

**STAGING IRELAND'S YANKS:
AMERICAN CHARACTERS IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH THEATRE**

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Over the past 50 years Ireland has undergone a sweeping series of changes that have transitioned the nation from a protectionist agrarian state to a modern, globalized entity. The United States has played a significant role in that evolution. Once the destination for a majority of Irish emigrants, later an arbiter in the peace process, and then the primary investor fueling a new Irish economy, America has a relationship with Ireland that is concurrently political, economic, and cultural. Consequently, when Irish playwrights and theatres produce work that engages with contemporary issues facing Ireland, they often use American characters as catalysts to explore specifically Irish problems.

On a basic level, this study contends that American characters have emerged as an important paradigm in contemporary Irish theatre, and that these characters dynamically track the evolution of Ireland's relationship with the United States. Further, this study demonstrates that Irish playwrights often use American characters in order to document, question, or criticize trends within contemporary Irish culture. Through the analysis of thirteen plays and their historical contexts, this work looks at both theatrical production and reception within the three major paradigms of contemporary Irish history: Emigration, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and the Celtic Tiger economy. After assessing how American characters are portrayed in Irish theatre across multiple historical contexts, it becomes clear that these characters do not exist in isolation, but instead have become an integral part of contemporary Irish theatre itself.

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I owe much gratitude to my parents as well, as they have heartily encouraged my development as a teacher, director, and scholar for many years. They have been and continue to be excellent role models. I owe endless thanks to the countless family and friends who have listened and challenged me along the way, whether during our years in Prague, Greece, Western Africa, Dublin, or the numerous places in the States that we have called home, including the wonderful city of Pittsburgh. Close friends and family have a way of making even the most solitary of tasks feel communal. And thanks, too, to the few salty rogues along the way whose baleful energies occasionally encourage the rest of us to work a little bit harder.

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And then there are the practitioners, those who create the work that scholars consume. This study only seeks to add color and context to the already tremendous accomplishments of the playwrights, designers, actors, directors, and other theatre professionals who created all of these productions in the first place. It is my hope that their ephemeral work will live on in new ways through honest scholarship. I can also say with certainty that this project could never have been accomplished without the tremendous resources made available by the Irish Theatre Institute, Abbey Theatre, National Library of Ireland, and Irish Newspaper Archive. Similar thanks are due to organizations such as the American Conference for Irish Studies (ACIS), Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE), and the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR); many parts of this project originally found their feet in conference sessions around the country.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The discourse of nationality and identity continues to hold a major place in academic and artistic communities. In what ways do people identify themselves, and how are they identified by others? Is nationality persisting or diminishing as an identifier? I find this interplay of nationality and identity to be especially salient in Ireland, where the past 50 years has been a veritable rollercoaster of political, economic, and social change. While cultural identity is an enduring topic, it becomes an urgent one in communities experiencing significant transitions, which is precisely the case with contemporary Ireland.

Writing in the early 1990s, Irish politician and historian J. H. Whyte sums up the two decades from the early 1960s to the early 1980s as a period “of more rapid change than any preceding period of comparable length in Irish history.”¹ The rate of change in all facets of Irish society was tremendous, due largely to reforms instituted in the late 50s and 60s, which sought to attract foreign investment and stem the flow of emigration. While the transition from a protectionist economy to a member of the European Economic Community (EEC) had its fair share of hurdles, politicians were largely able to follow through on their plans to bring Ireland into the mid twentieth-century as a newly sovereign nation. Foreign companies established a presence in Ireland, the agricultural sector gained massive amounts of support via EEC

¹ J. H. Whyte in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (Cork: Mercier Press, 1996), 342.

membership, and emigration slowed considerably for the first time in over a hundred years. Further, social reforms brought about a large-scale overhaul of the education system, Ireland's population began to grow and get younger, and the strict Catholic mores once prevalent in Ireland began to noticeably erode.

One reason for the dramatic slowdown in reform in the 1980s was the increasingly volatile situation in Northern Ireland. Sectarian unrest in the North required the intervention of British Army forces in late 1969, and the situation has proven extremely difficult to diffuse. After the failure of several promising attempts to negotiate an end to the violence in the 1970s, politicians from both the Republic and the North began looking for answers outside of Ireland, in terms of foreign aid and moderation. Even the United Kingdom, which had long maintained that the Troubles was an explicitly *internal* conflict, was forced to listen to international opinion after the considerable gravity brought to the situation by Bobby Sands and the other hunger strikers in 1981.

The United States, with its massive Irish-American population, had long maintained a curious relationship with many factions connected to the Troubles. Officially, the US was hesitant to engage directly with the conflict, primarily due to its very close relationship with the United Kingdom. Unofficially, Republican paramilitary organizations sourced a considerable amount of funding and influence through the legions of Irish-Americans residing in the US, many of whom made sentimental links between the current Troubles and the oft-romanticized earlier struggle for Irish independence. It was only in 1985, as an ancillary part of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, that Reagan would establish legitimate US involvement in the Troubles in the form of monetary aid. From there, US involvement in the Troubles would balloon, right up until

George Mitchell was named United States Special Envoy for Northern Ireland, ultimately chairing the negotiations that would lead to the Good Friday Peace Agreement of 1998.

Concurrently in the mid-1990s, just as the Troubles were being reigned in, Ireland experienced its second round of unprecedented growth. Again it was foreign aid and international investment that breathed life into Ireland's economy, but this time the money came so quickly that the beast was given a name: The Celtic Tiger. Myriad factors from within Ireland, such as mid-century reforms to the educational system and low corporate taxation rates, combined with external elements, such as the internet boom in the United States and the development of the European Union and its single currency, to create a unique situation in which Ireland's economy would experience a decade of double-digit growth. Dozens of major multinational corporations (Microsoft, Shell, Google, GE, etc.) moved their European headquarters to Ireland, while at the same time the European Union (EU) was pumping billions of Euro into modernizing Ireland's infrastructure. Unemployment hit an all-time low, which brought large amounts of immigration, this time from the many newly-minted EU member states in eastern Europe.

Once again, the massive economic changes quickly translated into cultural ones, in what has been described as the rapid Americanization of Ireland. Church attendance declined sharply, and American-style malls and mega-cinemas began opening up as affluent twenty-somethings suddenly had cash to burn. The gulf between the city (Dublin) and the country grew even sharper, as wealthy Dubliners purchased weekend homes on the west coast via a marketing campaign titled: "Look west – to your roots." Rural Irish villages were literally marketed to Dubliners as a place that they could go to get in touch with their Irish side, and pubs around Ireland began redundantly marketing themselves as "Irish Pubs." This is also the time that

Riverdance became a massive success, first to Irish audiences, before travelling to America and further abroad. One after another, signs of old Ireland were bulldozed to make way for the new, and even Guinness – the single most quintessential Irish brand – was sold to a major multinational drinks maker (Diageo), after having been in the hands of the Guinness family for over 270 years. Everything, it would seem, had a price, and the Celtic Tiger endorsed such commodification.

The social and economic changes have been so rapid, the cultural shifts so distinct that it is no wonder, then, that in the past 50 years Irish nationality and identity has been a major sticking point for Irish artists. This is of particular importance in theatre and the performing arts, where identities are purposely crafted and displayed on stage. In the case of Ireland, many of these portrayals are destined for the *national* stage, as the Abbey Theatre, among others, continues its quest to produce work that is specifically Irish, just as its founders were attempting to do well over a century ago. The interesting overlap is precisely how such broad national distinctions can effectively be employed in the theatre. If “Celticism” was *de rigueur* for Lady Gregory and Yeats, might “Americanism” be apropos for Friel and Murphy?

This study contends that just as America has played a massive role in Ireland’s recent history, American characters similarly play a significant role in contemporary Irish Theatre. I have researched over 60 such plays where this is the case, all with significant American characters, and all written and produced in Ireland within the past 50 years, many with resounding popular success. My thesis is that these American characters do not exist in isolation, but rather they closely track changing Irish perceptions of America through recent history. This

takes place in three major historical contexts, which will form the basis for the three chapters that follow.

1. Emigration is depicted in an increasingly negative light after a wave of reforms helped to modernize Ireland in the 1960s. This translates to the stage in the form of unsuccessful Irish-Americans who return to Ireland only to discredit the idea of the American Dream.
2. As Ireland was looking to America for support during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, American characters hit the stage parallel to America's changing stance on the Troubles: at first neutral and unattached, and later increasingly involved and ultimately helpful.
3. Finally, with the tremendous recent economic growth (then collapse) of the Celtic-Tiger came concerns over the Americanization of Ireland, and theatres focused on representations of American characters to highlight the effects of American capitalism and cultural appropriation on a newly wealthy Celtic Tiger Ireland.

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For many years scholars have discussed the "stage-Irishman", a stock character heavily used in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Anglophone drama. This stage-Irishman was a loveable, if unreliable, drunk, a perfect stereotype to be used in contrast to the more proper British characters. During the early twentieth-century, as Ireland's literary scene became increasingly concerned with its "Irishness," the Irish theatre rejected the stage-Irishman. Perhaps most notable is George Bernard Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), which features Irish characters who are keenly aware of the stereotype and play off of it to their own advantage within the world of the play. The production, more evolutionary than revolutionary, found considerable success in London, and likely helped to pave the way for a more nuanced depiction

of Irish characters, as was concurrently beginning to take shape at the nascent “literary theatres” in Dublin and Belfast at the same time.²

The founders of the Irish Literary Theatre (which would affectionately become known as “The Abbey”) and the Ulster Literary Theatre were dedicated to creating and staging specifically Irish theatre; that is, theatre that was situated in Ireland and inherently concerned with Irish identity. This new wave of Irish playwrights made great strides away from the stage-Irishman and soon began writing foreigners onto their own national stages. Before long, both theatres were regularly featuring Irish-American characters in the form of returned-emigrants, simply because emigration was an unavoidable aspect of the Irish experience. Although still operating largely within the style of Irish peasant drama, these liminal foreigners, stuck between their native land and their adopted one, would become the seeds for an important dramatic paradigm in the contemporary Irish theatre: using Americans as catalysts to address domestic conflict.

For the purposes of broad classification, I am going to follow the lead of other scholars and divide recent Irish theatre into two distinct time periods, based on a significant moment in Irish theatrical history: The original Abbey Theatre burned to the ground in 1951, and would not reopen until 1966. The intervening years were something of a lull for Irish theatre, and although the Abbey worked in conjunction with other theatres to stage productions, the early 1950s were a relative dark period for Irish theatrical innovation. Thus, I will consider the period from the inception of the “literary theatres” in the 1890s through the burning of the Abbey in 1951 as “Modern Irish Theatre.” While the period produced a wide variety of styles and plays, I contend that as a whole they are markedly different than the work that would follow. As such, Modern

² A similar argument could be made for some of Dion Boucicault’s earlier work, though it falls outside the parameters of this project.

Irish Theatre will provide an important starting point for my investigation, but will remain just that: a place to establish a foundation, but not the primary concern of this dissertation.

Beginning in the early 1960s, perhaps with Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), a profoundly different kind of theatre began to flourish on Irish stages, which I will simply refer to as "Contemporary Irish Theatre." It is within this period, the past 50 years, that my investigation truly takes shape, building on the foundations of what came before, and largely concerned with Ireland's increasingly visible place in the global world.³ As Ireland's "native" (and I use the term loosely) theatre scene was rejuvenated and blossomed in the mid/late-20th century, an interesting thing began to take place: American characters became more and more prevalent on Irish stages, hence it is with contemporary Irish theatre that I focus my inquiry.

When foreigners appear in a play, it is never a chance meeting, but rather a direct example of competing identities at play. This dissertation will craft a critical history of the myriad American characters that have been written into contemporary Irish theatre by looking at thirteen representative plays and their historical and political contexts. While the American characters found in Irish theatre have occasionally been discussed singly in the context of individual plays, the old adage applies: it is hard to see the forest for the trees. My intent is to pull back and address the whole story. Contemporary Irish theatre does not *happen* to be full of American characters, each in isolation from one another, but rather they are all part of a significant cultural paradigm, and one deeply rooted in Irish and Irish-American history. This idea has gone largely unrecognized in current scholarship, aside from my own. My analysis, at once historical, political, and theatrical, will consider the play texts as historical documents that

³ As discussed in the chapters that follow, I will follow Fintan O'Toole's lead in further subdividing this period of "Contemporary Irish Theatre" into two distinct phases.

are just one part of larger performance histories. These histories must necessarily include the theatre professionals who bring such texts to life, the audiences who experience the shows, the popular critics who engage with the performances, and the historical circumstances that inform the productions. I ultimately seek to reconcile the trend of American characters in contemporary Irish theatre with the history that has shaped the relationship between Ireland and America over the same time period. Thus, I am seeking to acknowledge the trees as part of a collective forest: one that is important to Irish theatre history.

