see Trilbe: she beckons to Cass*' (LCM, p.49). At this point, Cass is left standing between Trilbe's calling voice from the garden and the theatre audience in the auditorium before ignoring both and quickly absorbing herself in the memory of her past days as a waitress. Cass's ignorance of Trilbe standing in the outer garden space reiterates to the theatre audience that the garden is separate from the main performance space. In looking at the stage window in *The Loves of Cass*

*McGuire*, it is important to recognise that even though the visibility of the Eden House garden prevents it from actually being 'offstage', Friel's use of an outer space beyond the back wall of the stage would indicate an early desire to explore stage space, and from here he would further develop action of the offstage space in subsequent works involving a stage window.

Before looking at the way that the stage window discloses the activity of the actual offstage space, attention can be drawn to the stage window in *Aristocrats* which like the garden window in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* allows both the protagonists and audience to perceive a space that is located somewhat apart from the main stage. The stage directions require that the lawn stretch across the front of the stage but halts 'at a tall grey gable with uncurtained windows.' (SP, p.250), and in a recent Abbey theatre production<sup>34</sup>, Claire played the piano from a music room behind veiled windows, so that contrary to Friel's intention, the music room remained separate from the main onstage performance space. Although Friel's stage directions do not indicate any room other than the study, the music room in the Abbey production can be compared with the garden space in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* because in both plays the audience can actually see another space separate from the main performance space through the stage window. The fact that the audience can actually see into the music room of Ballybeg Hall means that like the Eden House garden in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, it cannot be considered 'offstage' but it is a space somewhat outside the spatial barriers of the main stage. Offstage space and activity, by contrast, is defined by its invisibility, something that Friel makes crystal clear by his use of the baby alarm later in this play as the means by which the offstage action of Father's bedroom can be communicated.

The garden space in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and the music room in *Aristocrats* can be paralleled with framed space in other contemporary theatre, particularly that of the Polish director, Tadeusz Kantor. In *Today is My*

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<sup>34</sup> Abbey Theatre Production, Dublin, January 2004.

*Birthday*, his last work for the stage, Kantor investigates stage space by using three framed spaces known as his Room/Inn of Imagination/Memory. Like the garden in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and the music room in *Aristocrats*, these framed spaces cannot be considered offstage because the theatre audience can see the action that takes place inside the frames. In these works, Friel and Kantor probe the margins of various spaces onstage, but Kantor's work indicates a dissolution of spatial distinctions given that in *Today is My Birthday*, the inhabitants of the framed space - Self-portrait and the Double - can in fact jump out of their framed space into the main performance space. By contrast in Friel's two plays, the margins of various spaces onstage are reinforced and stressed, considering that Claire O'Donnell plays the piano from the window of the music room in *Aristocrats* and Trilbe and Ingram stand behind the window in the garden in *Cass*, which means that in both cases, the protagonists cannot physically engage with the main performance space. Friel's stringent spatial boundaries mean that Claire has to leave the music room to be perceivable to the audience while Trilbe can only beckon to Cass through the window rather than talk to her. Although Friel is more concerned with reinforcing spatial boundaries, while Kantor's experiments with framed space reflect a dissolution of spatial boundaries onstage, both men probe the limits of onstage space through a frame in their respective works.

Friel's initial investigations into visible stage space in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* underwent radical development five years later in *The Gentle Island*. In this play, Friel employs the stage window as a device to demarcate spatial margins and also convey offstage action that is not visible to the theatre audience in the play's immediate moment. The stage window in the play is located on the sidewall that divides the Sweeney cottage and the stage street outside rather than the back wall position of the Eden House window in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. Although the audience can still see the street space that the side window looks out to, they still rely on the reportage of Sarah Sweeney to convey the offstage events that take place beyond the visible space. In this respect, the play can be compared to Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* or O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* because the events that happen outside the stage window in the offstage space can only be related to the theatre audience

through particular protagonists. The audience's reliance on a protagonist's reportage in *The Gentle Island* is a pattern that is evident in later works such as *Translations*.

In *The Gentle Island*, the window is really only drawn to the audience's attention in the latter stages of the play after Sarah tells her father-in-law, Manus, that she saw her husband, Philly, naked in the boathouse with Shane, a visitor to the island. Prior to this event the window is barely used but with the same token Friel indicates in an opening stage direction that Sarah 'occasionally ... glances quickly out the window and down towards the harbour' (*GI*, p.11), an indication that when used, the window is a surveillance tool. The opening directions reflect little distinction in space as Friel simply instructs that one third of the stage is allocated to the cottage while the rest is the stage street outside, but 'There are no walls separating the kitchen area from the street' (*GI*, p.11), which means that actual spatial demarcations are as invisible as offstage action itself. In the scene after Sarah insinuates to Manus her husband's homosexual actions, Sarah can be found 'looking out the window' (*GI*, p.62) observing and commenting on Shane's approach to the house from the boathouse: 'He's coming. He's alone' (*GI*, p.62). The audience can only see Shane in his last approach to the house but Sarah's report of Shane's actions offstage creates suspense and tension: 'He's coming. He's alone... he's stopped now. He's looking about him at everything clear in the moonlight.' (*GI*, p.62). Not only are the audience relying on Sarah's observations to relate the actions of an offstage world that they cannot see, but they are also being offered what she imagines to be Shane's private thoughts: 'He's saying to himself, "My God, it's heavenly"' (*GI*, p.62), leaving the audience to question the reliability of Sarah's fervent speculations. The build-up to Shane's entrance continues, 'Shhh! Quiet! I think - aye, he's singing' and Friel instructs that 'In the distance right we can hear Shane singing "Oh, Susanna!" Very faintly, getting louder slowly' (*GI*, p.63). The more Sarah describes the person outside, the more the tension builds because the offstage singing alone confirms that it is Shane. Friel uses the window in this play to communicate the action of an offstage space but in doing so he also places the audience at the mercy of the protagonist that looks through it

and interprets its events, where in the previous works that have been deliberated, the audience could see for themselves the offstage action in the space beyond the window.

In *Translations*, Friel continues his inquiry into offstage space via the stage window. The window is located on the right hand wall of the schoolroom to prevent the theatre audience from looking through it into the offstage space, and like the cottage window in *The Gentle Island*, the schoolroom window is barely used until the latter stages of the play. The window is significant because the play's main activity - the English construction of the Ordnance Survey - takes place in the offstage world of Ballybeg that the window looks onto. For maps to be constructed for the survey, Irish place names are translated into their English form by Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland, with the help of the local schoolmaster's son, Owen O'Donnell, but the disappearance of Yolland towards the end of the play forces Lancey to order evictions and the killings of livestock until Yolland is found. Just before Lancey explains this drastic course of action, Doalty enters the classroom and tells his fellow classmates that fifty soldiers are already 'prodding every inch of the ground' (*T*, p.570, and he continues to offer his own commentary on the events happening outside as he looks out the window '*(With sudden excessive interest in the scene outside.)* Cripes, they're crawling all over the place!' (*T*, p.59). Doalty's reportage keeps the theatre audience more interested in the action that is taking place offstage rather than the action onstage, but at the same time, the audience are wary that they are depending on Doalty to communicate the action of the offstage space. Lancey enters and Doalty continues to look '*out the window all through Lancey's announcements*', casually asking Owen to 'Tell him his whole camp's on fire' (*T*, p.40). Doalty can see an outside world, again like Rebecca in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, and the tension rises because the audience cannot see what is going on. The activity of the offstage space becomes the preoccupation of the classroom onstage in the way that Shane's offstage approach to the Sweeney cottage preoccupies the onstage action in *The Gentle Island*.

Friel's reworking of the stage window in *Dancing at Lughnasa* means that the device must be viewed differently to *The Gentle Island* and *Translations* where its main purpose is to convey action that is taking place offstage. The reason for this derives from the fact that the window can be viewed primarily as a looking glass on the offstage space of the past, in addition to providing an outlook on the offstage action of the present moment of 1936 that the play dwells on, where the sweeping tide of modernity and the Industrial Revolution brings change that will disturb the rural Ballybeg world that looms precariously outside the Mundy window. The stage window's key role in depicting the past is most obvious when Kate comes home from a trip to Ballybeg and relates to her sisters that she saw Maggie's old pal, Bernie O'Donnell, in the village. Maggie proceeds to remember nostalgically a dance competition that Bernie lost in the past, which left her stunned and refusing to speak to anyone. Having voiced the memory, Friel requires that Maggie '*stands motionless, staring out of the window, seeing nothing*' (DL, p.20). Maggie's inability to see anything as she looks out the window is a sign that she is blind to the forces of modernisation that lurk outside the cottage window, but although Maggie does not see any physical activity outside, the window still allows her to look into the space that is her past before the wireless tunes in a few minutes later and Maggie's features '*become animated by a look of defiance, of aggression; a crude mask of happiness*' (DL, p.21), as the past is dissolved into the present. Friel's use of the window in *Dancing at Lughnasa* to convey the past that is not visible to the audience, is a technique that Friel had used in *Losers* - the second part of his fourth play, *Lovers* - where the audience discovers Andy Tracey at the opening of the play '*watching nothing*' (L, p.51) through glass, before he goes on to disclose details of his past, which centre around his difficulties in conducting a marriage under the nose of an interfering mother-in-law. Unlike the cottage window that Maggie looks through, the glass that Andy is looking into may not belong to a window - but the lenses of his binoculars instead - however, the principle is still the same as *Dancing at Lughnasa* because there is the suggestion that although Andy appears to be watching nothing, he can still perceive the offstage action of the past through the glass of his binoculars, rather than simply the backyard that he is sitting in.

Friel's use of the window to reveal the action of the past in *Dancing at Lughnasa* also brings to mind Kantor's *Today is My Birthday* during which the characters of Kantor's past such as his family members, his Self-portrait and also characters from past theatre productions are witnessed by the theatre audience in his three framed spaces as well as in the main performance space. More poignantly, in Kantor's earlier work, *The Dead Class*, an actual window is used to depict the past as opposed to the frames in *Today is My Birthday*. *The Dead Class* concerns a group of 'Old people' that undergo a transferral from the past to the present, one of whom is aptly described as the 'Woman Behind the Window'. This figure looks back to her childhood through the prop that characterises her description - a window that she holds in front of her throughout the performance. 'Woman Behind the Window' is little different to Maggie Mundy in that both women look back to the past through the window frame, but the difference is that in Kantor's play, the Old People's pasts are actually re-enacted onstage where in Friel's play, the events of Maggie's past remain offstage, hence, unseen. Both Kantor and Friel investigate the past and present through frames in their works but where Kantor highlights a past that is visible, Friel can be seen to be much more concerned with using the stage window to explore an offstage past or a present that is not visually perceivable onstage.

The stage window has evolved variously throughout Friel's career, but it is still a device that reflects his overall belief that the theatre should represent various perspectives on action of the past and present that take place offstage. The stage window can also be considered as a spatial marker between off and onstage actions, and this is evident in early experiments in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* where the Eden House window acts as a demarcation line between the main performance space and a visible garden space occupying the back wall. However, in *The Gentle Island* and *Translations*, Friel specifically employs the stage window to distinguish between invisible offstage and visible onstage action. The audience therefore becomes dependent on the play's protagonists to communicate offstage action that is not visible to the audience, and at the same time questions of the protagonist's reliability are

invariably raised. In the later work, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the window provides a view not just on offstage activity but, more importantly, on the past, hence the play's absorption with remembrance. It is to similar effect that music can be examined in the next section.

## MUSICAL SOUNDSCAPES

'I look on my manuscript as an orchestral score'<sup>35</sup>

– Brian Friel

In the last chapter, a tangible fourth wall object was examined to distinguish action of various stage space, but the abstract, invisible sound world of music can also be investigated to provide another viewpoint on the margins of time and space, bearing in mind Fintan O'Toole's observations that 'what music and dance do is to take time and mark it.'<sup>36</sup> Music is employed most often by Friel as an instrument to explore space, something that is evident in at least ten of nearly thirty plays, but for the purposes of this chapter, attention will be devoted to works from his early career such as *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, to *Aristocrats* and *Dancing at Lughnasa* from his later middle period, and finally his most recent work for the stage, *Performances*. Through the reoccurring character of music, Friel gives the audience a double perspective in defining the boundary of on and offstage space and also the past and present so that music, in Friel's handling, can be viewed as a language more powerful than the spoken word.

Elmer Andrews claims that 'Music fills the silence between ... past and present, helping to evoke that lost past ... to dissolve the intractable present, and recreate the world.'<sup>37</sup> Not only is Andrews proposing that music actually dissolves the boundary between the present and the past but in the process the present becomes devoid of its own identity. Although it is certainly true to say that music evokes the past, Andrews must be challenged because he fails to appreciate that Friel's use of music as a spatial marker actually highlights the identity of the present world onstage as well as the offstage past. In fact, Friel uses simultaneity to establish a twofold outlook on the offstage past and

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<sup>35</sup> Brian Friel, 'Self-Portrait', in *Aquarius*, 5 (1972), p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> Fintan O'Toole, *op. cit.*, p. 213-14.

<sup>37</sup> Elmer Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

onstage present in which the boundaries must remain in perception, rather than become broken down as Andrews argues.

In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* – Friel's first stage success - the onstage action takes place on the eve of Gar O'Donnell's departure from his Ballybeg homeland for a new life in Philadelphia. Throughout the play, Public Gar's alter ego, Private Gar, forces him to confront memories of the past regarding his late mother, his unrequited love, Kate, and also his father, S.B. O'Donnell, whose relationship with his son has suffered a long-term communication breakdown from a mutual embarrassment at exposing emotions. As Public absorbs himself with packing his suitcase, the first movement of Mendelssohn's violin concerto plays onstage from the record player. Private is immediately transported by the music from the present moment onstage that the theatre audience also occupy, to the past that takes place prior to the play's beginning as he nostalgically remembers his mother. Accompanied by the concerto, Private indulges in reverie that is distinctly lyrical in tone: 'She was small, Madge says, and wild, and young, Madge says, from a place called Bailtefree beyond the mountains; and her eyes were bright, and her hair was loose' (SP, p.37). At this point, Public attempts to exorcise the atmosphere of wistful remembrance that is created by Private's dialogue by replacing the Mendelssohn record with a lively ceildhe number so as to pull Private back into Public's present moment. But although the ceildh music is a far cry from the Mendelssohn concerto, Public Gar is powerless to prevent the music evoking the invisible action of the past as Private reminds him that the celidhe piece 'was Katie's tune' (SP, p.38), the girl Gar wanted to marry until her parents encouraged her to marry someone else.

Music is also used later in the play in an attempt to unite the past with the present when Private attempts to communicate a happy childhood memory to his father so as to alleviate the deadlock in their relationship before he emigrates. Public plays the second movement of Mendelssohn's violin concerto on the record player while Private rushes up to S.B. in a last bid to bond with S.B. and exclaims, 'Listen! ... D'you know what the music says?(To S.B.) It says that once upon a time a boy and his father sat in a blue

boat on a lake on an afternoon in May... a beauty that has haunted the boy ever since' (SP, p.89). However, music falls short of being able to disclose this past memory to S.B because the latter has no awareness of the invisible Private addressing him in the present moment, neither is he conscious of the Mendelssohn concerto playing, hence the fact that when S.B.'s friend, Canon O'Byrne, asks him if he can hear music, S.B. has to presume it must be Gar's record player because he himself cannot hear it. The failure of Gar's music to recreate the past for the other characters means that the present world, symbolised by communication breakdown, is indirectly highlighted instead.

In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* music playing from the onstage record player induces memories of both an offstage past and the onstage present, but although its influence on the spoken word is evident from the tone of Private's reminiscences, the Mendelssohn concerto is limited because the past that it evokes is only transitory for Private and he is pulled back into the present when he is ignored by Public and also when S.B. fails to hear him. Therefore, contrary to Andrews's belief that the world is recreated when the present is dissolved by the past, Gar's world is not recreated because the past fails to obliterate his present difficult relationship with his father, his frustration with his homeland and his unrequited love. In this respect, the margins of both space and time can be seen as remaining intact rather than merging together. But while onstage music is used in *Philadelphia* to convey both the past and present and also on and offstage space, in Friel's next play, spatial and time boundaries are further reinforced because offstage music is used exclusively as an instrument to sound the past.

In *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Friel utilises music to disclose the offstage pasts that tend to dominate the play's onstage action as Cass follows in the footsteps of Trilbe and Ingram - her fellow residents at the residential home, Eden House - and absorbs herself in her past which is brought to mind by the music of Wagner. In contrast to *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Wagner's music does not originate from any location onstage but it fades in from the offstage space instead and has such an effect on Cass, Trilbe and Ingram that Friel refers to the delivery of their respective pasts as 'rhapsodies', claiming

specifically in the 'Author's note', 'I consider this play to be a concerto in which Cass McGuire is the soloist'. The past in each rhapsody, which is obviously conveyed in poetic tones, has also been so heavily romanticised that it is obvious such things never happened other than in the rhapsodists' imaginations.

Wagner's 'Venusberg' accompanies Trilbe's rhapsody which centres round the life she lived in the past with her husband, Gordon McClelland. She recalls their life in a chateau on the banks of the Loire where they '*had servants and music and wine*' (LCM, p.30), and when Ingram's composes his rhapsody to the sound of Wagner's 'Magic Fire', the tone and content is equally musical. Of his honeymoon, Ingram recollects that 'there was music in my ears, throbbing, heady, godly music' (LCM, p.46) as he kissed and danced with his wife, Stella, until suddenly 'there was no sound' (LCM, p.46) when tragedy struck and Stella was drowned. Ingram's remembrance of music as he recalls the past of his marriage and then the sudden silence when Stella died would signify, on a small scale, the use of music to demarcate different time periods. However, Ingram's tragic version of the past events distorts the actual grimmer truth of the matter because his new wife did not drown but simply ran off with another man two days after their wedding. Meanwhile Cass's rhapsody, which is woven in with Ingram's reading of the story of Tristan and Isolde, is set against the background of the 'Liebestod'. During her rhapsody, Cass recalls her marriage to Jeff Olsen whom she describes dreamingly as being 'manly, with golden hair and kind soft patient eyes' (LCM, p.65), when in reality he was her one-legged drunken employer. Each rhapsody covers up the grim actuality of their lives but such is the power of the music that they regard it as 'truth'. More importantly, the highly lyrical tone of the rhapsodies is suggestive that music is a language of its own which keeps the offstage action of the past the preoccupation of the onstage space, in contrast to *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* where the onstage music reiterated the present moment.

In *Aristocrats*, the use of music to demarcate not just stage space but also the past becomes immediately obvious. From the beginning of the play, Claire O'Donnell of Ballybeg Hall plays Chopin music on an offstage piano, so that as much attention is drawn to offstage action as to the action onstage. The association of Chopin with the past is made clear not long into Act One as Claire plays the Ballade in G minor, and her brother, Casimir, announces: 'when I think of Ballybeg Hall it's always like this: the place filled with music' (*SP*, p.256). Each Chopin piece that is played holds a particular memory so that as Claire plays Chopin's Waltz in A flat major, Casimir goes on to recollect how they used to call it the bedtime waltz 'because as soon as Mother'd begin to play it, we'd have to dash upstairs' (*SP*, p.268). Later on in the play Claire plays Chopin's Sonata No.2 in B flat minor while Casimir recalls further events of the past such as Yeats's visit to the Hall and also the day his father told him he would never succeed in life. So what Friel is doing is using offstage music as an instrument first of all to make known the existence of a space beyond the main stage from where the music plays, and secondly the playing of Chopin reveals action of the past that cannot be seen. But although the Chopin music prompts the audience to acknowledge a world offstage, the past that Casimir has constructed is heavily elaborated on in his own mind, much like the rhapsodists versions of their pasts in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. Casimir's need in the present moment to reconstruct an imagined past based on the actual past is proof that the present action onstage is not 'dissolved', as Andrews's argues, for reasons that also become clear in the second act of the play.

In Act Two, it is the present moment rather than the past that is highlighted as Friel replaces Claire's offstage playing with an onstage tape recording of Chopin. By bringing music onto the main stage, Friel is making a distinction between visible and invisible space, as well as diverting the focus from 'remembrance of things past' (*SP*, p.289) offstage, to the present moment onstage. But while the Chopin recording plays, Eamon, a local from the village married to Claire's sister, Alice, begins to sing a popular verse, 'So Deep is the Night', over the top of the recording. The popular song is a stark

contrast to what Harry White refers to as the 'art music'<sup>38</sup> of Chopin that had been employed to convey the past in Act One, however, it is symbolic because the decline in the standard of the music reflects the present decline of Ballybeg Hall from being a place of high culture in the past to its present state of decay.

But nowhere in the play is the shift from offstage past to onstage present so marked than when the Chopin tape that has been playing is replaced by another tape recording - a violin lullaby played by Claire's sister, Anna, a nun in Africa. As the tape '*plays a few bars of the music*' (SP, p.304), Father, who has been an offstage figure until this point in the play, having been confined to bed by a stroke, enters, hears Anna's music and screams for his absent daughter, so that '*the tape's scream and Father's roar overlap for a few seconds*' (SP, p.304). The pristine offstage Chopin music used in Act One to convey Casimir's fond memories of his mother has now been exchanged for the unintelligible sound produced as Father's roar is combined with the violin. The resulting sound would imply that music itself has become insane and hysterical in an attempt to reflect the present moment of chaos before Father collapses. Moreover, sound has replaced words as order has succumbed to disorder, and the overlap of Anna's violin and Father's roar is also indicative of an onstage battle in sounds in which neither can conquer. At the end of the play, Friel continues to draw attention to the present with onstage singing of another popular song, 'Sweet Alice', and instructs in a stage direction that there should be '*the impression that this afternoon ... may go on indefinitely*' (SP, p.326), very much an indication of a desire to savour the present moment. The play therefore concludes with the rejection of the offstage past symbolised by Chopin and also the rejection of any attempt to look into the future. In *Aristocrats*, Friel uses the performed music of Chopin as a device to distinguish specifically the offstage action of the past, and both popular and recorded music to highlight the present moment onstage. However, not only is Friel using music to demarcate space in *Aristocrats* but the sound world is being asserted as being more powerful than language to convey the past and present.

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<sup>38</sup> Harry White, 'Brian Friel and the Condition of Music', in *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies*, 29, 1 (Spring-Summer 1999), p. 6.

This latter point is something that Friel pursues in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, in his insinuation that music performed or recorded, is perhaps now 'the way to speak' (*DL*, p.71). Although the lyrical tones of Michael Mundy's opening address would indicate an offstage past: 'When I cast my mind back to that summer of 1936 different kinds of memories offer themselves to me' (*DL*, p.1), it is the present action onstage that preoccupies the theatre audience through most of the play, despite Andrews's insistence that the present is dissolved by the past through music. The dominant source of music in the Mundy household is Marconi, the onstage wireless, which delivers 'Irish dance music beamed to us all the way from Dublin' (*DL*, p.2). The fact that the wireless, an inanimate object, has a name is suggestive that music has become personified as a character in itself. More importantly Marconi is a sign of the present, the new times of the 1930's Industrial Revolution in Donegal, which is one of the key times the play dwells on, and with this token the music that flows from it reflects the action present to the 1930's in the Mundy house. Michael Mundy, the play's narrator, who occupies the same moment of time as the play's current audience, refers to Marconi's music as 'voodoo' (*DL*, p.2), because it ignites in his mother and her four sisters an urgency to seize their own immediate moment. This is most evident in the famous moment of Act One when Aunt Maggie remembers a dance competition from her past, and then the wireless suddenly bursts in with 'The Mason's Apron', an Irish dance piece. One by one, the sisters leap into raucous frenzied dance, at which Friel explains in a stage direction that *'there is a sense of order being consciously subverted'* (*DL*, p.22), an indication that the order upheld by the past is being undermined by the present moment of dance. Incidentally, this subversion of order provoked by Marconi's musical 'voodoo', can be compared to the similar breakdown of order already discussed in *Aristocrats* when Anna's violin music overlaps with Father's cry for his daughter. Music is again used to emphasise the present moment later in the play when Michael's father, Gerry, appears after a long absence. Gerry explains to Michael's mother, Chris, what he has been doing in the past and his future plans, but at this point 'Dancing in the Dark' plays from the wireless, which plunges Gerry into the present moment with Chris. He dances with her and

even proposes to her, a spontaneous reaction to the moment. Chris attempts to hold onto the present by telling Gerry, 'Don't talk anymore; no more words. Just dance me down the lane and then you'll leave' (*DL*, p.33), a sign as well that Chris recognises the inadequacy of language compared with music when it comes to doing full justice to feeling. This is something that is also evident at the end of Act One as Jack beats out a musical rhythm with two sticks in an attempt to communicate what he cannot say in English, having spoken Swahili for twenty-five years in Africa. Earlier, Jack recalls that on his return to Ireland 'there were days when I couldn't remember even the simplest words' (*DL*, p.40), so that music can be viewed as a substitute when words fail to suffice.

Throughout the play, the use of music to demarcate the present world onstage is fairly obvious and consistent, but offstage music to define the past is perhaps less so. Although the past is evoked through Michael Mundy's five audience addresses during the play as he looks back on a summer of his boyhood, it is really in Michael's final address at the end of the play that offstage music conveys the past. Michael reveals to the audience the conclusion of the Mundy sisters lives from the perspective of the past such as Jack's death, his mother's loathed employment in a factory for the rest of her days and his own departure from home when he was grown up, before he nostalgically relates his most persistent memory from his childhood - dancing. As the latter memory becomes more vivid, the Thirties song, 'It is Time to Say Goodnight', fades in softly from the offstage space. This music is a sign that the offstage past is as important as the action of the present moment conveyed by Marconi. It might also be argued that the play's retreat into the past at the end indicates a fear of looking to the future. But in terms of dramaturgy, the play's conclusion to offstage music is also a reminder by Friel of the diversity and distinction of stage space, and at the same time, Michael's final memories reflect the dissolution of words, 'Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary' (*DL*, p.71).

In *Performances*, Friel's most recent work, on and offstage space is demarcated by the music of Leos Janacek's second String Quartet, 'Intimate

Letters'. Like the other plays considered, the perspectives of past and present are juxtaposed with the music coming from different stage space. During the play, a PhD student called Anezka questions Janacek about his second string quartet, which is crucial to the thesis she is writing about his work. In her thesis Anezka wants to argue that Janacek's second String quartet was a declaration of love to Kamila Stosslova, a married woman he was romantically besotted with as he composed the quartet. But Janacek denies this throughout the play, arguing that the work is separate to the private life.