First, the Americans found in recent Irish plays will be couched in Irish theatre history. It is significant that American characters have displaced British ones as the "other" of choice on the Irish stage.⁴ These Americans are the primary "others" against which Irish characters are depicted. Therefore it is necessary to branch out from theatre history into a macro historical analysis to look at why this has become the case: From politics to pop culture, the evolution of Irish history, with an eye to America, will serve as crucial evidence when making claims about trends in American characters on the Irish stage.

Any historical analysis of Ireland is necessarily going to be entrenched in emigration, and that is the starting point for my project, particularly as it relates to modern Irish theatre and entertainment. Although the waves of Irish emigration flooded the shores of both Britain and the United States (as well as many other countries), America lured emigrants with the promise of "The American Dream." As demonstrated so perfectly in the first film known to have been shot in Ireland, Sydney Olcott's *The Lad From Old Ireland* (1910), the emigration ideal was simple:

- 1) You sail to America as a peasant; 2) work your way up (literally) in New York City; and then
- 3) return home with bags of money just in time to save your colleen and humiliate the landlord.

⁴ As noted by Brian Singleton in "Performing Ireland: New Perspectives on Contemporary Irish Theatre" in *Australasian Drama Studies* 43 (October 2003) and referenced by Marvin Carlson in his Wurtzburg keynote.

Truth be told, emigrating to England just wasn't as interesting as departing for America, and in purely dramatic terms a visit from the U.K. pales in comparison to a homecoming from the USA. Thus, it is the American characters that tend to occupy the foreign spotlight on the Irish stage.

Consequently, the first section will focus exclusively on how emigration has shaped the relationship between Ireland and America, and how Irish theatre has employed American characters to respond to the changing role of emigration in Irish society. A major focus will be on Brian Friel's work, particularly *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, which begin a new phase of Irish theatre while telling two very different emigration stories. I will then look at the role of John F. Kennedy in the Irish imagination by tracking his relevance in Irish culture via two plays spread across nearly twenty years, Michael McDonnell's *All Gods Die on Friday* and Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming*.

The next section will delve into the Troubles, a tumultuous period of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland that spanned from 1969 to ~1998. After a brief overview contextualizing the Troubles, I will chart America's role throughout the conflict via four disparate "Troubles Plays" and their respective American characters. Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* is the earliest and most political of the period, and it relies upon an American sociologist to give voice to the playwright's political opinions. Dominic Behan's *Hotel Europé* and Marie Jones *Now You're Talkin'* both place ineffective American mediators at the center of the conflict, using comedy to ironically demonstrate that resolution and reconciliation are not tasks to be taken lightly. I finish the section with a look at Frank McGuinness's *Dolly West's Kitchen*, which is both a Troubles play and a post-Troubles play as it uses a historical metaphor to showcase how American involvement can bring peace into a troubled household.

My final section focuses on the recent Irish economic phenomenon known as the Celtic Tiger, a period from the mid-1990s to 2007 when Ireland was suddenly catapulted into economic success, largely at the hands of foreign and American investment. I begin with a look at Irish theatrical representations of Hollywood in Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and Marie Jones *Stones in His Pockets*, where American representations of Ireland are called into question. I then return to Brian Friel and his *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*, a semi-autobiographical play that asks Irish artists to think twice when American institutions seek to appropriate and value their work. To conclude the study, I revisit the subject of emigration, this time situated against the Celtic Tiger economy, where Tom Murphy's *The Wake* holds the mirror up to Ireland via a returned-emigrant who barely recognizes her homeland.

In conclusion, as Ireland's social, economic, and cultural landscapes have been rapidly changing, so too has its relationship with the United States. What was once a primary destination for Irish emigrants is now a source of major political and cultural influence. This study demonstrates that American characters have become an important tool that Irish playwrights and theatres regularly employ when crafting plays about significant issues facing contemporary Irish culture and identity.

2.0 THE ENDS OF EMIGRATION 1960-1985

*Emigration in Ireland is a predominant way of life. It has been going on since the Milesians landed in South Kerry over 2000 years ago, and I suspect it will go on forever.*⁵

- John B. Keane, 1995

2.1 EMIGRATION AS THEATRICAL MATERIAL

Playwright John B. Keane's summation of Ireland's entanglement with emigration is as accurate as it is concise. Any history of Ireland must contend with emigration, and Ireland's theatres have done so since the establishment of a distinctly Irish theatre at the beginning of the 20th century. At the forefront of the discussion of emigration must then be America. The destination for over 7 million Irish emigrants, America was all but synonymous with emigration in 19th and 20th century Ireland.

⁵ *Out of Ireland*, DVD, directed by Paul Wagner II (1995; Newton, NJ: Shanachie Entertainment, 1997).

This chapter seeks to examine and document how American characters have served the Irish stage as Ireland transitioned from a territory of the United Kingdom, to a protectionist state, and then became a major player in the global market. The seeds for such characters were set in early 20th-century theatre and film, and the Irish theatrical “golden age” of the 1960s saw these characters reach maturity as a rapidly modernizing Ireland officially recognized chronic emigration as a national problem.

2.1.1 Irish Literary Theatres and National Identity

Although Irish and American characters had intermingled on stage well before the twentieth century, there had been no theatrical forum for Irish playwrights to directly address Irish audiences prior to the “Literary Theatre” movement in Ireland. This changed significantly in 1899 when Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats, George Moore, and Edward Martyn established the Irish Literary Theatre. Later renamed the Abbey, it would become the first major theatrical effort dedicated exclusively to presenting and cultivating Irish theatre. Several years later, Bulmer Hobson and David Parkhill would follow suit with the corresponding Ulster Literary Theatre (ULT), similarly dedicated to representing material relevant to Ulster on stage.⁶

Both of these theatres prided themselves on their relevance to contemporary Ireland, and as such, emigration was necessarily a frequent subject on their stages. Notable to this project is that the vast majority of these emigration plays feature America as the destination of choice. This

⁶ The initial motivation behind the Ulster Literary Theatre was that it might be an extension of the Irish Literary Theatre; however the idea was not well received in Dublin. Thus Hobson and Parkhill founded a parallel, yet distinct, theatre for the North. It should be noted that its political bent, as with the Abbey, was decidedly republican.

is because although the tides of emigration have spread the Irish to many countries, no country has received as many Irish immigrants as the United States of America. Considering just the period after the Famine and ending with 1920, the United States received five out of every six Irish emigrants. (fig 2.1)

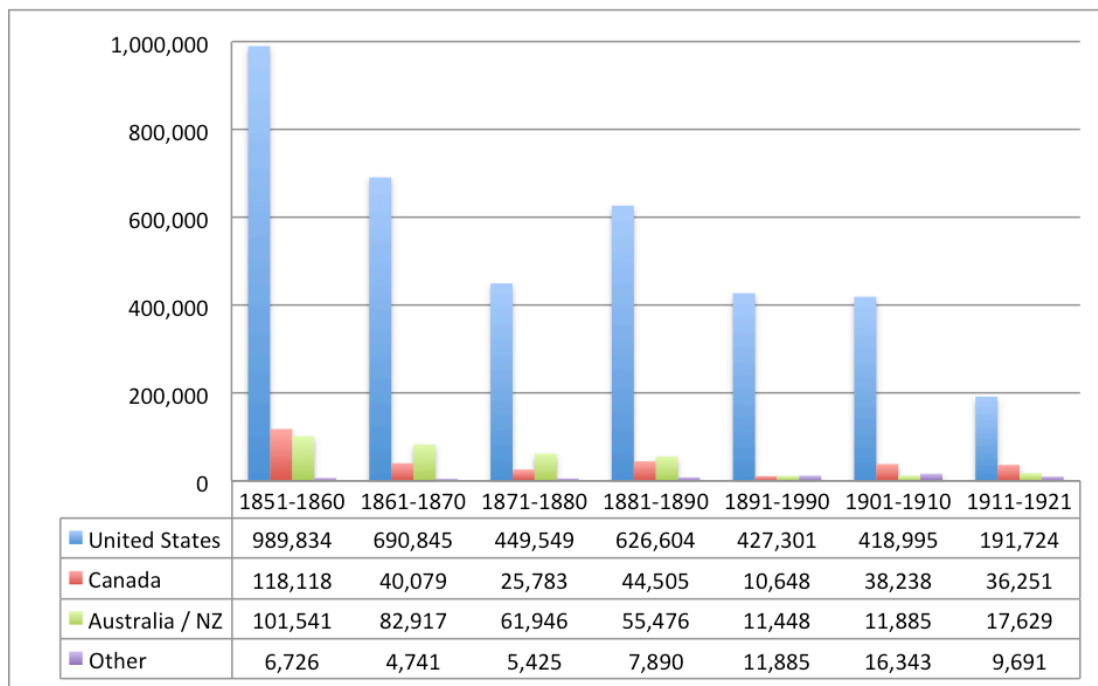


Figure 2.1 Irish Emigration by Destination, 1851-1921.⁷

Thus, the States would become the obvious choice for playwrights looking to unpack the Irish emigration phenomenon on stage. However, simply naming an emigrant's destination as "America" didn't provide enough material for theatrical storytelling, hence an American character was often placed onto the Irish stage in order to make real the implications of emigration. By locating an American onstage alongside inherently Irish characters, playwrights and theatres invited audiences to compare and contrast the national identities against one another, effectively offering a contemporary critique of emigration.

⁷ Data compiled from *Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems*, (Dublin: Ministry of Social Welfare, 1954), 309-11.

In the early days of Irish national theatre, the American character was almost always Irish-American: in common Irish parlance, a “returned-Yank.” These returned-emigrants personified the trans-Atlantic migratory experience, and were drawn in sharp contrast to their Irish counterparts. The adoption of a hyphenated identity signaled the emigrant as homeless: In America they were simply Irish, and upon returning “home” to Ireland, they were seen as American. As noted by Marvin Carlson, these characters serve as “. . . *a disturbing mixture of Same and Other, impossible to fully place on either side and serving to expose the tensions and inadequacies of both.*”⁸

Both the Abbey and the Ulster Literary Theatre routinely used American characters on their stages in order to draw attention to the topic of emigration. Notable early Irish playwrights such as George Sheils, Hugh Quinn, Piaras Béaslaí, Dorothea Donn-Byrne, Lennox Robinson, and St. John Greer Ervine all employed Americans to do the heavy lifting in plays which presented fictional emigrations – and often returns – to Irish audiences. However, it all began with the Abbey’s 1907 production of George Fitzmaurice’s *The Country Dressmaker*.

⁸ Marvin Carlson, “The Mother Tongue and the Other Tongue: The American Challenge in Recent Drama” (keynote address at the 11th annual conference for the German Society for Contemporary Theatre and Drama in English, Würzburg, Germany, May 9-12, 2002).

2.1.2 1907: The First Returned-Emigrant on Stage

George Fitzmaurice was a writer, playwright, and eccentric who had as many plays produced by the Abbey as he had rejected by them. His work is often cited as “ahead of his time” and his plays have recently been enjoying newfound popularity, with Conall Morrison heralding Fitzmaurice as “the one remaining under-celebrated genius of twentieth-century Irish Drama.”⁹

The Country Dressmaker is a comedy about a young woman, Julia Shea, who harbors a penchant for the romantic. She has spent the past ten years convincing herself that her true love will one day return from his emigration to sweep her off her feet. Pats Connor, the man in question, emigrated to the US ten years prior, and has done nothing to warrant Julia’s obsession. Julia’s neighbors, the Clohesy family, have been catering to Julia’s imagination, occasionally spurring her on with tales of fictional letters from Pats wherein he details his love for her. Meanwhile, the audience learns that Michael Clohesy has been arranging his own contrived, and financially motivated, plan to get Pats to marry one of his own daughters.