At the beginning of the play, Janacek plays brief excerpts of his string quartet on a piano onstage. As he plays, Janacek attempts to divert Anezka's interest in his past by testing her knowledge of his work to keep her absorbed in the present moment. However, the focus is diverted to Janacek's past when he stops playing the piano onstage and his visiting string quartet plays 'Intimate Letters' offstage. The shift from onstage to offstage music reminds the theatre audience of the double perspective of visible and invisible space being offered by Friel. As soon as the quartet plays offstage, Anezka begins to read excerpts of Janacek's love letters in which he tells Kamila, 'this quartet, my Intimate Letters to you, my love... was composed in fire out of the furnace that is our great love' (*P*, p.30), so that the offstage music is being used to evoke Janacek's past through the letters, as Janacek even confesses, 'I composed from emotions remembered' (*P*, p.30). But the past that is conveyed in Janacek's letters does not portray an accurate picture because like the fabricated accounts of the past that Private Gar, the Eden House rhapsodists and also Casimir present, Janacek's letters from the past would imply that he had embarked on an affair with Kamila - 'how our first meeting set my soul ablaze with the most exquisite melodies' (*P*, p.23) - when, in fact, it was all in his head.

Towards the end of the play, however, the focus is again diverted back to the present when the offstage string quartet that has been playing 'Intimate Letters' come onstage and play beside Janacek. The relocation of the quartet from the invisible to the visible space mirrors the similar shift of Chopin from offstage to onstage in Act Two of *Aristocrats*, and it is also telling that the

present sound world onstage is now more important than the words of Janacek's letters written in the past. Janacek tells Anezka that Kamila was not the inspiration for 'Intimate Letters' only the desire for the dream sounds of music in his head. He even admits that he 'came to know no distinction between the dream music and the dream woman!' (*P*, p.34), a sign that identity has been put into dissociation by music. Anezka leaves horrified that Janacek has undermined Kamila's centrality to his music. Meanwhile, Janacek remains silent onstage listening to the quartet play beside him until the allegro ends the play. As Janacek listens to the music he reads a line or two of the love letters. He then leans back from them and closes his eyes to absorb himself wholly in the music being played in the present moment onstage, a sign that both language and the present moment has succumbed to the sound world of music at the end of the play.

Friel has used music and has manipulated stage space variously throughout his long career. In the works discussed, it would seem that a general trend emerges as Friel employs offstage music to demarcate the offstage past and also onstage music to highlight the present action and time onstage. At the beginning, reference was made to Elmer Andrews who put the view that music dissolves the boundary between the fictional spaces that are 'the present' and 'the past'. However, it would appear that Friel's drama insists on differentiation in stage times and spaces so that even though the double perspectives of offstage and onstage, past and present, art and popular music make up the wider soundscape, each continues to retain an identity of its own. Meanwhile, if there is anything that is dissolved by music it might be argued that it is language, as Friel said himself in his 'Notes for a festival Programme':

what music can provide in the theatre [is] another way of talking, a language without words. And because it is wordless it can hit straight and unmediated into the vein of deep emotion.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Brian Friel, 'Seven Notes for a Festival Programme' (1999), in Murray, C. (ed.), *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p.177.

## FRIEL'S TIME WARP?

... the days of the solid, well-made play are gone, the  
play with a beginning, a middle, and an end ...<sup>40</sup>

- Brian Friel

Chronological ordering, as a feature of classical drama, gives the impression that the action of the play is happening in the same moment that the audience also occupy. Therefore, even though the sixteen-year time gap between the first and second act in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*<sup>41</sup> is impossible in the actual time of the theatre performance, the audience accepts this time gap regardless of its improbability because it recognises that through such a breach, the plot can be advanced without the play's linear time scheme being jeopardised. In Friel's drama, there is a similar need to reconcile various time periods and actions, particularly the past, a tendency that was discussed in the last chapter where Friel's employment of music was explored as a means by which the time periods of past and the present could be demarcated and highlighted. Commonly, the past that music evokes is invisible to the theatre audience, such as Casimir's memories of his mother, which he recalls to the music of Chopin. However, in the seven plays that are examined in this chapter - *Lovers*, *The Freedom of the City*, *Volunteers*, *Faith Healer*, *Living Quarters* and *Afterplay* - it would appear that instead of music, Friel's use of memory flashbacks and reportage can also be used to convey the play's central event that belongs to the past. But through such mediums, Friel undermines the linear time frame typical of classical theatre by shifting action between many distinct, conflicting and repetitive layers of time. The resulting distortion in time results in a large discrepancy between how things seem and how they are in reality.

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<sup>40</sup> Brian Friel, 'The Theatre of Hope and Despair', (1967), in Murray, C. (ed.), *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> In Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, the commentary of the character, Time, is used to bridge the sixteen-year period that separates the first and second act during which Perdita grows from being an abandoned baby rescued and brought up by a shepherd to her present state in Act Two as a young woman.

Friel has toyed about with various time periods since early works such as *The Loves of Cass McGuire* where Cass flits between her past and present world of Eden House with the eventual result that reality and time is distorted. In *Winners*, the first part of the early play, *Lovers*, the play's immediate moment is set in a past, where Joe and his pregnant girlfriend, Mag, attempt to study for their school exams. However, the linear action between the lovers, which takes place in the main performance space, is constantly interrupted from the wings where the Commentators, Man and Woman, narrate the events that will lead up to Mag and Joe's drowning at the end of the play – an event which takes place offstage in the past, from the perspective of the present time that the Commentators occupy. A disjunction is created in the play because the Commentator's proleptic insights into offstage events before they happen are completely out of joint with the action in the main performance space where the lovers occupy the play's moment of the past. Man and Woman's serious, impersonal reading of Mag and Joe's familial backgrounds, their whereabouts, the police search when they go missing and the discovery of their bodies seems completely out of joint with the warmth of the young lover's prattle, role-play and petty arguments during the play. Mag is even described as 'bubbling with life' (*L*, p.11), while Joe's belief in education is described as 'touching' (*L*, p.11), characteristics which are hardly evident in the steely narrators.

Throughout the play, the narrators reveal to the theatre audience the lovers' offstage past, which is future from the time of the play's action. But Man and Woman's insights are in complete conflict with the lovers' banter in their immediate moment onstage. When Mag jests that until she is married in three weeks she does not need Joe's permission for anything, her references to the future are juxtaposed against Man and Woman's revelations on the limitations of their life span as they inform the audience from the wings that two bundles found floating in the lake face down have been confirmed as the bodies of Joe and Mag. Later in the play Joe tells Mag jokes and makes impersonations of people in an attempt to erase the icy atmosphere after a disagreement. Joe thinks that he is failing to win Mag over and keeps up the impersonations but

all the time the audience learns in a stage direction that Mag has been 'chuckling silently ... Now she can contain her laughter no longer. At the last line she screams her delight and throws herself at him, and they roll on the ground' (*L*, p.44). Mag's uncontrollable laughter and the tender moment that follows, when for the first time in the play Joe throws his arms around Mag and kisses her, is thrown into immediate disarray by the other onstage action coming from the wings where the Commentators stand. Woman pulls the theatre audience back into the dismal offstage action by announcing the decision by the Ballymore community to hold an inquest into the deaths. It is as if the Commentators are always battling against the lovers' oblivious warmth by undercutting their exchange with the harsh reality of the present. In this regard, the past is transitory, the present the victor in this onstage battle in time.

By the end of the play, the audience is still confronted with double off and onstage action that fails to correspond as Mag drags Joe down the hill in haste to take a boat out to the islands, but their carefree screams, 'Wheeeeeeeeeee', 'Aaaaaaaaah' (*L*, p.48), pale into oblivion as Man and Woman impart the final episodes which complete the tragic lovers' tale, such as the varying states of the lover's parents health after their children's deaths. This, coupled with the Commentator's further useless intelligence concerning the population growth in Ballymore in the following months, is designed to make the young lovers' deaths insignificant, to alienate feeling from fact, something that is reiterated by the narrators final observations when Man claims that 'Life there goes on as usual', and Woman adds, 'As if nothing had ever happened', (*L*, p.49). Not only is this information delivered in a particularly cold, unsympathetic and distanced manner (which again is a stark contrast to the lover's buoyant exit), but the Commentator's callous indifference is almost designed to reflect a deliberate detachment, to devalue the past and, most importantly, the lover's existence. The latter is just the crowning instance among many in the play when Man and Woman, who occupy the present time, blankly narrate from the wings the offstage events leading up to the lovers' deaths, while at the same time the lovers preoccupy themselves with one

another, completely oblivious to the fact that they are being watched in the main performance space.

Finally, the disjunction in *Winners* between on and offstage action and the time periods of past and present is exemplified because there is no resolution to the mystery of the lover's deaths. The theatre audience never actually knows what has happened to the lovers whether they drowned by accident or with intent because Friel employs a technique of suggestion where nothing is reliable even though the narrator's factual tone exudes certainty. Woman tells the theatre audience that 'an accountant ... went home for his lunch. He left the oars and rowlocks lying in the boat. When he returned an hour and twenty minutes later, the boat was gone; and a girl's bicycle was lying at the edge of the water' (*L*, p.27) Although there is the strong likelihood that the bicycle is Mag's and the lovers have taken the boat, Friel never confirms this and leaves the mystery open. The audience also doubts the reliability of Man and Woman's reportage because the mystery of the lovers' deaths remains unanswered, and this sense of deliberate misrepresentation in *Winners* is certainly an important strand in *The Freedom of the City*.

In *The Freedom of the City*, various conflicting time periods and actions are in operation despite the Judge's insistence that 'Our only concern is with that period of time when these three people came together' (*SP*, p.109). The play's main action onstage dwells on the time period up until the deaths of three civil rights protestors during Bloody Sunday and then there is the Bloody Sunday tribunal, which takes place after their deaths and is set outside the play's time in the present time of the audience. The protestors' deaths - the event which divides up the action and time of the play - is highlighted at the beginning when the audience are confronted with the proleptic image of three bodies strown across the stage, so that the play's final outcome is predestined from the beginning. Moreover, the main onstage action of Bloody Sunday is also doubled because although there is the activity inside the Mayor's Parlour of the Guildhall where three civilians, Lily, Michael and Skinner have accidentally found themselves following the army's intervention in a civil rights demonstration that can be heard taking place offstage, there is at the

same time the action outside the Guildhall where the army have gathered under the false impression that the Hall has come under siege, an impression which is reiterated by the inaccurate reportage of events by an adjoining television crew. Time is therefore distorted because the onstage action flits at random between the present time of the play (Bloody Sunday) and the present time of the audience (the tribunal), which is future in terms of the play's present time, as Klaus Birker notes:

there is a clear division between the time and place of the action on the stage and the actual time and place of the performance, that is to say the real time of the audience and the theatre building.<sup>42</sup>

Not only does Friel present the audience with various actions on and offstage, which are set in their own distinct time, but the audience are faced with conflicting versions of Bloody Sunday's events, as Nichola Grene argues, there is a

necessary disproportion between lived actuality and interpretation, whether it is political, sociological or rhetorical.<sup>43</sup>

Friel deliberately places the audience in the position of eye witness to the actual goings-on of the Mayor's Parlour, but the truth is persistently distorted by the tribunal and also the army and television crew that are camped outside the Guildhall in eager pursuit of what the RTE journalist, O'Kelly, refers to as 'a group of about fifty armed gunmen (that) have taken possession of the Guildhall' (SP, p.117). The Army Press Officer also tells the press that it is estimated that forty people are involved, but these reports are a far cry from the reality of the three unarmed protestors who have accidentally walked into

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<sup>42</sup> Klaus Birker, *op.cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Grene, 'Distancing Drama: Sean O'Casey to Brian Friel', in Masary, S. (ed.) *Irish Writers and the Theatre* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1986), p. 66.

the Guildhall in the pandemonium that follows the army intervention of the civil rights meeting that takes place offstage.

There is an enormous disparity between the visible and invisible episodes of Bloody Sunday because often the aura of calm onstage is juxtaposed against horror and panic offstage. This is something that becomes apparent early on in the play when a woman can be heard addressing a civil rights meeting offstage in Guildhall Square even though a stage direction reveals that '*The amplification is faulty and we cannot hear what she is saying*' (SP, p.110). But '*while the meeting is going on offstage*' (SP, p.110), Dodds, a sociologist, ascribes social uprising to the subculture of poverty when confronted by the Judge of the tribunal. Dodd's composed monologue is however engulfed '*by the roar of approaching tanks. Their noise is deafening and fills the whole auditorium*', while the woman addressing the offstage meeting attempts to convince the crowd, "Stand your ground! Don't move! Don't panic! This is your city!" (SP, p.111). The woman's voice is drowned out by rubber bullets, CS gas and the '*revving of engines as ranks and water-cannon pursue fleeing groups... [until] Very slowly the noise fades to background. As it does, Dodds resumes as calmly as before*' (SP, p.111). Dodd's collected factual address to the tribunal in the present time of the audience is completely out of joint with the offstage mayhem of the civil rights meeting in the play's present moment. This stark contrast in the atmosphere of visible and invisible action is also evident throughout the main action of the play inside the Mayor's Parlour as Lily and Skinner take advantage of their esteemed surroundings and help themselves to the drinks cabinet, try on the Lord Mayor's robes, and use the telephone, despite Michael's strong disapproval. The party atmosphere of the parlour is completely out of context with the Priest's chilling address that follows to an imaginary audience, 'At eleven o'clock tomorrow morning solemn requiem mass will be celebrated in this church for the repose of the three people whose death has plunged this parish into deep and numbing grief' (SP, p.124). The disjunction in time in *The Freedom of the City* is consequently intensified due to the common placement of calm or light-hearted action onstage which is set against invisible action offstage that is often alarming or bleak, and this is a trait that occurs in Friel's later play,

*Dancing at Lughnasa*, where onstage banter is juxtaposed against grim offstage events,<sup>44</sup> as will be discussed later.

*The Freedom of the City* is a play in which various actions operate either in the time of the play or the time of the audience, but at one point in the middle of the play, these specific time frames are displaced as the three main protagonists can be seen to occupy what can only be described as their own transitory moment outside time. Act Two has just commenced and the Judge of the tribunal has come to an informed conclusion on the events of Bloody Sunday when Lily, Skinner and Michael step out of their roles and conduct monologues in neutral accents that have taken place after they have died. These protagonists transcend the play's time that they have previously occupied as they reflect their feeling and shock at their deaths, Michael claiming, 'And that is how I died – in disbelief, in astonishment, in shock. It was a foolish way for a man to die' (SP, p.150) while Lily says she died of grief, and Skinner confesses that he had 'died, as I lived, in defensive flippancy' (SP, p.150). The three monologues occupy a time frame beyond the time that the play and audience inhabit, in a space that is neither the past or present, simply an afterlife of remembrance, just like Frank Hardy in the later play, *Faith Healer*<sup>45</sup>. Skinner, Lily and Michael's mediations on their deaths seem all the more out of joint from the action and time of the play when a few lines later the audience are pulled back into the immediate moment onstage where the mood of the Mayor's parlour continues in buoyancy as Lily jokes that the Mayor's robes would make a good dressing gown. However, this sense of a moment outside time reoccurs again at the end of the play when O'Kelly, the RTE reporter, delivers his commentary of Lily, Skinner and Michael's funerals, adding that if he had to use a word to describe the scene 'I think the word would be dignified' (SP, p.168), another misrepresentation of

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<sup>44</sup> In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Michael Mundy's fourth audience address has just revealed the grim news of Rose and Agnes's death when suddenly the play reverts back into the banter that preoccupies the activity onstage as the Mundy sister's joke about men.

<sup>45</sup> In *Faith Healer*, the audience learns that the main protagonist, Frank Hardy, is dead through the monologues of others, but in his last monologue, he also recalls his own death, which makes the audience question what time and space he occupies. Although he talks about the past and appears to exist in the present time of the theatre audience like Lily, Skinner and Michael, he somehow eludes time, because he does not engage in action, only monologue. Therefore, he simply exists in a space of continual remembrance.

events which adds to the play's general discrepancies, considering that there is nothing 'dignified' about the fact that the three protestors have just walked out to their deaths to 'thundering' organ music. After the Judge offers his final conclusions on the tribunal at the end of the play, Lily, Michael and Skinner stare straight out to the audience with the spotlights on their faces to a 'burst of automatic fire' (SP, p.169) as the immediate moment of their death, that the play first opened with, is relived before the black-out. Like their expressionless tones earlier when they reflected on their deaths, their blank stares symbolise a complete dissociation with a particular time or space.

As a play, *The Freedom of the City* shifts between many conflicting time frames, actions, spaces and versions of events but in a sense its structure can be traced back to *Winners* where there are also different time periods at work. Like Mag and Joe, the protestors in *The Freedom* occupy the play's central and present time while the figures in the tribunal occupy the audience's time just like the Commentators. However, *The Freedom* differs from *Winners* because in the latter the main action of the play concerning Mag and Joe is chronological with the Commentators simply adding in their singular view of the cold, hard facts of the lovers' deaths, where in the former, multiple angles on the events of Bloody Sunday are constantly presented with little regard to the proper ordering of time. The structural form of *Winners* is thus more straightforward than *The Freedom* because there are only two actions at work, where in the latter play, many layers of action and reportage are knit together in their own distinct time frame, the result being a more sophisticated and complex play.

In *The Freedom of the City*, Friel abandons chronological ordering in favour of time shifts and introduces many different actions on and offstage so as to distort a singular version of events. Friel's interest in multiple and conflicting versions of a story in *The Freedom* is pursued in *Volunteers* but the latter work differs because Friel can be seen to disassociate himself from the employment of epic devices used in the former - such as commentators and time shifts - to achieve a plural perspective on events. The time frame of *Volunteers* is also distinct from that of *Winners* and *The Freedom* because it is set in 'The

present' and the play also follows linear action, but that is not to say that the present is the only time frame that the play is concerned with. The fact that the play's onstage action is set in an archaeological dig in Dublin would suggest that the past is literally entrenched in the present. The ancient Viking past is dug by five political prisoners - the 'volunteers' - whose crimes have also been committed in the past before the play begins, so immediately it becomes clear to the audience that there are different layers of the past to be uncovered in the present which is the basis of the play's disjuncture in time. In *Volunteers*, it is these multiple views on the past from the perspective of the present that allow Friel to further his existing experiments in *Winners* and *The Freedom* with conflicting time schemes and actions.

During the play the audience are confronted with the macabre image of Leif (a pun on Life), an excavated skeleton that lies positioned onstage in the midst of the archaeological site. The past can therefore be seen as almost 'leifing' in the present moment that the theatre audience inhabits, which is also the same time as present day Dublin in the streets above the dig. However, not only is Leif a figure that represents the past, but he is also a harrowing reminder of ritual execution and tribal revenge of the Viking era considering the leather noose around his neck and hole in his skull. The past is therefore presented in the play in a conflicting manner: on the one hand the past is a rich one given that the present archaeological dig has produced invaluable finds such as the skeleton of Leif and also a jug among many things, but on the other, this wealth of the past is in complete opposition with a past that is based on '*tribal, intimate revenge*';<sup>46</sup> for Leif has been executed just in the way that the volunteers will end their present day. In this regard, Leif can be seen as a metaphor for the conflicting views on the past, as being both rich and also harrowing, that coexist in disjuncture throughout the play.

There is a lack of congruence between how things seem in the play's many narratives and how they are in actual fact. Like the various angles presented on the events of Bloody Sunday in *The Freedom*, multiple perspectives on the

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<sup>46</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'Punishment', in Heaney, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 38.

past are offered by the boisterous double act, Keeney and Pyne, two of the five volunteers that dominate the play's present moment. On a first glance their seemingly light-hearted banter seems completely out of joint with the grim reality of the past symbolised by Leif, but as the play progresses the audience learns from their banter that the volunteers present reality is as grim as Leif's was, given that they too will be killed like him by their own tribe - their fellow prison internees - once the dig is over. Keeney and Pyne preoccupy themselves by inventing stories about Leif in response to the question 'What in the name of God happened to him?' (*V*, p.28). In Keeney and Pyne's narratives, Leif was perhaps a faithful servant disposed by his masters when he was no longer able to work, a prince reduced to being an impoverished street musician, a message carrier between subversives or the victim of tribal contempt for his relationship with an American Indian woman, to name just a few theories. But Keeney and Pyne's various theories on Leif and his past are delivered with a large degree of irony because these stories are also being used to indirectly disclose and 'dig' at the other volunteer's various criminal pasts which have led them to be political prisoners in the first place.

A disjunction arises in *Volunteers* because Keeney and Pyne's multiple theories on Leif's past are conflicting and as a result the theatre audience and the other volunteers cannot take any of their possible theories for fact, not least because the past is not perceivable onstage; the audience in *The Freedom of the City* witness the action of Bloody Sunday and are in a position, at least to some extent, to make an informed opinion. The mystery surrounding Leif and the volunteers' backgrounds, their inner torments and the play's many ambiguities remain glossed over by Keeney's wit, stories and rhymes. In this regard, Keeney is just as much 'a casualty of language' (*V*, p.28) in the way that he claims Leif to be because his various theories on the past do not necessarily equate to any conclusion or truth. Therefore, despite his obsession with asking questions,<sup>47</sup> Keeney is forced to admit 'I'm sure of nothing now' (*V*, p.72), in tones similar to Father Chris Carroll in Friel's early unpublished play, *The Blind Mice*, when he declares, 'I scarcely know what the truth is

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<sup>47</sup> One of Keeney's favourite questions that he constantly asks is, 'Was Hamlet really mad?' (*V*, p.22), which has invited critics such as F.C. McGrath to argue that, 'The role of Hamlet on *Volunteers* bears directly on these questions', *op.cit.*, p. 126.

now'.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, Seamus Heaney refers to himself as 'dithering, blathering'<sup>49</sup> in talking about Ireland's Viking past, perhaps a sign that words fail to convey the past adequately much like the inability of Keeney and Pyne to relate the past in their narratives. In fact, the solitary skeleton of Leif gives in itself a more accurate view of the past than Keeney and Pyne's many speculative versions of the past that contribute to the play's disproportionate narratives.

If *Volunteers* highlights the endless multiplicity of the past, Derek Mahon's poem, *Lives*, in which the subject's many past lives are remembered, strongly parallels the way Keeney and Pyne offer many different theories on Leif's past and death. Like Keeney's mockery of the other volunteer's pasts in his Lief narratives, Mahon's tone is also mocking and satirical because he is also, to coin Heaney, 'buoyant with hindsight'<sup>50</sup>. Mahon claims that while being a torc of gold 'was fun', he was then 'buried... in the Earth for two thousand years',<sup>51</sup> something that now seems surreal to him in his present condition as 'an anthropologist'.<sup>52</sup> Mahon's view on the diversity and multiplicity of pasts mirrors Pyne and Keeney's many theories regarding Leif's life whereas Seamus Heaney, on the other hand, prescribes a singular outlook on the past in *Punishment*, in his highly personal account of the ritualistic killing of a 'little adulteress'.<sup>53</sup> Heaney attaches himself emotionally to his subject's ritual execution that is so much a part of the Viking past that Lief has been subject to: 'I can feel', 'I can see', 'My poor scapegoat, I almost love you'.<sup>54</sup> But while Heaney attaches himself emotionally to the past, there is a marked detachment and rejection of a particular knowledge of the past in Mahon's poem as he confesses that 'I know too much to be anything anymore'.<sup>55</sup> Mahon's latter view is also strongly reminiscent of Keeney's dismissal of one

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<sup>48</sup> Carroll's statement is in response to accusations that he betrays the truth. *The Blind Mice* (1963) remains unpublished though it is available in typescript through the BBC Northern Ireland Home Service. It is cited here following Elmer Andrews, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces', in Heaney, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'North', in Heaney, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Derek Mahon, 'Lives', in Mahon, *Lives* (London;Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Derek Mahon, 'Lives', in Mahon, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>53</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'Punishment', in Heaney, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>54</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'Punishment', in Heaney, *op.cit.*, p. 37, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Derek Mahon, 'Lives', in Mahon, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

knowledge, if any at all, because the latter recognises that regardless of his energetic narratives on many pasts, the basic fact of the volunteer's present world remains unchanged - Leif is dead, regardless of how Pyne and himself imagine in their fictions that he came to be so, and in the same way he and the other four prisoners, will soon be Leif - executed by their fellow internees, regardless of their respective crimes in the past, for their simple defect in volunteering. Thus, the many conflicting layers of the past that are offered in Keeney and Pyne's narratives during the play seem completely out of joint with the play's final preoccupation with the present as the volunteers exit the dig for their deaths. Just a short time earlier, Butt symbolically smashes a thirteenth-century jug recovered in the dig so that it has gone from being a whole object to being reduced to many, many pieces. Therefore, as the volunteers leave the dig for their deaths, the audience is again reminded that like the many pieces of the ancient jug, the volunteers have simply become part of the many conflicting and larger narratives of the past that Lief and the Vikings also belong to, rather than a single version or piece of the past.

The disjunction in *Volunteers* can be viewed differently to *Winners* and *The Freedom of the City* because it does not stem from any structural shifts in time, but arises instead from the many conflicting narratives of the past woven into the present, something that Friel would probe further four years later in *Faith Healer*.<sup>56</sup> In *Living Quarters*, the territory is more familiar to *The Freedom* in that the play is characterised by structural time shifts but various narratives and actions concerning both the past and present are also intertwined.

In *Living Quarters*, the play's double actions onstage are completely out of joint with one another. The main action of the play concerns May 24<sup>th</sup>, a day in the Butler family's past when Commandant Frank Butler is honoured for his services in the Middle East. The family have 'reconvened in recollection' (*SP*, p.178) in the 'present time' that the theatre audience also occupies to re-enact this day in the past under the guidance of Sir who directs the action of May

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<sup>56</sup> In *Faith Healer*, the three monologist's version of the one story conflict and contradict one another.

24<sup>th</sup> from the script that is the ledger. Throughout the play, a disparity arises from these two conflicting onstage actions – the re-enactment of the past in the present, and the action of the present time that the Butlers also occupy with the audience.