However, the love triangles that unfold and the heavy emphasis on marriage are not simply comic devices at the Abbey. As Fiona Brennan points out, “the necessity of marriage for both the Sheas and the Clohesys was an economic fact of life.”¹⁰ Neither family has any evidence to support their theories that Pats has found success in his emigration, they simply assume it to be true because emigrants, by definition, had escaped the poverty inherent in rural Irish life. The actual material conditions that these emigrants found in America, however, often differed greatly from the Irish-American Emigrant Dream.

⁹ Fiona Brennan, *George Fitzmaurice: ‘Wild in His Own Way’* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2005), back cover.

¹⁰ Brennan, *Wild in His Own Way*, 55.

When Pats actually does arrive back in Ireland, he is a relic of the man he once was. He has been widowed by his German wife, whom he met in America, and he is variously described as “withered, bald,” and an “old sham of a Yank.”¹¹ Nevertheless, his meager financial security relative to the impoverished Irish makes him an appealing potential husband, and the Clohesys embark on various and sundry plans to get Pats to marry a Clohesy daughter, any Clohesy daughter. Pats eventually learns of their plans, and decides to thwart them by instead marrying Julia after all, despite having “no particularly deep attachment” to her.¹²

The comedy comes to a head when Julia sees Pats for the first time, and he proclaims that he has returned from America just to marry her, thus unknowingly fulfilling her decade-long obsession. However, Pats isn’t exactly what Julia had been expecting:

*Julia is utterly shocked at her reunion with Pats who is ‘So changed, so changed!’ Julia doesn’t want the older and bald Pats, but the younger man that has existed in her dreams for the previous decade. [...] Once the truth is laid bare, she is utterly appalled by the physical appearance of the older Pats, and her romantic idealism lies in shreds. [...] By marrying Pats, Julia describes herself as an ox going to the slaughter as she looks towards an impending loveless marriage.*¹³

Thus, the play ends on a rather somber note for a production that achieved success as a realistic comedy in 1907 Ireland. In fact, Yeats had initially expressed concern that the play’s content was too “harsh, strong, and ugly” and he “worried because he felt this play actually gave a worse portrait of the Irish person than *The Playboy* and thus anticipated that more serious riots would occur.”¹⁴ In fact, Yeats called for 200 policemen to be present at the theatre on opening night specifically to help quell the expected riots. There were no riots, however, and Brennan

¹¹ Quoted in Brennan, *Wild in His Own Way*, 56.

¹² Brennan, *Wild in His Own Way*, 55.

¹³ Brennan, *Wild in His Own Way*, 55, 57.

¹⁴ Brennan, *Wild in His Own Way*, 53.

documents the myriad ways in which “the press complimented the Abbey for having found a play that no one had the slightest objection to.”¹⁵ Among the reviews are proclamations that Fitzmaurice had “given us some remarkably true types of Irish character” and that “his characters are understandably Irish, his situations are natural, and his dialogue rich and fluent.”¹⁶

The play had clearly struck some resonant chords of the contemporary Irish experience, and its portrayal of the American-emigrant dream, as contrasted against economic desperation and loveless marriage, was pinned as accurate, even to an audience sensitized to such things after the *Playboy* riots earlier that year. In fact, the play was so popular that the Abbey extended its run in order to bolster profits, and the *Country Dressmaker* would be brought back to the Abbey stage several times over the next 20 years.

2.1.3 Irish Theatre Context

Irish audiences regularly saw American characters embodying emigration on stage. This would continue for the next fifty years, during which time Ireland declared and eventually won independence, faced partition and civil war, established a constitution, and left the Commonwealth of the United Kingdom to become a republic. As Ireland developed its sovereignty, Irish theatres became legitimate institutions, and the founders of the Abbey succeeded in establishing an archetypical Irish play, with its pastoral setting and kitchen box

¹⁵ Brennan, *Wild in His Own Way*, 58.

¹⁶ Brennan, *Wild in His Own Way*, 58-59.

set.¹⁷ However, as the Irish nation was progressing by leaps and bounds, its national theatre was on a schedule of baby steps. Although the Gate and other theatres were occasionally featuring innovative and important work from elsewhere in Europe, theatre that was inherently Irish had become stagnant. As Mary Trotter summarizes, “[by] 1950, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland faced new, very different, political and cultural challenges. The Irish theatre, like any theatre movement engaged in its community, needed to respond in new ways.”¹⁸

Thus, the complete destruction of the Abbey Theatre to fire in 1951 can be seen, in retrospect, as both a metaphorical and literal clearing of the way for a new Irish theatre. The 1950s also presented a unique opportunity for theatre artists; the Republic of Ireland was now fully sovereign, just as the first generation of playwrights who had been born in an independent Ireland were maturing. Generally speaking, this caused a “second wave” of Irish dramatists who were differentiated from the first in that they entered an established theatre forum seeking to interrogate the contemporary Irish issues of their lived experience. No longer was the focus on creating an Irish theatre, as Lady Gregory and Yeats had envisioned. Rather, the second wave of Irish playwrights who emerged in the 1950s looked inward and problematized notions of a static Ireland. Whereas early Irish playwrights frequently featured emigrants returning to Ireland as a material curiosity, contemporary playwrights such as Brian Friel and Tom Murphy sought to deconstruct the emigrant piece-by-piece on stage in order to reflect on changing Irish cultural values. Thus the theatrical representation of emigration changed from “people emigrate to America” to “why do Irish people emigrate, and what is America’s role in a new Ireland?”

¹⁷ This isn’t to suggest there were no outliers or urban settings, however the peasant play dominated the “Irish” stages until the 1950s. Theatres such as the Gate, for instance, offered a very modern international repertoire, however they had no intents of staging Ireland as such.

¹⁸ Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 123.

The theatre wasn't the only forum asking this question. The 1950s saw Irish emigration reach its highest point since the famine years, rising by almost thirty percent during the first five years of the 1950s alone.

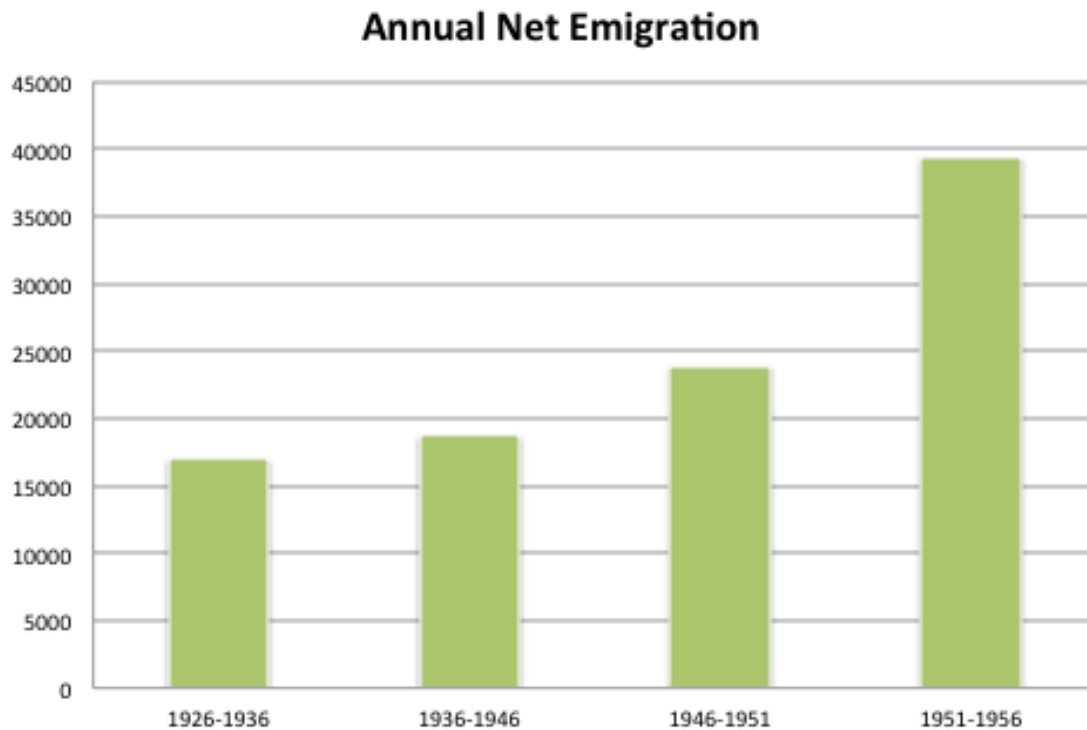


Figure 2.2 Census Data for Ireland's Annual Emigration 1926-1956.¹⁹

With the Irish economy in a deep recession, and emigration again on the rise, Taoiseach John Costello established the “Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems” which would be the first major government action directed towards stemming the tide of emigration. The findings report was published in 1954, and it discovered that Ireland's position was unique; every other European population was rebounding after the war, while Ireland's was

¹⁹ Compiled from data published by the Central Statistics Office, Dublin, as referenced in Piaras Mac Éinrí, “Some Recent Demographic Developments in Ireland,” *Études Irlandais* 22-1 (1997): 161..

in rapid decline. Ultimately the report suggested that emigration was one of many population problems, compounded by (and perhaps related to) exceptionally low marriage rates, late age of marriage, and high rates of sexual abstinence outside it.

Political priorities had hitherto been focused on national sovereignty and Éamon de Valera's protectionist economic policy had offered little in the way of opportunities for individual advancement or financial success for the post-independence generations. Thus, by the 1950s, Ireland had been established as a sovereign republic, but its economy was stagnant and its young people were leaving at an alarming rate. Not unlike the state of Irish theatre, something had to change.

The chief architects of this change would be John Costello, Seán Lemass, and T. K. Whitaker, whose *First Programme for Economic Expansion* would become a milestone in Irish economic history. In short, it called for an end to protectionism, demonstrating a clear need for a move toward free trade, industry, and services. Combined with social and educational reforms, the radical reshaping of Irish society was intended to make would-be emigrants think twice about leaving Ireland.

Enter Gareth O'Donnell, an Irish emigrant so torn about his decision to emigrate that he is literally divided into two separate characters on stage. With *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964) Brian Friel provides the artistic follow-up to the aforementioned government reports on emigration; he captures it from both sides, with Gar, on the eve of his departure, and his Aunt Lizzy, who had emigrated some 30 years prior. As arguably the first of Ireland's contemporary playwrights, Friel at once employs familiar Irish stage conventions and explodes them via his fractured protagonist and an intentionally unreliable historical narrative.

Playwright Thomas Kilroy notes that *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* “ushered in contemporary Irish drama.” He is not alone in his praise; *Philadelphia* is often earmarked as one of the primary plays that signal this important shift in Irish theatre. Kilroy goes on to describe Friel’s break from tradition:

*The Friel play is set in the kitchen-home of a county councillor. One might be in any number of kitchen farces, comedies, tragi-comedies of the preceding decades. But not quite. [...] The imagery of Ireland [...] is traditional with many of the stock situations and characters that had appeared in other plays before, but the sensibility of [Friel] is what is striking: modern, alive to the dislocating perspectives of the mid-century and the fluidity of expression possible on stage with modern lighting, design and direction.*²⁰

Kilroy makes clear that two different forces enabled Friel and his contemporaries – Kilroy included – to push Irish theatre into a new era. There was the underlying element of progressive theatrical practices, “modern lighting, design, and direction” which had radically changed theatre elsewhere in the world, but had largely eluded the earlier generations of Irish theatre practitioners who were focused on pastoral nationalism.²¹ Then, in the early 1960s as Ireland began the rapid transformation instigated by Whitaker’s *First Programme*, there was a new wave of playwrights ready to take up the task. Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, John B. Keane, Thomas Kilroy, and Hugh Leonard were the first generation to be raised in a post-independence Ireland, and that, combined with rapid political, economic and social changes, paved the way for modern theatre practices to help locate a modern Ireland.

²⁰ Thomas Kilroy, “A Generation of Irish Playwrights,” in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000), 2.

²¹ “Modern” theatre productions certainly did make it to Ireland, thanks in large part to Michael MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards at the Gate theatre, however these productions had little impact on what was being written by Irish playwrights or staged at the Abbey.