The Butler family's consciousness of their various roles during the play is one of the main factors for the play's disproportionate action. The Butlers' are highly conscious that they are acting the part of themselves in May 24<sup>th</sup>, a day in their past outlined by Sir's ledger, but when they are not acting these parts, they simply engage with one another in the present time outside their imposed roles. In this respect, *Living Quarters* is the first play of its kind in Friel's work whereby single protagonists consciously perform multiple roles in multiples actions set in various time schemes; not even the split Gar figure in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* can compare to the multiplicity of the Butlers' roles because two actors play each part of his alter ego. The contention in the protagonist's various roles, which basically arises from the clash between who they are and who they are meant to portray, is never really reconciled as the Butlers battle throughout the play with the identities that have been imposed on them by the ledger. Uncle Tom, for instance, recognises his incongruent roles as both a human being and as a character in the events of May 24<sup>th</sup> prescribed by the ledger when he asks Sir 'Which of my many fascinating personas should I portray?' (*SP*, p.179), but his jests are snubbed when Sir blankly reminds him that as far as May 24<sup>th</sup> is concerned the Butler family regard him as an outsider. This is something that a tearful Tom is reluctant to accept but Sir simply insists 'It's your role' (*SP*, p.180). For Tom, the ledger's characterisation of him is unfair and inaccurate but this is just one example among many in the play whereby there is a clear disparity between the protagonist's actual character in the present time and how they are portrayed by the ledger in the re-enactment of the past.

In *Living Quarters*, the disjunction in the play's double action is further complicated because the action of the past, May 24<sup>th</sup>, can be divided into two distinct time periods. In the earlier work, *The Freedom of the City*, the past events of Bloody Sunday could be divided between the action prior to and

after the three protestors' deaths and in the same way the action of May 24<sup>th</sup> can be divided before and after Commandant Butler's return from the public dinner in which his service in the Middle East is commemorated. Therefore in Act One, while Frank and his new wife, Anna, are at his honorary dinner, the audience are engrossed with the onstage action between one of Frank's daughters, Helen, and his estranged son, Ben, who has entered the house for the first time since he accused his father in the past of being responsible for his mother's death. The rest of the act dwells on the time prior to Frank's return so that by the beginning of Act Two, Ben has still not seen his father. However, when Act Two commences, the Butlers have cast off their roles as characters in May 24<sup>th</sup> because Sir is absent. Having taken a break from the re-enactment of the past, the Butlers can be seen as occupying the same present time as the theatre audience during which all of them, including Frank and Ben, joke about among themselves. But when Sir reappears, the action of May 24<sup>th</sup> commences in the time period when Frank and Anna return from the honorary dinner, during which Ben and his father officially meet for the first time on May 24<sup>th</sup>. Any previous tension between father and son from the past is removed as they embrace, but for the audience looking on the tension in the play's many conflicting actions and time periods is intensified because only a short time before, at the start of Act Two, both men have been joking together with the others in the audience's present time and now towards the middle of the act the audience witness them meeting for the first time.

If the double action of *Living Quarters* is conflicting, then the atmosphere of both actions is also contradictory. Often, when the re-enactment of May 24<sup>th</sup> becomes too emotionally charged, Sir suddenly interrupts the action so that the theatre audience are brought back into the reality of the present time, which he inhabits. In Act One, during the time of May 24<sup>th</sup>, Uncle Tom takes a photograph of the Butler family in the garden from where *'The laughter is infectious'* (SP, p.202). At this point, Anna, who is unseen by the others, enters the living room in the present moment, having momentarily abandoned her character in the ledger. She attempts to shout to Frank that she had an affair with his son, 'An affair, d'you hear – out of loneliness, out of despair, out of hate! And everybody in the camp knows – except the Butlers' (SP,

p.202), but although the others cannot hear her, Anna's frustration and grim revelation as she stands in the present time is completely at odds with the jovial mood in the garden. Tom even exclaims 'Terrific!' in regard to the family's pose, but the irony is that there is nothing terrific about her news, when it will result in Frank's suicide by the end of the day. The clash in the mood of the play's double action is also highlighted towards the end of Act One when Helen confesses to Ben that she is still in love with Gerry, her first husband who left her, but as she breaks down the audience are rudely distracted from such an engaging moment and are thrown into the present when Sir interrupts, 'Thank you. We've got quite a bit done. I'd say the back's broken' (SP, p.215). The audience is left struggling to adapt to the sudden change in the play's atmosphere as the past is undermined by the present, but perhaps the starkest mood shift between the action of the present and the re-enactment of the past is at the end of the play when Frank goes offstage. A revolver shot can be heard as Frank shoots himself, having discovered that his wife, Anna, has been having an affair with his son, but the atmosphere is abruptly transformed from one of alarm into a sense of unexpected release as the Butlers' roles metamorphose in accordance with the shift in time as May 24<sup>th</sup> is dissolved by the present time. In a stage direction, Friel requires that there is '*a single revolver shot off. TINA's hand's go up to her face. She screams. Silence... Then very slowly, the others relax and emerge from their cocoons. Cigarettes are lit. A sense of relief. Serenity*' (SP, p.242) and the theatre audience are even reminded that the action has switched from the past and has returned to the audience's present time as Sir inquires, 'That wasn't too bad, was it?' (SP, p.242). *Living Quarters* is therefore little different to *The Freedom of the City* because the different actions each play flits between possess their own distinct time scheme and atmosphere, so that while in the latter, bleak offstage events are juxtaposed against the light-hearted action of the Mayor's Parlour, in the former, the often intensely charged action of May 24<sup>th</sup> is deliberately set against the more relaxed mood of the present time.

Apart from the fact that the double action of *Living Quarters* is not chronological, the play's incongruent actions emerge because Sir's ledger, which outlines the events of May 24<sup>th</sup>, appears to be out of joint with what

actually happened, much in the way that the RTE television reporter's account of the events of Bloody Sunday failed to accurately portray the action inside the Mayor's Parlour in *The Freedom of the City*. Throughout the play, the Butler family re-enact a piece of their own lived pasts rather than simply bringing any old script to life. They know the story of May 24<sup>th</sup> before it begins which is why they are quick to point out any discrepancies in the script. The ledger's limitations are first pointed out by Helen who claims that a scene from May 24<sup>th</sup> that she has just acted in with her two sisters is 'distorted – inaccurate... There was unease...- we've got to acknowledge' (SP, p.188), but Sir ignores her and tells her that they have it exactly right as set out by the ledger. The ledger's accuracy is again challenged in the final scene of the play when Sir reads the postscript of May 24<sup>th</sup> from the present that he possesses. As Sir concludes the Butlers' outcome: 'Helen has had to give up her office job because of an acute nervous breakdown. Ben went to Scotland ... jailed twice for drunk and disorderly behaviour. Father Tom ... in a nursing-home' (SP, p.245), Anna comes onstage to listen to him just at the moment when he adds, 'Anna, emigrated to America' (SP, p.246). Sir goes on to reveal that Anna shares an apartment with an English girl in Los Angeles and has never returned to Ireland but having concluded the narrative of the ledger, Anna inquires, 'That's all?' (SP, p.246), a sign that the ledger has failed to convey the entire events of May 24<sup>th</sup> in a sufficient manner and even Sir himself is aware of its inadequacy to convey actual lives, which is why he allows the Butlers to take 'a few liberties' (SP, p.225) with the script throughout the re-enactment of May 24<sup>th</sup>. The conflicting narratives of May 24<sup>th</sup> offered by the ledger in *Living Quarters* also reminds the audience of the contradictory narratives imposed on the past by Keeney and Pyne in Friel's previous work, *Volunteers*, and consequently, in both cases, the theatre audience leaves the auditorium never quite knowing with any surety what actually happened in such pasts.

Other than the late play, *Molly Sweeney*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, perhaps the play that most springs to mind in regard to this latter point is *Faith Healer* because the four monologues that the play consists of constantly contradict each other's version of the same story, as Karen De

Vinney argues, the play's time scheme is 'deliberately pushing us in and out of different conflicting and repetitive frames.'<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, the audience can never know the true nature of the shared past that connects the faith healer, Frank Hardy, his wife, Grace, and his manager, Teddy. But if the monologues offer conflicting narratives, the play's time scheme is also shifting because the action of the monologues occupies a different time from the time that they are actually delivered in. Despite the audience's impression that Frank speaks from the present time, they learn in Grace's subsequent monologue that he is dead, much in the way that the audience will discover that Molly Sweeney is dead.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, despite the fact that Grace appears to conduct her monologue after Frank's death in what seems to be the present time that the audience also occupy, it emerges in Teddy's monologue that she is also dead, in a manner similar to the protagonists in Beckett's *Play*.<sup>59</sup> There is however nothing to suggest that Teddy is dead which means that the narratives of the time of the living and the dead are juxtaposed against one another, forcing the spectator to accept the huge discrepancy between how things appear to be and how they actually are, just like *Living Quarters* where the events of May 24<sup>th</sup> that are laid out by the ledger are out of joint with how the Butlers remember them to be. But *Faith Healer* can be seen as diverging from *Living Quarters* because in the latter there is a desire amongst the Butlers to dispute the content of the ledger when it appears to conflict with the past as they know it, where in the former, the facts seems less important and the distinction in time less particular as Frank and Grace Hardy - who are somehow simultaneously alive and dead - inhabit a

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<sup>57</sup> Karen De Vinney, 'Monologue as Dramatic Action in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*', in *Twentieth Century Literature: a scholarly and critical journal*, 45, 1 (Hofstra Univ. Hempstead, NY, 1999), p. 177.

<sup>58</sup> In *Molly Sweeney*, it is clear from Molly, Frank and Rice's monologues that the past that has taken place offstage before the play begins but it is only towards the end of the play that the audience knows how far they are looking back from the present when Molly refers to 'those last few months' (P2, p.500) and Rice surmises that Molly's operation was all less than a year ago, an indication that Molly is dead and all three monologists are looking back in hindsight at least from this period.

<sup>59</sup> In Samuel Beckett's *Play*, the three protagonists deliver their intertwining monologues onstage but Beckett's insistent stage directions make it clear that none of the three protagonists is in any ordinary sense of the word, alive.

time and space of remembrance that is neither past or present,<sup>60</sup> which somehow coexists with Teddy's present time in the play that the audience also occupy.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the play's shifting time frames, as Michael Mundy looks back and narrates his past, show a return by Friel to the territory of *Faith Healer*, not least because there is a sense that any disjunction between fact and fiction and the past and present time of the audience can somehow be reconciled by Michael's existence in the space of eternal remembrance. Through his five audience addresses, Michael looks back from the present moment that he shares with the theatre audience to a particular summer of his childhood - that of 1936 - which is re-enacted onstage. The fact that Michael stands in the present time period, at least twenty-five years after the summer of 1936 which the play is set in, means that he can remember time which is future in terms of the play's present time. However, the play's ensuing juxtaposition between the action that takes place before and that which takes place after this summer means that there is 'a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was' (*DL*, p.2), a characteristic of all the plays in this chapter.

It becomes apparent from Michael's narration in the present moment that the play's action can be roughly divided by the time schemes before and after the few days during Summer, 1936, which the onstage action dwells on. However, the action of the past that takes place up until the end of Summer, 1936, can be further sub-divided into that which takes place onstage and that which takes place offstage before the play begins. Michael recalls to the audience 'two memories - of our first wireless and of Father Jack's return' (*DL*, p.2), which have taken place before the plays' present moment begins. The audience never actually witnesses Jack's return to Ballybeg from Africa where 'For twenty-five years he had worked in a leper colony' (*DL*, p.1) because this important event, like Michael's mother's illegitimate pregnancy, has taken place before

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<sup>60</sup> In monodramas such as *Molly Sweeney* and *Faith Healer*, the monologists can be seen as delivering their narratives from a time and space that is beyond the conventional boundaries of reality onstage.

the play's action begins. The audience is therefore reminded that the present moment of Summer, 1936, is the play's centre point both in structure and time given that the action before 1936 spans back at least twenty-five years when Jack left Ballybeg, and the action after 1936 spans at least another twenty-five years until Michael's present moment that the audience also dwell in.

It is worth noting that the offstage action of the past that has taken place prior to the play's present moment is only revealed to the theatre audience by the three men in the play: Michael, Jack and his father, Gerry, even though the action is dominated by five women. Gerry tells Michael's mother, Chris, that people wrongly 'thought gramophones would be a thing of the past when radios came' (*DL*, P.29), a sign of the past's bearing on the present. Meanwhile, Jack persistently makes references to his past in the Ryangan leper colony, even though his pious sister, Kate, rejects his talk of animal sacrifices and pagan ceremonies. Jack also recalls their mother, and her facial expression as he left for Africa, which 'showed nothing' (*DL*, p.38) but even though his memories offer us an insight into his past, he never seems to make any significant point which means that it is difficult to know how much his memories are simply random portions of madness, given that he has returned from Africa mentally unstable. Jack's possible misrepresentation of events may not be deliberate but his untrustworthy view on events can still be compared to the distorted picture that the Army Officer presents of the Guildhall situation in *The Freedom of the City* and the inaccuracy of the ledger in *Living Quarters* in portraying the events of May 24<sup>th</sup>.

The onstage action set in the play's present time of 1936 is constantly at odds with the offstage action which is conveyed in Michael's addresses as he stands in the audience's present moment. In his addresses, Michael discloses the future that his Uncle Jack, his mother, Chris, and her four sisters, Kate, Maggie, Rose and Agnes will face after the summer but the insight that he provides into his family's future is usually out of kilter with the play's present moment onstage. At the end of Act One, Michael addresses the audience for the third time and the audience is presented with a harrowing portrait of his aunt's future as he recalls, 'but what she [Aunt Kate] couldn't have foreseen

was that the home would break up quite so quickly and that she would wake up one morning in early September both Rose and Agnes would have left forever' (*DL*, p.41). Aunt Rose and Agnes's sudden departure takes place after the few days in 1936 that the play's action deals with, hence it is an offstage event that the audience never actually witnesses, but such grim revelations in Michael's present moment are completely at odds with the play's present action onstage as Uncle Jack dances to the rhythm that is created when he strikes two pieces of wood together. Moreover, as Michael's aunts gather round and watch Jack's attempts to recreate an African ritual from his past, Michael continues to provide an insight into the future that seems so far removed from the present action onstage. Michael describes his father and mother's unofficial marriage ceremony in lyrical tones: 'No singing, no melody, no words. Only the swish and whisper of their feet across the grass' (*SP*, p.42), but even this event is a stark contrast to the conflicting racket that Jack is making onstage with the sticks.

The discrepancy between the play's present action onstage and the offstage events imparted in Michael's audience address concerning his family's future meets its starkest contrast in Act Two. Michael relates to the audience a whole host of offstage events that will take place in the protagonists' future after the few days in the summer that the play's action dwells on, right through to Michael's present time at least twenty-five years later. The audience learns that Aunt Rose and Agnes eventually finish their days impoverished in London as Michael adds that when he tracked them down twenty-five years later, Agnes was dead and Rose died soon after. No indication has been given throughout the play's action that the future would be so grim as Michael goes on to relate his discovery of his stepfamily and brother after his father's death, and even the less surprising news that Jack dies within a year still leaves the audience shell-shocked. If Michael's revelations concerning the Mundy's future have not been enough to comprehend, the audience are suddenly catapulted back into the light-hearted mood of the play's present action onstage where the only ominous sign is the death of Rose's pet rooster. Ironically, the action is recommenced by Chris who remarks, 'Well, at least

that's good news' (*DL*, p.61), even though the outcome of their lives is anything but good news.

*Dancing at Lughnasa* is a play in one sense where the often light-hearted action onstage is juxtaposed against the gloomy world offstage conveyed in Michael's remembrance, but if the action of the play's present onstage seems particularly white in comparison to the black of the Mundy's offstage future, it is most unlikely to be deliberate on Michael's part. The reason for any disjunction between the offstage events related in Michael's address and the onstage action is because memory is not always alert to the distinction between perceptions and fact (something that will be developed in the next chapter), and Michael is certainly a point in case despite his claims, as mentioned earlier, that as a child he had been aware of this 'widening breach' (*DL*, p.2). Friel famously said himself in an interview, 'A fact ... can also be something I thought happened, something I thought I experienced',<sup>61</sup> and this is a strand that emerges in Michael's remembrance of his past, particularly in his final address.

As Michael commences his final address by briefly reiterating his family's gloomy future that lurks beyond their present moment onstage, the protagonists resume the tableau position that the play had first opened with. Michael speeds through further aspects of his aunts' future adding that his mother spent the rest of her life working in the local factory and 'when my time came to go away, in the selfish way of young men I was happy to escape' (*DL*, p.71). But although Michael's latter information indicates enormous movement in the Mundy family's lives, the tableau has the opposite effect of freezing time and the action onstage. More importantly, Friel requires in a stage direction that the tableau be '*lit in a very soft, golden light ... almost, but not quite, in a haze*' (*DL*, p.70), a sign that Michael's own commentary has become equally hazy as he nostalgically recalls his most persistent memory of dancing. In tones that are reminiscent of both Friel's interview earlier quoted

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<sup>61</sup> Brian Friel, 'Self-Portrait', in *Aquarius* 5 (1972), p. 18.

and also his first play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*,<sup>62</sup> Michael admits that his remembrance of dance 'owes nothing to fact' (*DL*, p.71), an indication that memory remembers what and how it wants to remember things rather than what actually happened in reality. Michael's memories of a summer in his childhood and the events that took place over the many years after 1936 have become so blurred by the end of the play that facts no longer matter and with this token the various distinct time schemes that the play deals with seem less important.

In *Winners*, *The Freedom of the City*, *Living Quarters* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the most obvious time shifts that Friel primarily deals with are structural so that different stage spaces are employed to differentiate time, in particular the play's action in the past and the present moment that the theatre audience also inhabits. However, another prominent feature in these latter plays and also more specifically in *Volunteers* and *Faith Healer* is the conflicting narratives that emerge during these distinct time periods, and the last play to be discussed in this chapter - *Afterplay*, Friel's late play after Chekhov - also follows this trend. Unlike the other plays which are principally defined by their structural time shifts, the action of *Afterplay* begins in the play's present moment of the 1920's and follows a linear time scheme, but like *Volunteers*, only to a greater extent, the disparity in the action arises due to multiple narratives, often fictionalised, that are offered on a past that is not perceivable to the theatre audience.

Although the action of this late play is not unsettled by constant time shifts like *The Freedom of the City* or *Living Quarters*, it still follows the pattern of every play examined in this debate because from the beginning there is a sense of an action having taken place offstage in the past before the play's present moment. Not only is this evident in the choice of Friel's title, *Afterplay*, but in the opening action there is also a hint that Friel is pursuing the story of two Chekhovian plays when Andrey from *The Three Sisters* enters the Moscow

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<sup>62</sup> In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, when Private Gar recalls a childhood memory of himself and his father out on a blue boat, he questions, 'did it really take place or did he imagine it?' , (*SP*, p.89).

café and addresses Sonya, the niece of *Uncle Vanya*, in a familiar manner, 'Hello again. ... We met last night. We shared that table' (*TPA*, p.81), a sign of action having taken place prior to the present moment onstage. Through the conversation that progresses between the pair, it becomes apparent that the entire concern of the play is with a past that is not perceivable to the theatre audience, despite Sonya's insistence that 'a complete break with the past – that would be such a release, wouldn't it?' (*TPA*, p.88). However, it is not just the past of their previous encounter in the same café the night before that is revealed, but a past that spans over twenty years to the place where Chekhov had left Sonya and Andrey at the end of his two plays. In this regard, *Afterplay* brings to mind *Dancing at Lughnasa* because Michael reveals in his addresses the events of the twenty-five years between the few days in 1936 that the play's action dwells on and the present moment that he occupies, and similarly Andrey and Sonya's narratives on the past bridge both the gap of twenty years from the end of Chekhov's plays up until their present moment in the 1920's in a Moscow café. At the same time, Sonya and Andrey's deeper past - that a Chekhovian audience would be familiar with - is also revealed so that the audience can understand the context of Friel's play if they have no previous knowledge of Chekhov. However, the obvious difference with *Afterplay* in contrast to *Dancing at Lughnasa* is that the play's action onstage deals solely with the present moment in the 1920's, where in the latter, the audience perceives the action of 1936 as well as Michael's present time many years later, and in this respect *Afterplay* is perhaps more reminiscent of *Volunteers* because it is dealing in the present moment with a past that cannot be seen.

Friel's decision to base his play on Chekhov's works roughly one hundred years after Astrov speculated in *Uncle Vanya* as to whether 'the people who come after us in a hundred years time – would they remember us?',<sup>63</sup> is testimony to the fact that the past cannot be broken with. Not only is Friel concerned with the past in developing the lives of Chekhov's protagonists, Andrey and Sonya, but he can also be seen as pursuing Chekhov's style. Stanislavsky believed that Chekhov's plays could be defined by their inner

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<sup>63</sup> Anton Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, in *Plays*, trans. Elisaveta Fen (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1959), p. 188.

development, and similarly in Friel's *Afterplay*, Sonya and Andrey's narratives span a large amount of time but what is ironic is that the play can be noted for its dramatic inactivity onstage as both protagonists barely move from their positions at the café table throughout the play. In this regard, *Afterplay* is therefore like *Faith Healer* where there is little dramatic action onstage and also the concern of both plays is with a past, the events of which are offstage so that the audience never actually witnesses them.

*Afterplay* can be directly compared to *Volunteers* because like Keeney's various theories on Leif's past in the latter play, Andrey offers many contradictory versions of his past to Sonya so that the audience is left trying to distinguish between what has actually happened in the twenty fictional years since his appearance in Chekhov's play and his fabricated version of past events as he occupies the present moment onstage. The only difference between Keeney and Andrey is that for all Keeney's joking, his narratives are not always far from the truth or implausible where Andrey's narratives are 'Bloody lies!' (*TPA*, p.104) as Sonya later retorts when Andrey tries to defend his narratives as 'Little fictions'. In other words, while Keeney can be seen as trying to construct some version of the truth, Andrey attempts to deconstruct the true events of his past where his wife left him and having drunk himself to poverty, he has to busk to make money to visit his son in prison. Instead of being honest, Andrey wants to impress Sonya and believes he can do so if the truth can be fabricated, but both the audience and Sonya only learn of his lies as the play progresses. The previous evening Andrey had talked to her about his children, claiming that 'Bobik is a doctor and Sophie is an engineer' (*TPA*, p.93) but later he is forced to admit that Bobik gave up medicine and Sophie never qualified, but even this is not entirely true as the audience and Sonya finally discover that he rarely speaks to his daughter and his son is in jail. For Andrey, it is also less degrading to say that his wife is dead than admit she ran off with his colleague, while his modest living as a busker can be concealed in his claim to be a violinist in the Puccini opera.

The reason for Andrey's untruths stems from a desire to escape what Sonya calls 'the disturbing here and now' (*TPA*, p.101), which is why his 'Three

Sisters' live their lives through a romanticised vision of Moscow to escape their dreary lives in Taganrog. The need to escape the present can also be traced back directly to Keeney in *Volunteers* who also masks the reality of ritual execution that he and the other volunteers face in the present by making up fictions of Leif's past. Meanwhile, although Sonya does not lie like Andrey, she certainly lives a lie and cannot accept Andrey's proposal of a future meeting because she is still in love with Astrov, a married man who occasionally comes to her when he is drunk. In tones similar to Grace Hardy in *Faith Healer*,<sup>64</sup> Sonya has convinced herself that both now and in the past, Astrov offers her 'elusive sustenance' (TPA, p.114), in complete defiance of the 'dismal fact' (TPA, p.106) that Astrov is more likely trying to take advantage of her sexually. Her retreat into past memories of Astrov mirrors Michael Mundy's attempts at the end of *Dancing at Lughnasa* to ignore the present by focusing on his persistent memory of dancing from the past. But there is also a hint in *Afterplay* that absorption into the narrative of the past is not the most successful way of avoiding the present, as Sonya is still forced to admit that living in the present through her past memories of Astrov is 'Not much of a way to get through your life, is it?' (TPA, p.110). Moreover, there is also the suggestion in the play that not only is it impossible to escape the present but immersion into an imagined, created past means that the present becomes confusing as the truth is distorted. Baffled by Andrey's conflicting narratives, Sonya laments, 'I don't think I know anything any more' (TPA, p.105), again adding, 'I don't know what to believe anymore' (TPA, p.106). The audience are instantly reminded again of Keeney in *Volunteers* when he admits, 'I'm sure of nothing now' (V, p.72), having become so disillusioned about the past and his attempts to recreate it in the present. But regardless of whether the past is better than the present or vice versa, what is certain however, is that for Sonya and Andrey both options are at least more contemptible than the future,<sup>65</sup> as Sonya admits it is the 'future that terrifies

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<sup>64</sup> In *Faith Healer*, Grace Hardy fears that she is one of her husband's fictions, 'O my God I'm one of his fictions too, but I need him to sustain me in that existence', but despite this, she acknowledges that she needs his sustenance in the same manner that Sonya's believes in Astrov's sustenance, 'I don't know if I can go on without his sustenance' (SP, p.353).

<sup>65</sup> Sonya can be compared to Grace Hardy in *Faith Healer* because both women have a problem facing the future. Sonya claims that only 'when I summon that necessary fortitude, as I will ... then my life will begin to cohere again' (TPA, p.114), while Grace opens and closes

me' (*TPA*, p.100). The fear of looking into the future means that by the end of this play both are still in the exact same position as they were in at the end of Chekhov's play twenty fictional years earlier - both in love with someone that does not love them back. Friel's play may be called *Afterplay* but there is certainly no chance of a new beginning, no room or possibility for a future, only many endless, conflicting narratives on the past to be deciphered and remembered in what seems to be an endless and protracted present as the play concludes with Andrey continuing to write a letter to Sonya, who has left, despite the fact that the stage lights are coming down.

The fact that Friel leaves Andrey and Sonya in the same hopeless position as they were in at the end of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* is an indication of a wider pattern that is evident in *Lovers* and *Volunteers*. In *Winners*, the first part of *Lovers*, Mag and Joe arguably commit suicide at the end to avoid the likely unhappiness that awaits them if they get married, but this cycle of unhappiness repeats itself in the second part, *Lovers*, as Hanna and Andy are by the end in the same unhappy situation once they are married as Joe and Mag were destined to be in. Similarly the *Volunteers* by the end of the play make up the same wider circle of the past that Leif has been part of in that like him, they too will also be ritually executed. This idea that things have come full circle by the end of each of these three plays brings to mind Jean Baudrillard's theory that there is no such thing as the end because 'no matter where you start out, you always end up at the same point.'<sup>66</sup>

But while the protagonists of *Lovers*, *Volunteers* and *Afterplay* would appear to have come full circle by ending the play in the same personal position as they themselves or others began in, the protagonists from other plays in this discussion can be seen to inhabit the same time scheme by the end of the play as they occupied at the beginning. Therefore, in *The Freedom of the City*, the play opens with the bodies of Lily, Michael and Skinner strewn across the stage and the play finishes with the automatic gunfire that takes their lives. In

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her monologue locked in the present unable to go forward into the future because she is in 'such a mess' (*SP*, p.353) despite her attempts to convince herself otherwise.

<sup>66</sup> Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. C. Turner, (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992), p. 111.