Theatre critic and historian Fintan O'Toole concisely summed up this major paradigm change for Irish theatre in a 2000 article, "Irish Theatre: The State of the Art." In it he labels the shift to contemporary Irish theatre as the "second revival" or "second phase" of Irish theatre.²² O'Toole is specific in his analysis of what caused the major shift in Irish theatre, effectively defining the primary break by demonstrating that the first phase of Irish theatre artists are:

*able to complain that America coarsens manners, that its emphasis on self-seeking endangers custom, and that this obviously makes no sense. In the balance between the old world and the new, the new world is found wanting, is self-evidently less. In the Ireland whose national mood the playwrights of the second revival had to interpret, nothing could be less obvious. Their Ireland is shaped by America, a place in which the new world is superimposed on the old, like a colour print that's out of key.*²³

O'Toole argues that Ireland's mid-century turn towards modernity was anchored in a new relationship with America. No longer is America simply a destination for emigrants, but it becomes an unavoidable economic and cultural force in Ireland.

*From the late 1950s onwards, "Ireland" as a single, simple notion which might underlie and give formal coherence to a work of theatre began to seep away. This happened because we were no longer merely going to the New World. The New World was also coming to us, in the form of £6 billion pounds of investment from multinational corporations, £4 and a half billion of it from the USA. Government policy of trying to protect a unified, predominantly rural, Catholic, and conservative society collapsed [...] The society became complex, no longer definable in a single reality.*²⁴

While O'Toole's assessment effectively establishes why Irish theatre so desperately needed a major change mid-century, his theatrical evidence is primarily concerned with form,

²² This is often cited as the "second wave" of Irish theatre, as in Mary Trotter's and Scott Boltwood's work, although O'Toole himself doesn't use that phase.

²³ Fintan O'Toole, "Irish Theatre: The State of the Art," in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eamonn Jordan. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000), 51.

²⁴ O'Toole, "The State of the Art," 51.

not content. He demonstrates how Ireland's relationship with America was radically changing, yet O'Toole largely avoids the elephant in the room: The flood of American characters on the modern Irish stage, who literally and figuratively embody this cultural transition.

As Ireland's unified national identity was reduced to ashes, so too was its national theatre. Efforts to rebuild the building, which had burned to the ground in 1951, were plagued with uncertainty and questions over its design. However, its new generation of playwrights was stirring, and the changes that Ireland was experiencing demanded a new type of theatre altogether. States O'Toole:

*The theatre of naturalism, the theatre in which every effect has a cause,, in which every action has a motive and in which every character has a fundamental substratum of coherence, became virtually impossible. The very notion of character, as something given, something singular, as a vessel within which words, ideas and emotions could be contained, became highly problematic.*²⁵

If singular, coherent characters were the problem, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* offered a solution. With its production in 1964, Brian Friel and director Hilton Edwards destroyed the notion that character had to be "something given, something singular" while at the same time questioning Ireland's relationship with America via a mélange of American characters on both sides of emigration.

Both Fintan O'Toole, Ireland's foremost theatre critic, and Thomas Kilroy, one of Ireland's most significant "second phase" playwrights, assert that Friel and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* brought Ireland into a new era of theatre. In order to understand the significance and abrupt nature of this shift, it would be helpful to take a look at the same play, several years earlier. That is to say, if *Philadelphia* had been one of the last plays of the "first phase" of Irish

²⁵ O'Toole, "The State of the Art," 51.

theatre, rather than the first play of the “second phase,” how might the pivotal roles of America and Americans have differed across this major divide in Irish theatre? While the plays discussed earlier document the creation and early importance of American characters, there exists a largely forgotten play, produced by the Abbey in 1960, which is nearly identical to *Philadelphia* in every measure, except in that it lacks the distinctive second-phase qualities.

Thus, if Brian Friel’s *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is the first play of Irish theatre’s second-phase, then John Murphy’s *The Country Boy* is its first-phase twin: a theatrical yardstick with which to document the way that American characters helped to redefine a nation’s theatre.

2.2 JOHN MURPHY'S *THE COUNTRY BOY*

John Murphy's *The Country Boy* premiered at the Ulster Group Theatre in 1959 and was picked up by the Abbey in 1960. The play is about a young man, aged 25, who has decided to emigrate from Ireland, and the story follows the last moments leading up to his intended departure. A major focus of the play is the young man's troubled relationship with his father, whom he works for, but rarely appeases: they seldom speak, and when they do it is antagonistic. The father cannot bring himself to ask his son to stay, and the mother figure desperately does her best to bridge the gap between them. The young man is also madly in love with a local girl, but has been too afraid to take the next step and marry her. Halfway into the play a relative who previously emigrated to America, returns to Ireland and offers to pay the young man's way across the Atlantic, and help get him settled in the new world. It soon becomes clear that this relative has deep seeded family problems and is trying to drown them in alcohol, but failing miserably at it. The young man questions his own decision to leave, and as the play nears its end, he argues – seemingly with another version of himself – over the merits of his emigration.

The weekend that the play opened in Dublin, “it was hailed by critics and audiences as one of the greatest Abbey successes in a decade”²⁶ and newspapers went on to herald its playwright as a fresh voice in Irish theatre who was sure to be a rising star. Sounds awfully familiar, no? The similarities between *The Country Boy*, and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* are many; the above description of the play and critical response could apply equally to either Murphy or Friel's mid-century emigrant stories. However, *Philadelphia* would be the beginning

²⁶ “Relax with THE COUNTRY BOY to-night,” review of *The Country Boy* by John Murphy, *Kerryman*, September 3, 1960, 18.

of Friel's theatrical success, whereas *The Country Boy* would be both the beginning and the end of Murphy's.

John Murphy originally submitted the play to both the Abbey and the Ulster Group Theatre. Shortly thereafter, both theatres engaged "in competition for the play and compromised by purchasing the performing rights each for their own territories"²⁷ so that the play could be premiered concurrently in both the Republic and the North. When this was announced, the *Sunday Independent* ran a headlined story that asserted the importance of such an unprecedented opening. No play in the history of Irish theatre – especially not one by an unknown playwright – had ever received such an honor. The *Independent* review explains the importance of the play:

*It is bang up-to-date, and perhaps because it presents a new slant on Ireland's emigration problem, it made an instant impression on both theatre managements. [It] will make drama history.*²⁸

Although the concurrent premiere wouldn't come to fruition for scheduling reasons, the play did play at both theatres during the same season, and according to contemporary newspapers it sounds as though there was never a time in the early 1960s when *The Country Boy* wasn't playing on an Irish stage someplace.

There is little doubt that Friel would've been familiar with *The Country Boy*. It saw major success at the Ulster Group Theatre in 1959, and played an extended run at the Abbey in 1960, with a further revival as part of the International Theatre Festival the next season. It also proved hugely popular among the large amateur theatre scene in Ireland, with the *Irish Independent*

²⁷ "An Ovation for 'Premiere of 'Country Boy'," review of *The Country Boy*, by John Murphy, *Irish Independent*, April 8, 1959, 9.

²⁸ "Mayoman's first stage play will score a Dublin-Belfast double," *Sunday Independent*, February 1, 1959, 4.

noting that it was far and away the most produced play amongst amateur groups in the 1960/1961 season:

*“The Country Boy” has everything the majority of amateur groups look for. It has a cast of six, evenly divided among the sexes; it has a single setting; it has comedy and romance and a natural flow of dialogue. And above all, it has a social message which is topical in almost every parish of rural Ireland. It is, in short, a quality play which can give tremendous satisfaction to both actors and audiences.*²⁹

Although *The Country Boy* is not mentioned in any of Friel’s writings or interviews, it is certain that he was well aware of the work. In fact, Friel’s first stage play, *A Doubtful Paradise*, was staged by the Ulster Group Theatre during the same season as the successful *Country Boy* premiere, and the two productions shared an actor, Maurice O’Callaghan. Friel’s first theatrical effort failed, and he was branded one of the “Abbey rejects” by the *Irish Press*, as he struggled to craft a successful play.³⁰ It is even possible that *The Country Boy* was playing when Friel originally dropped off his first published play, *The Enemy Within*, for review at the Abbey. As a fledgling playwright, there is no doubt that Friel would’ve taken notice of what was considered the most successful play of the day. Although history would ultimately relegate both *The Country Boy* and its playwright, John Murphy, to the sidelines of Irish theatre, the play likely instigated Friel to take a closer look at emigration and its resultant Irish-Americans.

I emphasize the significant overlap between these plays not to question Friel’s originality, but rather to support it. As previously discussed, the topic of emigration was Ireland’s most pressing social issue, and it was thus a recurrent theme on the Irish stage. The insular, pastoral

²⁹ “Amateur Drama Round-Up,” *Irish Independent*, November 18, 1960, 13.

³⁰ Sean Ward, “Theatre,” *Irish Press*, December 3, 1962, 8. It should be noted that *A Doubtful Paradise* is the revised title, often with the article “the” or “this”, that was given to Friel’s first stage play, which he originally entitled *The Francophile*.

setting, limited job opportunities, and rigid Catholic mores that governed much of rural Irish society provide many of the rest of the details. Although *The Country Boy* and *Philadelphia* are unusually similar, their shared themes resonate throughout numerous other plays as well. The most important facet of the relationship between these hugely popular theatrical endeavors is that they aren't entirely the same. The differences between them, in turn, mark a new epoch in Irish theatrical practice.

The most obvious difference, of course, is that Murphy does not split the main character, Curly, between "private" and "public" to be played concurrently by different actors, as Friel does with *Philadelphia*'s Gar. Instead, Murphy employs an older brother, Eddie, who has lived a seemingly identical life to Curly, only 15 years prior. Thus Eddie exists in the play as a voice of Curly from the future, a de facto alter ego, rather than the cleverly contrived one Friel would later construct. Their final pivotal argument at the end of Act II reveals that Eddie's relationship with Katie – whom he abandoned when he emigrated – is identical to Curly's courtship with Eileen: Both envision themselves as the exception to the emigration rule, blindly believing that they can venture to America for a year or two, make lots of money, and then return to sweep their sweethearts off their feet:

CURLY: She'll wait for me.

EDDIE: Don't make her wait. Curly! Curly, does she ever meet you down in Morahan's Lane of a summer's evening just when it's getting dark? Answer me.

CURLY: Sometimes.

EDDIE: And do you go along our field with the high hedge into the fort at the far end?

CURLY: Sometimes.

EDDIE: And does she sigh into you ear when she lies beside you on the grass and wind her warm arms around your neck?

CURLY: (voice rising) Aye... with her arms around me...

EDDIE: And do you keep thinking of it all the next day?

CURLY: Eddie! Yes... yes... (At the torment in Curly's voice they both wheel to face each other, Curly throwing himself down on the chair again at the end of the table), because me heart is breaking for her...
*EDDIE: Curly, sure as God's above I know*³¹

There's nothing subtle about the parallel relationship that Murphy constructs between the brothers. Their identical courtships fifteen years apart are evidence that things simply do not change in Ireland, unless you leave. Eddie finishes the argument by begging Curly to take the money that's been set aside for his ticket to the States and use it instead to buy Eileen a wedding ring, concluding with "And if you do this it'll be right ... and I'll know I've done something worthwhile for the first time in my life."³²

This scene is very reminiscent of the intense sidecoaching that Gar Private gives to Gar Public as he recollects his failed attempt to muster up the courage to marry his sweetheart, Katie Doogan. Both young lovers are paralyzed by their fear, while their alter egos implore them to choose love. This leads to the second, and most significant difference between the two plays. Eddie ultimately succeeds where Gar Private fails. *The Country Boy* parts ways with *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in its storybook ending: Curly finishes the play proudly engaged to his Eileen, asserting his role as the new head of the household, and ultimately content to stay in Ireland.

This idealistic ending, precisely at the peak of Irish emigration, effectively pushes the play into a very different category than *Philadelphia*. Although the play presented some of the economic realities of mid-century Ireland, the polarized views of America and Ireland and overly optimistic ending definitively earmark the work as that of the first phase of Irish theatre. The

³¹ John Murphy, *The Country Boy* (Dublin: Progress House, 1960), 51.

³² Murphy, *Country Boy*, 52.