*Living Quarters*, the play commences in the present time of the performance as the Butler family gather to re-enact a day in their past and having completed this re-enactment, the play again ends in the present time. Meanwhile, the time frame of *Faith Healer*, which is neither past nor present is defined by eternal remembrance from start to finish and in *Dancing at Lughnasa* Michael Mundy continues to stand in the same present moment that he has addressed the audience from the beginning of the play, which is at least twenty-five years after the play's time of Summer, 1936. Regardless of whether or not the plays in this chapter conclude in either the same time period or situation that they begin, it would seem that in coming full circle the distinction in beginning and end is diminished. This means that whether it is Andrey scribbling furiously to Sonya or the three Bloody Sunday protestors lying dead onstage, the present moment that the play ends with seems almost unlimited, and with it, linear time appears all the more distorted.

## The Blind Field: A Metaphor For Offstage Theatre?

The last chapter investigated time shifts in plays where chronological ordering was abolished and conflicting perspectives were portrayed on past and present events so that the play's central offstage event was distorted. In this final section, action of the past that is not visible onstage can be considered through the built-in metaphor of blindness in Friel's late work, *Molly Sweeney*, a play concerned with a blind woman who has her sight restored after forty years. The metaphor of blindness and also blindsight, that Friel employs during the play, allows for a fuller perspective on his drama in general, because both conditions prevent visual access of the sighted world, much in the way that offstage action in Friel's work forces the audience to be as blind as Molly herself.

Throughout *Molly Sweeney*, Molly's journey as a happy blind woman, to the restoration of her sight after her operation and the subsequent decline of her sight into blindsight is delivered entirely through the interconnected monologues of her surgeon, Dr Rice, Molly herself and her husband, Frank Sweeney. The three monologists conduct their interweaving monologues from separate spaces onstage and never interact with each other during the play, a sign that they are blind to one another. More importantly, there is no onstage action corresponding to the past and present events that are revealed in the protagonists narratives and therefore although the theatre audience are not literally blind, they are still blind to the main action of the play, as J.C Kerrigan point out that

the sight on the stage does no good. Like blindsight,  
theatrical spectacle in this case is not useful sight.<sup>67</sup>

The theatre audience therefore has to rely on words alone rather than sight to interpret the play, and in this respect *Molly Sweeney* draws immediate

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<sup>67</sup> John. C. Kerrigan, 'Swimming in Words' in Harp, R. and Evans, R.C (eds), *A Companion to Brian Friel* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 2002), p. 157.

comparison in its structure to Friel's earlier play, *Faith Healer*, where the play's entire onstage action also resides in Frank, Grace and Teddy's conflicting monologues which deal exclusively with the central offstage events of the past that are not perceivable to the theatre audience. In contrast to the plays that were discussed in the last chapter, in which key offstage events were distorted by onstage narrative, in *Molly Sweeney* and *Faith Healer*, Friel directly places the offstage world at the play's core through the less conventional structural device of monologue.

In the last chapter, various plays were investigated whereby various offstage events of the past were reported and remembered in a conflicting manner, and this is also the case in *Molly Sweeney* as the audience is blinded by the contending versions of the Molly story that they are offered in Molly, Frank, and Dr Rice's monologues. Through Molly's monologue, the audience learns about the contentment that she possessed in her blind world for forty years before she underwent the operation that would allow her to see, which was instigated by Frank and performed by Rice. Molly also reveals to the audience her anger at being forced to undergo the operation, her frustration in the sighted world after her initial excitement, and her subsequent slip into blindsight before her entry, by the end of the play, into a blind 'borderline country' (P2, p.509) where she can no longer distinguish between reality and imagination. By contrast, Frank's monologue lacks emotional attachment because he pursues the regain of his wife's sight as his latest cause, among many projects he has embarked on over the years from importing Iranian goats to ensuring the well being of whales. Therefore, when Molly's restored sight begins to fail, Frank has to leave her in pursuit of a new cause, feeling that he can do nothing more. Dr Rice's monologues approach the Molly story not just from a medical viewpoint but also from his own personal perspective as he confesses that restoring her sight would renew him as a person by allowing him to escape his grim reality<sup>68</sup> since his wife left him for his colleague. Like

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<sup>68</sup> Throughout the play, Frank and Rice use the restoration of Molly's sight to access their own fantasy world. Frank is obsessed with the pursuit and success of worthy causes of which Molly is just another while Rice uses the success of Molly's sight to enter a world in which he can forget the pain of his personal life after his wife left him for his colleague. When Rice is

Frank, Rice also removes himself from the situation when Molly's sight fails her, by leaving to start a new life elsewhere. Molly, Frank and Rice's respective roles in the offstage events of the Molly story varies from monologue to monologue which means that it difficult for the audience to separate fact from fiction. Consequently, Molly, who is meant to be the central character, often seems removed from her story because Frank and Rice frequently get to give their view first. This becomes apparent when the audience discover that despite the operations to restore her sight, Molly becomes totally sightless again and also mentally unstable, but such information, which should come from Molly herself, is disclosed as if by accident through Rice's random commentary on his wife's lover's memorial service when his colleague casually inquires, "So she is totally sightless now?" (P2, p.505).

Blinded by three diverse and conflicting versions of the Molly story, the audience perceive what they can and try to envisage in their minds the offstage action of the play that they cannot see. The audience's need to envisage what is not visible is well indicated by J.C. Kerrigan who writes that

In these plays ... action takes place not only on the stage, but also (and often more importantly) in the mind.<sup>69</sup>

By absorbing Molly, Frank and Rice's contending narratives, the audience try to construct in their mind a meaningful representation of the offstage world that they cannot see. Even though they are still literally blind to the action of the play, the audience's mental envisagement of offstage action in their head means that they behave in a manner similar to a blind Molly: '*like fully sighted people*' (P2, p.455).

From the imagery that is conveyed in the protagonist's narratives, the audience perceive the offstage world that they are blind to as one of darkness because

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faced with the prospect of making Molly see, he admits 'that within a week I crossed the frontier into the fantasy life again' (P2, p.469).

<sup>69</sup> J.C. Kerrigan, *op.cit.*, p.152.

the play itself is concerned with Molly's blind world, which is also one of darkness. The darkness of the blind field is highlighted when Molly becomes frustrated and disillusioned by the sighted world after her sight is restored and desires to return to her old, familiar blind world, because for her 'the only way to live – was to ... immerse yourself in darkness' (P2, p.492). A sighted Molly longs the comfort of her former darkness which is the reason why she wants to go swimming in the 'pitch dark' (P2, p.494) and also why she 'switched off the light. Then she went back to the dressing-table and sat down again; in the dark; ... and gazed listlessly at the black mirror' (P2, p.495) when she is unable to derive meaning from the sighted world. The association of the blind field with darkness is not anything new in literature - Mary Dougl in J.M Synge's *The Well of the Saints* refers to herself as a 'dark woman'<sup>70</sup> and after she loses her sight for a second time she admits that 'the blackness wasn't so black at all the other time',<sup>71</sup> a sign that her blind field is one of darkness - but in *Molly Sweeney* there are also connotations in the narrative of metaphorical darkness that would also imply metaphorical blindness. Rice, for instance, talks about the 'terrible darkness' (P2, p.489) he succumbed to when he realised how blind he had been to his wife's affair, a darkness that miraculously lifts when he operates on Molly who brings light to his life. Meanwhile, caught up in the idea of his blind wife seeing, Frank is also metaphorically blind to the fact that if Molly's sight is restored, she would lose the contentment and independence she had known in the darkness of her familiar blind world and instead be forced to live in a world that is 'disquieting; even alarming' (P2, p.492).

If the protagonists' actual and metaphorical blindness is associated with darkness throughout the play, then it is only natural that the audience view the offstage action of the play that it is blind to with darkness. To backtrack a little, the audience's association of the offstage world with darkness is also evident in Friel's other plays. In the early work, *The Gentle Island*, Sarah claims to have seen her husband, Philly, engaged in homosexual activities

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<sup>70</sup> J.M Synge, *The Well of the Saints*, in Saddlemyer A. (ed.), *Plays 1* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 79.

<sup>71</sup> J.M Synge, *op.cit.*, p.125.

with Shane, and this key event is one that takes place offstage in the 'black dark in the boathouse' (*GI*, p.24). Meanwhile, the audience discovers that Philly's late mother, Rosie Dubh, an offstage character throughout the play, drowned one night while walking along the cliffs in the dark. Rosie came from the back hills where little light could surface, not least because her uncles 'never lit a fire' (*GI*, p.21). Similarly in *Faith Healer*, offstage events are often conveyed in terms of darkness as Frank notes that like bats coming out at night, 'As soon as darkness fell, a few would begin to sidle in' (*SP*, p.335) to be healed. Later Frank recalls the play's central event in which he is murdered by a local stag party for failing to heal their crippled friend, an event that takes place 'before dawn' (*SP*, p.340) when it is still dark. Frank identifies his murderers in tones similar to Krapp's description of the offstage nurse in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*<sup>72</sup> by their 'White carnations. Dark, angular faces. Thick fingers and black nails', (*SP*, p.339). In this regard, Friel's earlier works, *The Gentle Island* and *Faith Healer* are like *Molly Sweeney* because the audience associates the offstage events that it is blind to with darkness, based on what it hears in the narratives onstage.

Like the theatre audience that convert the content of Molly, Rice and Frank's monologues into a meaningful mental representation of offstage events, Molly also has to convert her new sighted world into meaning so that she knows what she is seeing once her vision is restored. If the audience perceive the offstage that they are blind to as one of darkness, in the way that Molly's own blind field is dark, it is no surprise that Molly's perception of the sighted world is one of light. This becomes evident when her bandages are removed after her first operation and all she can see is a 'confusion of light' (*P2*, p.483), 'A bright light that hurt' (*P2*, p.484). By demarcating the boundaries of Molly's visual world after her operation by light, and her non-visual blind world by darkness, Friel is using light and dark to demarcate the boundaries of on and offstage action and space, respectively. Action can be classified as being onstage to the theatre audience because it takes place under the stage

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<sup>72</sup> In Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, the younger Krapp recalls his mother's illness during which she was nursed by a dark-skinned nurse in 'white and starch...with a big black hooded perambulator', and when she died, he remembers how he threw a 'black, hard, solid rubber ball' to a 'little white dog' (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 14-15.

light, while offstage action remains visually unperceivable to the audience because it is outside the glare of the stage light, an effect that is also achieved by Beckett in *Krapp's Last Tape*.<sup>73</sup>

Both the audience and Molly's reliance on their perceptions to construct a meaningful representation of their respective offstage and sighted worlds is suggestive of blindsight - another concept that Friel deals with in *Molly Sweeney*, in addition to blindness. Like Molly and the audience, people that have this physiological condition depend on perception to see, as Jason Holt explains that blindsight is 'the surprising ability of people ... to perceive things visually even though they lack visual experience completely.'<sup>74</sup>

In Friel's play, the condition is drawn to the audience's attention when Molly begins to lose her restored vision after her operations. Molly's blindsightedness means that 'she could see nothing, absolutely nothing at all ... But even as she said this, she behaved as if she could see - reach for her purse ... She was indeed receiving visual signals and she was indeed responding to them' (*P2*, p.498). In other words, Molly continues to perceive things visually without knowing it, as Holt says 'in blindsight, the system knows while the subject does not'<sup>75</sup> and the way in which Molly draws on her perceptions mirrors the audience's reliance on their perceptions to determine the truth of the Molly story from the three conflicting versions that are offered. However, both the audience and Molly's attempts to mentally envisage another world and draw meaning from their perceptions are completely limited because perceptions offer no surety. In the audience's case, it is impossible for them to construct an accurate mental picture of the play's offstage action because they are blinded metaphorically by the three conflicting versions of the Molly story and have no onstage action to clarify the truth, much in the

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<sup>73</sup> In Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, a desk light illuminates Krapp's table and chair while the rest of the stage is in darkness. Throughout the performance, Krapp flits between the activity onstage in the radius of the light and also offstage in the darkness where the audience can hear him opening up bottles but they cannot see him. Similarly, in Beckett's *Footfalls*, May stands under the light onstage while her mother communicates to her from the darkness of the offstage.

<sup>74</sup> Holt, *Blindsight and the Nature of Consciousness* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

way that the audience are so blinded by Frank, Grace and Teddy's contending accounts of their shared pasts in *Faith Healer* that it becomes impossible for them to know the truth. The audience's mental image of offstage events, created from the content of the monologues, is inaccurate because the audience cannot determine fact from fiction and they have no justification for what they are being told. To reflect on concerns of the last chapter, Friel portrays multiple rather than singular narratives on an event, refusing to reconcile inconsistencies or hint at the truth which means that the audience are only left with perceptions. The case is little different for Molly who becomes so blinded by the information and images of her new sighted world that she can no longer absorb anything: 'Just one more colour – light – movement – ghostly shape – and suddenly the head imploded and the hands shook and the heart melted with panic' (P2, p.492). Despite her efforts, Molly fails to draw meaning from her perceptions of the sighted world because 'her world isn't perceived instantly, comprehensively' (P2, p.477). Like blindsight, Molly has 'vision – but a vision that was utterly useless to her' (P2, p.498) because her impressions and perceptions are simply not enough for her to construct her own sighted world and the stress and frustration she puts herself under to absorb her new world inevitably acts as a catalyst for her descent into eventual blindness by the end of the play, because she cannot trust what she sees. Perceptions both for Molly and the audience are limited because they do not originate from fact, something that is reiterated by Friel at the end of *Dancing at Lughnasa* when Michael Mundy admits that what he perceives to be his most persistent memory of dancing 'owes nothing to fact' (DL, p.71).