Americans who appear, both Eddie and his wife Julia, have been traumatized by their experience in America. Eddie can no longer fathom a future in Ireland even though that was his initial plan, because America has taken the Irishness from him. Together Eddie and Julia's hollow existence and childless marriage is physically brought to the stage in the form of their steamer trunk. It is splendid: "the biggest goddam stateroom trunk you could afford."³³ However, as Eddie gets increasingly drunk and sentimental, he reveals that the trunk, like their lives, is empty. There's nothing subtle about it; Eddie is a mess. He has been unable to hold down a job, and the jobs he's had are wretched. He warns Curly:

*some day, maybe, when you're shoveling coal in a stinking boiler room ... or up to your knees in muck twenty feet under the clean sidewalks of Park Avenue ... or humping heavy cement bags off a dirty rail truck in ten degrees of front ... you'll stand for a moment and wipe more than just dust and sweat out of your eyes.*³⁴

Eddie concludes his appeal with a sardonic coda that hints at the dark side of emigration: Success is expected, and the idea of the American Dream must be preserved for those left behind:

*And don't forget to write home and tell the folks what a wonderful time you're having... and what a wonderful guy you are... and how in America you get all the breaks. Break your goddam back.*³⁵

Thus, as with many stage emigrants, and certainly with Friel's that would follow, Eddie has been relaying misinformation about his American experience back to his family at home, in a futile attempt to paint a rosy picture of emigration at its finest. When he finally returns to Ireland

³³ Murphy, *Country Boy*, 49.

³⁴ Murphy, *Country Boy*, 37.

³⁵ Murphy, *Country Boy*, 49.

after fifteen years, his face is described as “pale and lined”³⁶ whereas three weeks into his stay and after some hearty farm work, “he is looking very much better and has acquired a tan.”³⁷ Although the time spent in Ireland does help to heal Eddie, he ultimately accepts his fate as an American:

*The same house ... but in a different field, in a different country, in a different world. And you'll go searching for other things... like me... And let me tell you sumthin' ... when you go back and see that New York skyline ... you'll be so sorry you'll laugh ... 'cause you're really back home then.*³⁸

Again, in keeping with the tradition of earlier emigration plays, once Eddie has emigrated, his American hyphen is a permanent branding. Although he returns “home” to Ireland, it is only for a brief visit and spiritual replenishment before returning to his uncertain future in America.

Murphy makes clear that America has little to offer Curly. The only positive aspect of Eddie's emigration is that it hasn't physically killed him yet. In fact, the one enduring irony of *The Country Boy* is that despite Eddie's vociferous criticism of the Irish experience in America, he never considers the option of staying in Ireland himself. Although he implores his younger twin to remain in Ireland and make a proper life, Eddie seemingly considers himself too far gone to do the same. After all, only one son could stay and inherit the farm, and his hope is that Curly will continue the family in a way that he failed to do.

Curly's decision, whether to stay or go, becomes the major dramatic question not because the options are equally attractive, but instead because his stubbornness has been established early in the play. Thus when his decision to stay and marry Eileen is revealed at the end of the play,

³⁶ Murphy, *Country Boy*, 14.

³⁷ Murphy, *Country Boy*, 28.

³⁸ Murphy, *Country Boy*, 49.

the audiences get their happy ending, and the comedy is complete. Curly does not have to abide by the socio-economic realities of mid-century Ireland, because he is simply part of an evening's entertainment. *The Country Boy* speaks to the then-current state of affairs in Ireland in that it is topically about emigration, but it stops short of any interrogation of the subject, as Friel and others would later attempt.

When playwright John Murphy was interviewed about the content of *The Country Boy*, he insisted that it “is neither comedy or tragedy. It is life as it is.”³⁹ Like Friel, Murphy had spent time in America before writing the play, so he may well have had a more thorough understanding of the Irish experience abroad. However, his return to Ireland suggests that he might've had reason to paint Curly's decision with the nationalism characteristic of earlier Irish theatre.

The Abbey's Artistic Director, Earnest Blythe, also addressed the dissonant connection between the play and Irish emigration after its successful extended run in Dublin. Blythe was foremost a politician, having held numerous major public offices since the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. He served as artistic director of the Abbey Theatre from 1941 – 1967, though his leadership is often criticized for favoring financial viability over theatrical creativity. Therefore when *The Country Boy* was heralded as the best play to be staged during his reign, Blythe agreed that it “instantly placed its author amongst the hopes of the Irish Theatre. It delighted discriminating and critical playgoers and, unlike some works of which that could be said, it also drew large popular audiences into the theatre week after week.”⁴⁰

³⁹ “Mayoman,” 4.

⁴⁰ Ernest Blythe, preface to *The Country Boy* (Dublin: Progress House, 1960).

Blythe was patting himself on the back as much as giving credit to the playwright, with no acknowledgement to the production team. However, he also provides an interesting anecdote regarding the role of the play with American audience members:

*When the announcement was made that it would be seen again at the end of June a Dublin drama critic said that it was very bad judgment on the part of the Abbey Directors to select, for the visitors' season, a play with which Americans were likely to be displeased. But early in the morning after the first performance subsequent to the holiday break, a hotel porter arrived at the Abbey bearing a letter signed by seven Americans who had to leave Dublin that forenoon and did not want to go without expressing their admiration for the remarkable play they had seen the night before. They stated that they had enjoyed *The Country Boy* more than any play which they had seen for a long time, and that one of the things in it which delighted them was its unusual, but faithful delineation of an aspect of Irish-American life.⁴¹*

If this letter actually existed – the Abbey archivist has no knowledge of it – it would be a very interesting exercise to find out who the Americans were and precisely what they had to say. However, the fact that both Blythe and the editors at Progress House found this anecdote important enough to feature in the preface to the published edition of *The Country Boy* demonstrates how important the role of Americans, both audiences and characters, were in regards to theatre critics and management alike. Blythe uses this story as a proof that Americans might be able to appreciate the play, despite their rather dismissive treatment therein. In his own words, this “aspect of Irish-American life” becomes a springboard to his socio/cultural/economic assessment of the play:

*In *The Country Boy*, real problems, personal and social, are penetratingly discussed, not for the sake of reaching conclusions or suggesting remedies but for the correct and dramatic purpose of revealing the thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears of the people in the play. If there is a trace of sentimentality in *The Country Boy*, it is so well spiced with satire and laughter as almost to defy detection.*

⁴¹ Blythe, preface.

This conclusion highlights two of the features that distinctly cement the play into its pivotal role as the last of the first-phase emigration plays. First, Blythe celebrates that the play's "sentimentality" is hidden so well under satire and laughter that it "almost" defies detection. This suggests that sentimentality is obligatory, that the role of the Irish playwright is to mask it beneath the tricks of the trade. Murphy can bring up "social problems," but not for the purposes of "suggesting remedies" or interrogation. In fact, Blythe lauds the play for burying such problems with sentimentality, asserting the "correct dramatic purpose" of such content is limited to the "thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears of the people in the play." Further, the play ends wholly resolved, very much unlike the ongoing emigration problem that was growing at an alarming rate at the same time.

Fintan O'Toole and Tom Kilroy suggest that as the gulf between modern Ireland and its peasant plays grew, so too did the need for a reinvented Irish theatre. Whitaker's *First Programme for Economic Expansion* was beginning to shape a new Ireland, one which suddenly questioned its protectionist and pastoral past for the purposes of redefining its future as a player in the global community. Thus, a new generation of playwrights sought to replace clear, fictional, historical narratives with fallible memories, and stable characters with conflicted ones, ultimately leading Irish theatre into a "extraordinary period in which formal adventurousness and the desire to reflect and reflect on one's immediate society were not contradictory impulses but complementary ones."⁴²

⁴² O'Toole, "State of the Art," 53.

2.3 BRIAN FRIEL

Although *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* would establish Brian Friel as a major Irish playwright, he had already found considerable success as a writer by the early 1960s. His work as a short story writer had been featured in the *New Yorker*, and he contracted with the *Irish Press* newspaper to write a weekly editorial that ran from April 1962 to August 1963, for a total of 59 essays. Friel has prohibited these early articles from being reprinted, and they remain absent from his vast personal collection of work and papers housed at the National Library of Ireland.⁴³ Consequently access is currently limited to the *Irish Press* archives, where the articles can still be tracked down via microfiche and digital archives. Why Friel has attempted to distance himself from this public diary of his is unknown; the content of the essays reads much as a modern-day blog. Its topics are various, documenting Friel's home life and travels in an entertaining and inflated semi-fictional style. Many of his entries are formatted as short plays, which are indicative of his other writings at the time. Although Friel wrote several plays in the late 50s and early 60s, both for radio and stage, these early attempts met with very little success and Friel has subsequently prohibited them from being published. In 1963 Friel made a significant leap as a playwright when he left Ireland to work with Tyrone Guthrie in Minneapolis, clearly looking to hone his work in the theatre. During this sojourn, he maintained his column with the *Irish Press*, simply retitling it "Brian Friel's American Diary."⁴⁴

⁴³ For a detailed analysis on Friel's personal distance from his early work, as well as a more thorough investigation of the early *Irish Press* articles, see the first chapter in: Scott Boltwood, *Brian Friel, Ireland, and The North*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁴⁴ Much to theatre scholars' chagrin, and certainly to my own, although Friel writes this recurring newspaper column throughout his American trip, the entries contain little of interest in regards to what he was doing or seeing with Guthrie. Instead, it simply focuses

Sadly, it must be noted that although these *Irish Press* articles span a pivotal period of Friel's life as a playwright, they offer frustratingly little insight into the development of his theatrical career. In fact, once he is settled in Minneapolis his editorials drop off completely for several weeks, as if America had absorbed him like it had so many other emigrants. Friel finally caps off his *Irish Press* series with one final essay upon his return to Ireland. Entitled "Brian Friel: the Returned Yank," this last essay introduces readers to Friel's first "American" character: himself. Although the title is flippant, it establishes one of the themes that would carry significant importance through his next two plays: namely, that once a person leaves Ireland for America, they are forever branded a Yank. Friel employs the term in jest, as he was only abroad for a few months and is proudly returning home to Ireland. However, the branding is a matter of perspective; Friel's Irish-Americans of the 1960s, Lizzy Sweeny and Cass Maguire, certainly consider their returns to Ireland as homecomings, even though that is not how their families regard them. Just a year after Friel's return to Ireland, he would captivate Dublin's International Theatre Festival with this conflicted sense of home in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*.

It must also be considered that a lot was going on as Friel was traveling and writing in the early 1960s. Whitaker's *First Programme...* was crafted into legislation via Sean Lemass's aggressive series of economic and social reforms, and the national theatre was also in the midst of reorganization with Earnest Blythe at its helm. Although the Abbey had been able to mount productions in rented space after its fire, the destruction of the physical theatre began a period of uncertainty and opened new questions about what the Abbey should or could be as a national theatre. Its new building would be completed in 1966 – some 15 years after the fire - and Blythe

on the day-to-day struggles and experiences of a tourist in the States: airline agents; long-distance phone calls; hotel comings and goings; etc.

would step down months later, effectively opening the door for a new wave of Irish playwrights just in time to reflect and interrogate the major changes taking place elsewhere in Irish society.

Brian Friel was among the first playwrights to see that a rapidly changing Ireland called for a new and different theatre:

I would like to write a play that would capture the peculiar spiritual and indeed material flux that this country is in at the moment. This had got to be done, for me anyway, and I think it has got to be done at a local, parochial level, and hopefully this will have meaning for other people in other countries.”⁴⁵

One vehicle for Brian Friel’s investigation of the massive “flux” in Irish culture has been his returned-emigrant characters. Whether on a short holiday or moving back “home” in a more permanent way, they are drawn in stark contrast to the Irish who have stayed. Friel critically redefined the role of the Irish-American returned emigrant for contemporary Irish theatre with Lizzy Sweeny in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964) and two years later he would frame her almost exclusively in *The Loves of Cass Maguire* (1966). These contemporary returned-emigrants are no longer the social do-gooders that were featured on stage and screen at the turn of the century; by mid-century the shadow of the Irish American Emigrant Dream weighs heavily on them, and these “Americans” return to Ireland with significant baggage, much as they do in *The Country Boy*.

Although few theatrical portraits are particularly flattering in their treatment of the emigrants they chronicle, Friel opens a new epoch in Irish theatre with his treatment of emigration and America in *Philadelphia*. The play captures not just a young man on the eve of

⁴⁵ Fergus Linehan, “The Future of Irish Drama: A Discussion between Fergus Linehan, Hugh Leonard, John B. Keane and Brian Friel,” *Irish Times*, February 12, 1970, 14.

his emigration, but also three additional American characters: Con and Lizzy Sweeney, the returned-emigrants, and Ben Burton, an all-American tagalong. This mélange of America provides a valuable light on the ever-changing frameworks surrounding Irish emigration, particularly as reflected in Gar's very vocal inner struggle and ultimate decision to emigrate.

Friel's Irish-American returnees highlight Ireland's kinship with America, and in many ways they detail the evolution of this relationship precisely as Ireland is undergoing unprecedented social and economic changes. As demonstrated, at the time *Philadelphia* was written, emigration was still a major concern in Ireland, and its effect cannot be overestimated. However, it was also a time of radical transition: Whitaker's proposed reforms were gaining traction in the 1960s, United States immigration controls were tightening, and for the first time, the United Kingdom would match America in terms of its popularity as a destination for Irish emigrants.

The definition of emigration was beginning to change as well. With advances in transport and a rising standard of living, emigration was no longer regarded as the final and irreversible decision that it had been in previous decades. There was no need for an "American Wake" when a phone call could electronically connect families or a plane ticket could do it physically. This can be seen in the parallel visits in *Philadelphia* and *The Country Boy*: Although these homecomings are only separated by a few years, they mark different epochs in travel, just as the plays do for Irish Theatre. Eddie and Julia travel to Ireland via steamship, and they occupy the Maher family's homestead for over four weeks. The Sweeney's, on the other hand, fly to Ireland from Philadelphia, stay in a hotel, and hire a rental car to drive down to visit Gar for a matter of hours. Murphy emphasizes the difficulty of physically returning to Ireland, which has become a nonissue for Friel's Americans. Lizzy and Con's physical journey to Ireland is easy; it

does not affect them as it does Eddie, whose worldview is so changed after three weeks that he talks his brother *out* of emigrating. While neither Eddie nor Lizzy truly feel at home during their visit, Ireland's burgeoning tourism industry is clearly alive and well outside S. B. O'Donnell's doors in 1964.

Consequently, the prospect of return became more than a dream, but quite feasible and even fashionable. As Ireland became more open to foreign investment, it also developed an appetite for tourist dollars as well.⁴⁶ Therefore, not only does *Philadelphia* mark a new epoch in Irish theatre, but it also provides a reference point for a remarkable feat in global commerce. Only a few years prior, Ireland was considered inaccessible and remote, wholly foreign from America. *Philadelphia* reverses this trend; not only is Ireland accessible for Con and Lizzy, but they bring with them a proper American, Ben Burton, perhaps the first bona fide modern American tourist to grace the Irish stage.

The increasing popularity of tourism in Ireland, and the efficacy of the Irish tourist board are exemplified by one of Ireland's most popular visitors to date: The president of the United States, John F. Kennedy, visited Ireland – his ancestral homeland – in June of 1963. Although he didn't attend the theatre during his visit, his timing was impeccable. While JFK was in Ireland investigating his Irish roots, Friel was in America devising his own future in the theatre. Thus, the summer of 1963 might be viewed as the point at which Ireland became truly international. JFK's visit was the first ever for an American head-of-state, and Friel's sojourn to America would inspire him to help usher Irish theatre into a new age.

⁴⁶ Eric G. E. Zuelow, *Making Ireland Irish: Tourism and National Identity Since the Irish Civil War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

Perhaps Friel's final *Irish Press* article on the "Returned Yank" was also a nod to JFK, whose recent visit was touted as a return "home" for an American president who had never set foot in Ireland. This liberal definition of "home" would become an increasingly popular topic in Irish plays, and JFK specifically would feature in several, as seen later in this chapter. Friel, however, sidesteps any direct mention of JFK in *Philadelphia*, instead simply using the recent assassination as background noise in Gar's proclamation that he wants to be president of the USA. The fact that Gar becoming president is technically illegal, because he was not born in the US, becomes much less important than the idea that his presidency is metaphorically possible, as evidenced by JFK's recent "Irish" presidency. Thus, as the general public's perception and understanding of emigration began to change, so too did its theatrical representation – both in content and form. The prospect of return had morphed from one of permanent salvation to a jet-fuelled visit in search of a top-off of spirituality.

2.3.1 *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964)

*The “American Wake” of the Irish emigrant is given a new and imaginative twist by Brian Friel in his “Philadelphia , Here I Come”, which opened at the Gaiety last night. [...] Mr. Friel’s emigrant is a romantic. He lives in two worlds, the prosaic one of Ballybeg, where nothing happens or is ever likely to, and the day-dreaming one of Philadelphia where girls are cute, boys are handsome, and anything and everything may happen.*⁴⁷

As suggested by Fintan O’Toole and Thomas Kilroy, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* at once employs traditional Irish theatrical devices, and confounds them. What was originally regarded as simply a “new and imaginative twist” would become the cornerstone of a significant new phase in Irish theatre. *Philadelphia* chronicles Gareth O'Donnell's final day in Ireland before emigrating to America. Gar, his father “Screwballs” and their housekeeper Madge all live behind the family shop, where their routine has become painfully mundane and the future holds little promise for Gar. He and his father speak only when necessary and Madge is all the mother that Gar has ever known, since his biological mother died giving birth to him. Gar's girlfriend Kate is the daughter of a senator and Gar has neither the gumption nor the money to face up to him, therefore any hope of a future for the two of them is questionable at best. The play opens with Gar singing “Philadelphia, here I come, right back where I started from...” His emigration to Philadelphia is imminent; he has just enough time left to gather his things together and give his regards unless, of course, he changes his mind.

The defining feature of the play, and the one that would secure its spot in Irish theatre history is that the role of Gar is functionally split into two characters who appear on stage concurrently. As Friel introduces them:

⁴⁷ “Friel Gives New Twist to an ‘American Wake,” review of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* by Brian Friel, *Irish Press*, September 29, 1964, page 7.

*The two Gars, PUBLIC GAR and PRIVATE GAR, are two views of the one man. PUBLIC GAR is the Gar that people see, talk to, talk about. PRIVATE GAR is the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the alter ego, the secret thoughts, the id.*⁴⁸

Quite remarkable for Irish theatre at the time, Gar's fractured identity provides the audience with an otherwise impossible omniscience into his mind as he wrestles with his decision to emigrate. While John Murphy's *The Country Boy* presents both sides of the emigration debate, Friel conflates them into one character, just as Ireland itself is struggling to enter an increasingly global marketplace.

Gar is, in a sense, already an American. He is a pre-emigrant, and his mind is made up. As he packs his bags, his most significant toils are depicted in the past tense. Alternate scenes depict the pivotal moments that have influenced his decision to emigrate: the first is the day that Gar failed to ask his girlfriend's hand in marriage, and the second is the visit from his Aunt Lizzy that would pave his way to America. These scenes are presented as flashbacks: fully staged, yet products of his conflicted memory. As O'Toole has discussed, Friel's focus on past events is indicative of Ireland's struggle with its new economic direction; Irish society is beginning a period of rapid modernization which threatens to sever its agrarian roots. Gar embodies this struggle as he seeks to march blindly into a modern America, even though the little evidence available to him suggests that the promise of America is as fraught with problems and compromise as it is with opportunity. While Gar's American voyage is the focal point of the play, Friel serves up an additional three Americans for consideration.

⁴⁸ Brian Friel, "Philadelphia, Here I Come!," in *Brian Friel: Plays 1*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 27.

Halfway into the play we meet Con and Lizzy Sweeney, an Irish-American couple who are visiting Ireland along with a friend of theirs, an American character called Ben Burton. All are in their late 50s and have been drinking, although it is Lizzy who is “more than usually garrulous.”⁴⁹ She is the sister of Gar's late mother, and as close as Gar will ever get to knowing what his mother was like. Lizzy dominates the scene in their country kitchen, and as she goes on about all the things they have to offer Gar in America it becomes clear that the childless Sweeneys desperately want Gar to fill the void in their lives.⁵⁰

While Gar ponders how much of a sacrifice it would be to live with the Sweeneys and if he could ever get used to Lizzy, we meet “the lads” - Gar's mates. They're a wily bunch, yet despite their joviality they personify just how little there really is to look forward to in Ballybeg. They buzz around the kitchen trading the same tall tales they've told for years – of which Gar has had more than his fill. It's the same story every night, as they go out talking about revelry and girls, yet generally end up doing nothing at all. Their desperation is then replaced with bravado the next day as they invent more wild stories of what never happened, and the cycle continues.

Philadelphia's treatment of emigration is of major relevance to the play's place within Irish history. Gar is captured as a brief snapshot of the immediate act of emigrating, produced at a time of great flux and concern with the state of emigration. *Philadelphia* makes it clear that the material gains won from emigrating to America, however slight they can be, come at a spiritual and emotional cost.

⁴⁹ Brian Friel, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in *Selected Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 60.

⁵⁰ While it is significant that Friel's Americans never have any children, it is not new: Even George Fitzmaurice's “Pats” in 1907 had failed to produce offspring.

However, the situation in Ballybeg is no better; Gar's outlook for staying in Ireland may be different, but it remains equally grim. Thus Gar is on the brink of the single greatest decision of his life. In choosing to leave Ireland Gar not only gives up his home, but he also must forfeit his Irishness and adopt the American hyphen. The rules are clear; once emigrants leave Ireland they will only ever be “Irish” while abroad, and they will become “yanks” immediately upon any return “home” to Ireland.

Brian Friel wrote *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* after spending three months in America working with Tyrone Guthrie at his theatre in Minneapolis, an exchange organized by Guthrie that proved to have a profound effect on Friel. Upon his return he said that “[t]hose months in America gave me a sense of liberation [...] my first parole from inbred and claustrophobic Ireland.”⁵¹ Evidently, Gar's desperation to get out is no different than Friel's must have been, fuelled by the very same prognosis that instigated countless emigrants' journeys. America was a place where Irish people could chase the possibility of financial success, yet – in both fact and fiction – what they often found came well short of the Irish-American Emigration Dream. *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* chronicles this broken dream on both sides of the Atlantic.

Gar's Aunt Lizzy, the quintessential Irish-American character of the play, is used by Friel to demonstrate that emigration to America doesn't necessarily guarantee success or happiness. Much like the Irish-Americans in *The Country Boy*, Lizzy and Con have failed to produce any children. However, Eddie and Lizzy respond to their imperfect American lives in very different ways. Whereas Eddie eventually convinces Curly to stay in Ireland for his own good, Lizzy's motives are far more selfish. She demonstrates little concern for Gar as an individual, but rather

⁵¹ Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994) 78.

seeks to lure him to America and fold him into her family as if he were her own son. Her return to Ballybeg is branded as a “visit home”, however in reality it seems much more like a concentrated mission to procure herself the son that her marriage has failed to yield.

Lizzy and Con entice Gar with their apparent wealth of material goods; a deep freezer, a color TV, an air-conditioned car and “all the Irish records you ever heard.” And if those things weren't enough, they try to persuade him with cold hard cash, “fifteen thousand bucks in Federal Bonds.” As Lizzy is going on about “the smell of lavender in the spring and long summer evenings and snow at Christmas” her drunkenness overcomes her and she slips into an emotional admission of her sterility and her plans to “coax” Gar:

LIZZY: And it's all so Gawd-awful because we have no one to share it with us...

(she begins to sob)

CON: (Softly) It's okay, honey, okay...

LIZZY: He's my sister's boy – the only child of five girls of us -

BEN: I'll bring the car 'round the front. (BEN goes off through the scullery)

LIZZY: - and we spent a fortune on doctors, didn't we, Connie, but it was no good, and then I says to him (CON), 'We'll go home to Ireland,' I says, 'and Maire's boy, we'll offer him everything we have - '

GAR PRIVATE: (Terrified) No. No.

LIZZY: '-everything, and maybe we could coax him – you know -' maybe it was sorta bribery – I dunno – but he could have everything we ever gathered -

GAR PRIVATE: Keep it! Keep it!