The question of 'the relationship between vision and knowledge' (P2, p.460) arises when Molly and the audience rely on perceptions of their respective sighted and offstage worlds, rather than on actual fact. Before Molly undergoes the operation to restore her sight, she possesses knowledge of the sighted world by forming perceptions of it from the perspective of her own blind world. In having 'that rare understanding' (P2, p.483) of a world that she cannot see, Molly can acquire, for instance, visual pictures in her mind of her childhood - the subject of her opening monologue. However, when her sight is restored, it would appear that seeing is not knowing and vice versa because

she does not know what she is seeing in the sighted world. In this ‘agnosic’ (P2, p.464) state, Molly is forced to admit that the sighted world ‘had no meaning’ (P2, p.483), and when she is presented with her favourite flowers and Rice asks her to identify them she can only do so by shutting her eyes tight so as to draw perception by touch instead. The fact that Molly has vision but cannot trust what she sees, means that she becomes ‘incapable of experiencing anything’ (P2, p.494), a sign that visual experience does not equate to knowledge. If seeing does not result in knowledge for Molly, then neither does knowledge amount to sight given that she can only recall what she knows from the perspective of her blind world but cannot actually see what is before her. It is this failure to know what she sees that will lead her to become blindsighted, the condition where she will, according to Holt ‘have knowledge in one sense and lack it in another.’<sup>76</sup>

When Molly develops these symptoms, she even admits that ‘I didn’t know if the things I did see were real or was I imagining them... I couldn’t trust any more what sight I still had. It was no longer trustworthy’ (P2, p.500). Meanwhile, the theatre audience think that they know the offstage events of the Molly story due to the imagery they have painted in their mind from the powerful narrative onstage, but the audience cannot know what they cannot see onstage, and they also cannot see onstage what they do not know. Both Molly and the audience’s unavoidable reliance on their perceptions, not fact, results in a ‘catch 22’ situation which prevents knowledge and seeing from relating to one another.

The audience’s lack of knowledge, as a result of their blindness to the play’s entire offstage action, can be viewed in two different ways. Firstly, the audience can be seen to experience alienation<sup>77</sup> due to their lack of knowledge and inability to perceive the offstage events that the play focuses on, much in

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<sup>76</sup> Holt, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>77</sup> The alienation effect achieved in the play parallels Bertolt Brecht’s notion of *Verfremdungseffekt*, where the subject seems unfamiliar, a technique of defamiliarisation that allows the audience to remain detached or as Brecht says, ‘The alienation effect intervenes, not in the form of absence of emotion, but in the form of emotions which need not correspond to those of the character portrayed’, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 94.

the way that Molly's inability to know what she sees forces her to feel alienated in her sighted world, which she refers to as 'a very foreign world ... every shape an apparition, a spectre that suddenly challenged you' (P2, p.492). But secondly, there is a sense that it does not matter if the audience lack knowledge and only have perceptions that are not reliable because Friel perhaps wants the audience to see past fact and surrender themselves instead to the non-visual experience of the play with an acceptance of the inconsistent versions of the Molly story that are offered. Molly's stance at the end of the play suggests that it is futile of the audience to try to make sense of offstage events by envisaging what they cannot see. Unable to make sense of her sighted world, Molly's vision gradually reverts so that she becomes blind again and any concern for knowing also regresses and is replaced by an acceptance that reality and imagination have merged into one: 'Real – imagined – fact – fiction – fantasy – reality – there it seems to be. And it seems to be alright. And why would I question any of it any more?' (P2, p.509). Like Molly, who tolerates a world that she realises she cannot entirely comprehend, the audience must also accept the offstage events in Molly, Frank and Rice's monologues with all the inaccuracies with which they are portrayed.

Molly's existence at the end of the play in 'a borderline between fantasy and reality' (P2, p.500) is also referred to as 'external reality' (P2, p.495), which is suggestive of the offstage space that is situated beyond the reality of the play onstage. In this borderline space, Molly has eluded the reality that Frank and Rice consider themselves a part of and she also seems to exist beyond the reality of the present moment of Friel's play. Molly's seeming mental detachment at the end of *Molly Sweeney* from both the play itself and also the present time and reality that the audience occupy, stems from the fact that by this stage in the play Molly has become lost in words. The irony is that Friel has named his play, *Molly Sweeney*, after Molly who is the play's focus and central character, but by the end of the play both Molly and her story have become distorted and lost among Frank and Rice's own narratives in which Molly is just a subsidiary part among both men's inner fantasy worlds. In this regard, both Molly and these men are beyond each other as they occupy their

own elusive and individual 'external reality'. Meanwhile, Molly's final resting place in the space of external reality remains as elusive to the audience as the offstage events conveyed in Molly, Frank and Rice's narratives throughout the performance.

Friel's employment of monologue, which results in a lack of onstage action and a concentration on the non-visual, has led some critics to call plays such as *Molly Sweeney* and *Faith Healer* radio dramas,<sup>78</sup> while others like Richard Pine criticise them because they 'lack dramatic impact'.<sup>79</sup> In more general terms, another consensus, that Seamus Heaney<sup>80</sup> has advocated, is that Friel is more of a poet than a dramatist. But maybe, as Rice says, these critics are 'confusing seeing with understanding' (P2, p.475) because they fail to acknowledge that although monologue is not a conventional dramatic structure - as it leaves the audience blind to the action of the play which is instead pushed offstage - at the same time, the non-visual experience is a central part of Friel's work on the whole. By taking offstage theatre to the limit through monodrama, Friel is reiterating the demarcation between the visual and non-visual stage space, and the dramatic structure of *Molly Sweeney* mirrors the play's internal metaphor of blindness because the audience becomes as blind as Molly when it cannot see action that takes place offstage. Moreover, there is also a sense that the non-visual theatrical experience is more powerful as Molly confesses: 'I used to think that the other people ... the sighted people, ...their pleasure was actually diminished because they could see' (P2, p.466). It is in Molly's latter viewpoint that Friel responds to those that criticise his plays for lacking visual action and spectacle. Friel recognises the necessity of narrowing the audience's vision as a means of intensifying the play's dramatic impact and making his work somehow elusive and mysterious, an element that

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<sup>78</sup> Ruth Niel, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

<sup>79</sup> Richard Pine, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>80</sup> Seamus Heaney believes that 'Brian Friel's plays are poetic and mighty because ... he has given his audience access to their own possibilities and reminded them also of their limitations', 'For Liberation: Brian Friel and the Use of Memory' in Peacock, A (ed.), *The Achievement of Brian Friel* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993), p. 240. Echoing Heaney's sentiments of the poetics of Friel's work, Dantanus also says of *Winners*, that 'the play is tragic but has a poetic style', *Brian Friel: A Study* (London: Faber and Faber 1988), p.109.

critics do not always see, perhaps because they too 'behave like a man with blindsight' (P2, p.498).

## CONCLUSION

In Friel's late play, *Wonderful Tennessee*, the protagonists constantly look throughout the play at an island that is situated offstage. The island is intangible and elusive to the audience because they cannot see offstage and are forced to rely on the reportage and narrative of the protagonists to perceive it. The world that the audience can see onstage is also not what it seems, despite appearances. A party of three couples stranded on Ballybeg pier await the arrival of a boat that will take them to their destination, Oilean Draiochta, the island that lies before them. Unlike other plays considered in this thesis in which there is a play with time, the time of this play, which is set in the present, is classically linear, rigidly contained within twenty-four hours, with no unclassical licence. To pass the time as they wait for the boat that never actually comes<sup>81</sup>, the party engage in storytelling and song-singing. The aural element of music and the verbal outlet of storytelling may give the appearance of a jovial, party atmosphere but that is not the mood of this play. Unusual in Friel's work, this play is relentlessly tense. It is a study of evasion, of people in denial. The urgency and reckless abandon with which the protagonists throw themselves into singing and storytelling provides a window on each protagonist's grimmer, deeper past, that has taken place offstage; the stage window may not feature in this play as such but music and verbal exchange act indirectly as a window on the protagonist's offstage past and buried but ongoing troubles.

When the action onstage is other than it first seems, then it is unsurprising that the offstage island is referred to by Berna as 'Island of Otherness; [it is] Island of Mystery' (*P2*, p.369), explicitly in light of the fact that the island was once, according to legend, a 'spectral, floating island' (*P2*, p.369). It is poignant that this island, which is offstage, is considered as being 'other' because the offstage in Friel's theatre too is a space that is other to the main onstage performance space, and like the offstage island which is mysterious to the

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<sup>81</sup> The scenario of Friel's play, in which six people await a boat that never comes, is highly reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In Beckett's play, Estragon and Vladimir spend the entire action of the play awaiting the arrival of Godot who never comes.

protagonists, offstage action, which is not visible to the theatre audience, provides an elusive and mysterious element in Friel's theatre. This sense that the offstage is elusive has been examined in my previous chapter on *Molly Sweeney*. Molly's non-visual blind field and the happiness and pleasure she possesses in it eludes her husband, Frank, to such an extent that he instigates an operation to restore her sight so that she can experience his world. Moreover, although the blind world eludes Frank, the crucial action of *Molly Sweeney* also remains elusive and mysterious to the theatre audience because it takes place offstage.

Friel's placement of action offstage, so as to restrict the audience's vision of the island in *Wonderful Tennessee*, or displace the action offstage as in *Molly Sweeney*, can be traced in its origins back to *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. Throughout this latter work, it is the action in the auditorium that remains elusive to the play's protagonists; they cannot see the audience that are situated offstage because this space is outside the margins of the main onstage performance space from where they -- the protagonists - stand. At first, Cass succeeds in engaging with the audience as they sit before her in the offstage spatial domain of the auditorium because she still has, at this point in the play, the verbal stage device that is audience address at her disposal. This offstage space, however, eludes the play's other protagonists, so that when Trilbe 'searches the auditorium. She looks back at Cass and again at the auditorium. She sees no one out there' (LCM, p.29). But gradually, even Cass loses her access to the offstage space that the audience occupy when she can no longer perceive it visually, having retreated into a world of fantasy. This becomes evident when Cass 'searches the auditorium. She sees nobody' (LCM, p. 59). Moreover, the fantasy world that Cass succumbs to is itself referred to as 'otherness' (LCM, p.28) because it concerns offstage events from a past that the audience never witness in the play's present moment onstage. Thus, if the offstage world of the audience eludes Cass, then the audience are equally eluded by the offstage events of Cass's past that are only conveyed in her narratives when she succumbs to the fantasy world.

Cass's inability to perceive visually the offstage space of the auditorium has a parallel in the scene in *Dancing at Lughnasa* when Maggie pretends to the boy, Michael, that she is holding 'something fragile' in her hands and tells him to stand back before

*(Suddenly she opens her hands and her eyes follow the rapid and imaginary flight of something up to the sky and out of sight. She continues staring at it. Pause.)*

BOY: What was it?

MAGGIE: Did you see it?

BOY: I think so ... yes.

Maggie: Wasn't it wonderful?

- (*DL*, p.14)

Although Maggie is verbally tricking the boy into thinking that he sees something that is not visible, the scene is a subtle but pivotal moment in the play because other than the fact that the 'something' in Maggie's hand highlights the tension between reality and imagination and the visual and non-visual world. Maggie's awe and wonder at something that is not concrete or visible reflects Friel's concern with placing action offstage in his work, so that like the 'something' in Maggie's hand, it is 'out of sight'. Offstage action, therefore, remains intriguing and elusive because it can only be conveyed to the theatre audience through verbal and aural dramatic devices: audience address, the stage window, music and time shifts. Fascinated that Maggie apparently sees what is clearly invisible to himself, Michael inquires, 'Was it a bird?' (*DL*, p.14), and this episode encapsulates the way in which offstage action that is also not visually perceivable can produce a non-visual experience for the theatre audience that is both intriguing and mysterious: if Michael could see what Maggie is pretending to see, his intrigue and excitement would be diminished. Friel suggests that if the entire action of drama were revealed in a simple visual spectacle, the richness would be greatly diminished.

At the end of Friel's most recent work for the stage, *Performances*, the audience is confronted onstage with the image of the play's central character, the Czech composer, Leos Janacek, listening for 'a long time' (*P*, p.39) to a visiting string quartet that perform the allegro that concludes the play. This concluding sequence is calculated by Friel as lasting 'approximately 13½ minutes' (*P*, p.10) and throughout this daringly protracted conclusion the Janacek figure moves onstage so as to evoke the offstage. As he listens to the allegro, he reads a line or two of the love letters that he had written to Kamila, a woman he was romantically besotted with when he composed the allegro that is being played, so that music of the present time onstage is providing a window on his offstage past. Janacek then leans back from the letters and closes his eyes to absorb himself wholly in the music, a sign that the visual spectacle is useless. The music, as an aural rather than visual element, engulfs the entire theatre space so that as it continues to play for another few minutes, the audience is forced to surrender to an abstract, intangible experience that owes nothing to vision. This experience proved so powerful that at the world premiere of *Performances*, at the Gate Theatre, Dublin, the theatre front of house staff remarked in amazement how half the theatre audience lingered on in their seats for up to half an hour after the allegro ends so that they stayed gazing on what had become an offstage space, a space which in Berna's words in *Wonderful Tennessee* can be perceived in terms of 'The wonderful – the sacred – the mysterious' (*P2*, p.369).

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