LIZZY: -and all the love we had in us -

*GAR PRIVATE: No! No!*⁵²

In the face of Lizzy's self-proclaimed success in America, she and Con haven't been able to give any of it meaning without a child. Despite expensive medical intervention there is no cure for Lizzy's apparent emotional and physical sterility, so in desperation she returns to Ireland in

⁵² Brian Friel, *Philadelphia*, 65.

the hope of giving her life some significance. Here Friel frames America much like a drug for the Irish-Americans; Lizzy and Con are addicted to their material lives in America, and ultimately wants to add Gar to their formidable list of possessions. The possibility of staying on in Ireland, where they could just as easily rekindle relationships with their extended family, is never mentioned.

For Gar, this overly materialistic and evidently sterile culture remains a reasonable alternative to the future that he has to look forward to should he stay in Ireland. Although Ireland presents no threat of sterility – Madge’s one exit is to go visit a baby born nearby during the play – Gar’s financial situation offers him few prospects for advancement. Indeed, his best hopes for an Irish future rest on the morbid hope that his father might suddenly die “tonight – of galloping consumption!”⁵³ Short of a miraculous and swift outbreak of tuberculosis, Gar’s future in Ireland would be certain to move forward according to the same painfully mundane script that he is currently living, where he can predict every word from his father, see through every story of his mates, and now watch his girlfriend create a family with her new husband.

Emigration on the other hand, offers Gar a very different future. Although his Aunt Lizzy has problems, Friel’s overall portrayal of America is far more welcoming than the America depicted by Murphy in *The Country Boy*. This is likely because Friel had recently returned from his own formative experience in the States in the form of his observership at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. Whether or not Friel actually wrote parts of *Philadelphia* during his theatrical training in the States is unknown, but his experience there was very positive, evidenced by the fact that “upon completing the script of *Philadelphia* at the end of September 1963, Friel

⁵³ Brian Friel, *Philadelphia*, 40.

immediately sent a copy to Tyrone Guthrie,”⁵⁴ and the two would corresponded at length as Friel revised the play.

Friel was uncharacteristically outspoken about how important his work with Guthrie had been for him, and the fact that it was Guthrie who had reached out to Friel makes the exchange all the more remarkable. At the time Friel was simply a newspaper columnist and short story writer who had dabbled in the theatre, but not successfully. Guthrie, on the other hand, was at the peak of his career, and strangers were universally forbidden from his rehearsals.⁵⁵ Thus his generous invitation to Friel – a fellow Northern Irishman in Guthrie’s eyes – may well have been the inspiration for the lone American-American character in *Philadelphia*, Ben Burton.

Traditional scholarship surrounding the representation of America in *Philadelphia* tends to focus exclusively on Lizzy, attempting to claim that Friel’s outlook on America is universally grim. However, that isn’t the case at all. The lone true American in the play, Ben Burton, is portrayed with great sympathy. He is an exercise in charity, wholly selfless, and the reason that Con and Lizzy have achieved their relative success:

LIZZY: I’ll tell you, Gar, Ben Burton’s one hundred per cent. The first and best friend we made when we went out. [...]October 23rd, 19 and 37 we sailed for the United States of America. (CON spreads his hands.) Nothing in our pockets. No job to go to. And what does Ben do?

CON: A guy in a million.

*LIZZY: He gives us this apartment. He gives us dough. He gives us three meals a day – until Bonzo (Con) finally gets himself a job. Looks after us like we were his own skin and bone.*⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Anthony Roche, *Brian Friel: Theatre and Politics*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, 41.

⁵⁵ Roche points out that the only other outsider in Guthrie’s rehearsals at the time was Herbert Whitaker, who had “badgered Guthrie for a full ten years on the subject before being given permission to sit in” on rehearsals. 36.

⁵⁶ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 61.

Compare this with Brian Friel's own words about Tyrone Guthrie, two years after returning from his observership in Minneapolis, and the similarities between Burton and Guthrie become clear:

BRIAN FRIEL: [Tyrone Guthrie is] a marvelous, marvelous man. He's the 'greatest'. A great man in every way. Not only a great man of the theatre but a great man without qualification.⁵⁷

Although Ben Burton plays a minor role in *Philadelphia*, his likeness to Guthrie is evident. Ben welcomes and takes care of Con and Lizzy as if they were "his own skin and bone" much as Guthrie does for Friel because they are both Ulstermen. The few scholars who do note Ben's role in the play often attempt to ascribe ulterior motives onto him, suggesting infidelity with Lizzy. While his presence is intriguing – a solo man travelling with a married couple – the suggestion that he and Lizzy are sleeping together is wholly unsupported by both the text and its author.⁵⁸ Friel has remained firm that Ben Burton is simply "a person in whom the wife confides, probably. There is nothing sinister in this and certainly nothing sexual."⁵⁹ It is, after all, Lizzy's sterility that counterbalances her relative financial comfort, and a subplot revolving around her sexual promiscuity would have no place in Friel's narrative.

In fact, Gar views the sterility and material wealth of America as a positive feature. He is, after all, a 25 year-old young man from rural Donegal, and the prospect of easy money combined with a lack of responsibility has a certain appeal to him. This comes to a head as he lashes out at his former lover, Katie Doogan, when she comes to say goodbye:

⁵⁷ Brian Friel, "In Interview with Graham Morison" in Christopher Murray, ed. *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries and Interviews: 1964 – 1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 11.

⁵⁸ During the scene when Lizzy gets drunk, she kisses the top of Ben Burton's head.

⁵⁹ Brian Friel, "In Interview with Peter Lennon," in Christopher Murray, ed. *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries and Interviews: 1964 – 1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 3.

PUBLIC: You're stuck here! What else can you say!

PRIVATE: That'll do!

PUBLIC: And You'll die here! But I'm not stuck! I'm free. Free as the bloody wind!

KATE: All I meant was...

PUBLIC: Answerable to nobody! All this bloody yap about father and son and all this sentimental rubbish about 'homeland' and 'birthplace' – yap! Bloody yap! Impermanence – anonymity – that's what I'm looking for; a vast restless place that doesn't give a damn about the past. To hell with Ballybeg, that's what I say!

*PRIVATE: Oh, man...*⁶⁰

Gar is desperately trying to believe the emigrant rhetoric that he has been presented with throughout the play. However, even his two selves are conflicted. As Public Gar navigates the physical world of Ballybeg, Private Gar alternates between imploring him to stay and boasting about the raucous bachelorhood and promiscuity that eagerly awaits him in America. Even Master Boyle, Gar's former teacher, instructs him: "Don't keep looking over your shoulder. Be one hundred percent American. [...] Forget Ballybeg and Ireland."⁶¹

In the end, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* departs from the script established by *The Country Boy* in the most significant way possible: Gar follows through with his intended emigration. Curly, the 25 year-old would-be emigrant is able to overcome his obstacles and heed the advice of his alter ego. He stays in Ireland, marries the girl and supplants his father as the head of a rural Irish household. He is confident in the Ireland that he knows, and his future success is guaranteed for audiences willing to enjoy the fiction.

Gar, on the other hand, is troubled by a far more problematic and fractured Ireland. He has lost his girlfriend to a doctor from the city, and his alter ego is conflicted but cannot offer any realistic alternatives. Further, his incentive to Americanize is far greater than that of Curly.

⁶⁰ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 79.

⁶¹ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 53-4.

Where Curly's steamer passage was paid for, Gar is enticed by free airfare and more. Lizzy is offering him \$15,000 cash in addition to free room and board, a probable job, and a position as the Sweeney's sole heir. Truth be told, his immediate prospects in the US look remarkably good, despite an emotional Irish-American aunt who hopes to coddle him as though he were a child.

Gar takes the gamble because all measurable data tells him to. Although his move is ostensibly a reflection of Ireland's emigration problem, it is also emblematic of Ireland's shift towards a modern society with a heavy dependence on foreign – mostly American – capital. This is an intended irony; Ireland's new economic policy was specifically designed to slow emigration, yet Friel conflates exile with modernization in what O'Toole labels a

*double world, a slippery state in which the traditional and modern jostle for the status of reality, in which every truth was equally untrue, in which past, present and future seemed to melt into each other, in which the borders of reality and personality become permeable.*⁶²

Much like his mother before him, Gar stands in as a figurative representation of Ireland, teetering on the crossroads of an irreversible decision. Just as Gar Private and Gar Public spar over their collective future, Ireland was struggling over how best to embrace the economic opportunities of a global economy while maintaining its traditional Irish society. Decades of protectionist economic policies had created a rural economy that was effectively unsustainable in a capitalist marketplace. The 1954 *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems* listed the myriad problems fueling Ireland's endless flow of emigrants, and T.K. Whitaker's 1958 *First Programme for Economic Expansion* provided the most sensible way forward – according to all measurable data. As economic reforms began to take effect in the early 1960s and Ireland began to welcome foreign investment, Gar ultimately did the same.

⁶² O'Toole, "State of the Art," 51.

However, not all metrics are easily measurable, as evidenced by both Gar's trepidation and Ireland's conflicted embrace of modernity. Had Gar been unwavering in his decision to emigrate, *Philadelphia* wouldn't be a play, and if nothing was lost in Ireland's modernization, there would've been no need for a new wave of Irish theatre. This clash is poignantly contextualized on the "Culture" page in a 1964 *Irish Press* newspaper. Alongside an advertisement for the opening of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* the *Irish Press* published an ostensibly unrelated editorial lamenting one small way in which modernity was changing the fabric of Irish society:

*Anybody over 50 years of age can recollect when the average Dublin newsboy ran barefoot through the streets. This change to shoes represents a silent revolution. It is an evidence, as symbolic as any other, of the rapid increase in our national standard of living that has become manifest over the past generation.*⁶³

Although it may be hard to imagine barefoot child laborers as a romantic feature of any urban setting, the article advises a cautious and fractured relationship with the modernization of Ireland, suggesting that a new Ireland might become a "well-ordered – if, perhaps, less picturesque" place. The undertone of the article demonstrates nostalgia for what has already been lost. Friel echoes this same theme in *Philadelphia*, via the description of Gar's 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, and she carried her shoes under her arm until she came to the edge of the village, Madge says, and then she put them on...*⁶⁴

⁶³ "The Quiet Change" in *The Irish Press*, October 1, 1964, 10.

⁶⁴ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 37.

That this woman, characterized as Ireland herself, died giving birth to a son who would follow the money to America is no accident on Friel's part. While he may not offer the audience any answers with *Philadelphia*, he is certainly demanding that they ask some questions.

As the play closes, Gar ultimately chooses to leave Ireland and embrace the American hyphen, ending up woefully fractured. He remains at odds with himself, repeating the question that he has been asking all night, still no closer to an answer:

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

PUBLIC: I don't know. I – I – I don't know.

*Quick Curtain*⁶⁵

John Murphy's *The Country Boy* and Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* appear to be identical plays at the onset. The protagonists are 25 year-old men on the verge of emigration, and their home lives are nearly indistinguishable from one another. However, the final act of each play differs radically in how these parallel lives unfold. Curly listens to his alter ego, invests his passage money in an engagement ring, and asserts himself as the new head of his extended household. Gar, on the other hand, searches for a reason to stay, but comes up dry. As the final curtains fall, Curly is confidently giving his father orders, while Gar is lost and alone. Fundamentally *Philadelphia* is an early chronicle of modern Ireland's entanglement with America, whereas *The Country Boy* sentimentally proclaims that rural Ireland will remain idyllic, immutable, and singular.

The critical reception to *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* was overwhelmingly positive, both in its Dublin premiere and its subsequent American run in New York. Much like *The Country*

⁶⁵ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 99.

Boy, Philadelphia earned high praise in its initial reviews, and was “regarded by many critics and the general public as one of the most outstanding new Irish plays of the last twenty years.”⁶⁶ The play was the runaway favorite of the Dublin International Theatre festival, and it quickly earned Friel a spot “in the front line of our contemporary writers for the theatre.”⁶⁷

Curiously, a majority of the Irish reviews for *Philadelphia* either fail to discuss the subject of emigration at all, or simply give it a passing mention. It would seem that as with the politicians who had come before them, newspaper critics had accepted emigration as a given aspect of the rural Irish experience, and one unworthy of attention in print, even when the subject matter demanded it. One particularly glaring example of this is a 1967 column in the *Irish Press* that discusses *Philadelphia*’s success abroad. Although it makes no mention of emigration or Gar’s move to Philadelphia, the column is overshadowed by the bold headline for an adjacent article which stretches across the top of the page: “Irish Priests Take a Course on Emigration.”⁶⁸ According to the newspaper editors, it is unimportant that people and characters are emigrating, but it is newsworthy that Irish priests are taking a course in how to council these emigrants.

Likewise, few newspaper reviews picked up on the striking similarity between *Philadelphia* and *The Country Boy*. The one review that makes the connection does so only in terms of the boys’ relationships with their fathers, ignoring their shared experience at the precipice of emigration.

It is not new, this sad, arid lack of communication between father and son, which is a universal and soul-destroying ailment, but I have never seen it expressed with

⁶⁶ “Philadelphia, Here I Come!,” review of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* by Brian Friel, *Tuam Herald*, July 31, 1965, 7.

⁶⁷ Desmond Rushe, “At Last – It’s the Best New Irish Play of Year,” review of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* by Brian Friel, *Irish Independent*, September 29, 1964, 4.

⁶⁸ Donal Musgrave, “Irish Priests Take a Course on Emigration,” *Irish Press*, August 11, 1967, 9.

*such authenticity insight, humanity, compassion and humour. John Murphy's "Country Boy" portrayed it touchingly as a side-issue with a happy outcome, but Mr. Friel uses it much more profoundly as a pivot which keeps one in a state of involved suspense right up to the pathetic failure to establish any kind of rapport.*⁶⁹

While it is true that Gar's estranged relationship with his father is a significant emotional aspect of the play, *Philadelphia* is not a coming-of-age story. Gar is a 25 year-old man who, short of wishing his father dead, has no prospects for a future in Ireland. Whether or not Friel is an advocate for better parenting is irrelevant to the larger issue of emigration. His message with the play is political; the Americans in Philadelphia can offer Gar a more promising future than his cohort in Ballybeg.

Not all reviews missed the mark, however. The *Irish Press* article that ran the morning after *Philadelphia* opened in Dublin, accurately caught the gist of what had gone on in the Gaiety Theatre the night before:

*[Gar] feeds a rich vein of satirical, acrid comment on several aspects of Irish and American life [...] He lives in two worlds, the prosaic one of Ballybeg, where nothing ever happens or is ever likely to, and the day-dreaming one of Philadelphia where girls are pretty, boys are handsome, and anything and everything may happen.*⁷⁰

As O'Toole has alluded to, the production of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* was ahead of its time, and established a new phase in Irish theatre. No longer was Irish society presented as a single, unified entity, as it had been in *The Country Boy* and everything that had come before:

The societies of the great early Irish plays, Synge's included, are patently bounded, close, sharing a common ground that is so clear that it hardly needs to be marked at all. It is not that outsiders do not play an important role in these

⁶⁹ Rushe, "At Last," 4.

⁷⁰ "New Twist," 7. (Also quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this section.)

*plays. It is precisely that in order for outsiders to play the role that they do, they need to be set against a bounded and closely-knit society.*⁷¹

Friel inverts this norm with Philadelphia. Although Lizzy, Con, and Ben are all outsiders in the sense that they're American, they are employed to highlight the true outsider in the play: Gar. His father doesn't need him, his friends have forgotten him, and his girlfriend has married another man. Friel brings in the foreigners just as this outsider-in-his-own-town hits his lowest point – on the very day that Katie Doogan marries the doctor from Dublin.

Unbeknownst to him at the time, Friel was reinventing Irish theatre by engaging with the changing state of Ireland itself. Rather than creating American characters to showcase the perils of emigration or the prospects of a wildly successful return, Friel's Americans suggest a middle road. These second phase Americans demonstrate that people everywhere have problems, and that America can offer solutions to some, but not all, of Ireland's problems. As Ben Burton says:

*BEN: It's just another place to live, Elise: Ireland – America – what's the difference?*⁷²

In O'Toole's analysis, he suggests that this new phase of Irish theatre-making wasn't simply evolutionary, but that it was part of a rapidly changing national landscape. As people struggled to define what a modern Ireland might look like, theatre artists were compelled to find new ways to stage their own experiences. Mid-century Ireland provided

*[...]both a good ground to be a playwright, since the clash of cultures is inherently dramatic, and also a difficult one, since the sense of unity which underlies the work of a Synge or an O'Casey is no longer available. The combination of social opportunity and formal challenge gave us an extraordinary generation of theatrical creators, one which is, amazingly, still restlessly active.*⁷³

⁷¹ O'Toole, "State of the Art", 48.

⁷² Friel, *Philadelphia*, 64.

⁷³ O'Toole, "State of the Art" 51.

Friel's contemporary focus demonstrated a keen awareness of Ireland's changing relationship with America, and likely one fuelled by Friel's own experiences there. As such, his Americans are far from perfect; Lizzy is a mess, Con has been trampled, and Ben Burton – the one good guy – is an awkward third-wheel. However, they offer Gar precisely what America had to offer Ireland at the time: an opportunity for financial success.

Gar takes the offer, yet is haunted by nostalgia. Buried within the final minutes of the play is a brief non-sequitur that Friel had originally intended to be the epilogue for *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* In it, Madge explains what Gar would find in the States:

*MADGE: [...] His heart'll break tomorrow, and all next week, and the week after [...] That Lizzy one'll look after him well [...] And when he's the age the boss is now, he'll turn out just the same. And though I won't be here to see it, you'll find that he's learned nothin' in-between times.*⁷⁴

Both Friel and Guthrie favored this ending to the play, to be delivered directly to the audience. Hilton Edwards instead convinced Friel to reorder the final scene so that the play concluded with Gar's final hesitation "Why do you have to leave... I don't know..." rather than Madge's verdict on his emigration. "Friel conceded that the change worked better in performance and did not end the play on a nihilistic note, as he had originally intended."⁷⁵ The change was a good one for audiences; in practice it encourages audiences to think about why Gar needs to leave Ireland, rather than blaming him for doing so.

This change also made the play more marketable in America, where Irish-American audiences could get a taste of the auld sod while reaffirming their, or their ancestor's, similar

⁷⁴ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 97-98.

⁷⁵ Roche, *Theatre and Politics*, 46.

decisions to emigrate. *Philadelphia*'s focus on America and Americans, combined with the fact that it is also a very well crafted play, made it a shoe-in for the American theatre circuit. One of the few American critics to see the original production in Dublin later professed, "I have long hoped that "*Philadelphia, Here I Come!*" would be seen by American playgoers on their own stages."⁷⁶ The American run on Broadway, also directed by Hilton Edwards and sharing several cast members with the original Dublin production, proved a tremendous success.⁷⁷ The production garnered very favorable reviews and went on to run for 326 performances, establishing Friel as a hot playwright in New York, London, and Dublin. This considerable success would ultimately encourage Friel to reimagine his returned-emigrant and feature her exclusively in his next play, *The Loves of Cass Maguire*.

⁷⁶ Robert B. Byrnes, "Red Carpet Welcome for Friel Work," *Irish Independent*, January 22, 1966, 3.

⁷⁷ Although outside the scope of this project, there is considerable discussion on why *Philadelphia* proved so successful on Broadway. Certainly the play's sympathetic view of emigration and America was an important draw for Irish-American audiences. Ireland's newfound hunger and marketing for tourism also likely played a role. For more on the success of Friel and *Philadelphia* in New York, see Szasz's dissertation on the subject.

2.3.2 *The Loves of Cass Maguire* (1966)

The subdued domestic atmosphere is suddenly and violently shattered by CASS's shouts. She charges on stage [. . .] shouting in her raucous Irish-American voice. Everyone on stage freezes.

-Brian Friel, introducing Cass Maguire⁷⁸

After the critical and commercial success of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Friel recognized the potential for a character like Lizzy Sweeney to expand and fill the stage on her own. Just two years after *Philadelphia* premiered, and while it was still running on Broadway, Friel crafted another non-conformist drama, which reimagined his returned Yank as a powerful lead character. If the Sweeneys escaped judgment in *Philadelphia*, there was no such chance for Cass in the title role of *The Loves of Cass Maguire*. Friel's introductory stage direction makes it clear from the onset that the "raucous Irish-American" character is a force to be reckoned with.

The Loves of Cass Maguire depicts a single woman's return to her native Ireland after over 50 years in America. Cass Maguire emigrated out of necessity in 1914 at the age of 18, and has spent the her entire adult life eking out a living in New York, all the while sending weekly contributions home to the family that she left behind in Ireland. Unbeknownst to Cass, her younger brother Harry, who stayed in Ireland, has been very successful and consequently his family has never needed any of the money that she has sent home. Harry and his wife, Alice, didn't want to upset Cass, so for 52 years they quietly accepted Cass's monthly contributions without ever informing her that the allowance weren't necessary. In fact, they never touched a penny of it, and have been saving it for Cass all along. When she finally returns home the family decides to tell her that they never needed the money, and instantly Cass's life is rendered

⁷⁸ Brian Friel, *The Loves of Cass Maguire* (New York: Samuel French, 1966), 9.

meaningless. She must accept that all of her hardship and struggle, living and working “a block from skid-row” in NY, has been for naught. The initial joy that she felt when returning home is quickly displaced with anger and frustration; in no time she has alienated her family and is kicked out of their house and involuntarily sent to live in the “Eden House,” a retirement home that Cass refers to as the “workhouse.” Ironically, it is the money that she has sent home that will fund her final days there.

Much as he does with Gar in *Philadelphia*, Friel uses Cass as an experiment in breaking from traditional realism in the theatre. Where Gar’s bifurcation was significant because each half of his character was wholly independent of the other, Cass is tasked with co-existing two disparate worlds. She exists both within the world of the play and outside of it, in Friel’s first attempt at meta-theatricality. Cass regularly breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience directly. Upon her first entrance in the play, she immediately challenges her brother, in character, about how her story is to be told:

HARRY: Cass, you can’t break in, Cass, at – !
(CASS addresses the audience directly. They are her friends, her intimates. The other people on stage are interlopers.)
CASS: Cass! Cass! Cass! I go to the ur-eye-nal for five minutes and they try to pull a quick one on me!
HARRY: The story has begun, Cass.
*CASS: The story begins where I say it begins, and I say it begins with me stuck in the gawddam workhouse! So you can all get the hell outa here!*⁷⁹

Thus, after an initial five minutes of apparent realism in the sitting room of a comfortable Irish home, Cass instantly demands that the audience reconsider their theatre experience. Not only has she referenced the fact that she and Harry are engaged in theatrical storytelling, she also leverages the title of the play itself in order to win the argument over how the story can proceed:

⁷⁹ Friel, *Loves*, 15.

*CASS: [...] Go ahead and call the National Guard if you like; but you're not going to move me! What's this goddam play called? The Loves of Cass McGuire. Who's Cass McGuire? Me! Me! And they'll see what happens in the order I want them to see it; and there will be no going back to the past!*⁸⁰

Although Harry responds to Cass's meta-theatrical outbursts, he does so only directly to Cass; he never engages with, or acknowledges, the audience directly. The audience is the domain of Cass alone, yet her use of direct-address is not constructed of traditional asides. Instead, Friel displays Cass desperately attempting to control the storyline of the play because it is the only remaining thing in her life that she might be able to exert some control over. She alone has a direct connection to the audience, but it is one that she struggles to maintain:

*CASS: (Lights cigarette. Shades her eyes against the lights and searches the auditorium) You still out there? Stick around and we'll have fun together. You'll see, lots of fun.*⁸¹

Friel depicts Cass as an outsider both within the narrative and theatre; she doesn't play by the rules in either place. However, his use of foreigner-as-outsider is not a harkening back to the earlier phase of Irish theatre. Upon Cass's return to Ireland she is initially welcomed home and invited to live as a member of the Maguire family as though she had never left. This warm connection is only dissolved after Harry and Alice financially disown Cass. When faced with unwelcome economic sovereignty, Cass is forced out of the family and her worldview is permanently altered. She believed that she had done the good work of an Irish emigrant, diligently sending money home to support a loving family for over 50 years. When she finds out that the money was never used, she is effectively exiled a second time. This time her "otherness"

⁸⁰ Friel, *Loves*, 16.

⁸¹ Friel, *Loves*, 43.

is not due to her American hyphen, but rather it is a side-effect of her brother's financial success in Ireland. This sense of disconnect is central to the representation of Irish-American characters, and how it changes over time is evidence as to how Friel and others use Americans to reflect and comment on changes in Irish society.

Just like Lizzy before her, Cass's return to Ireland is also a final effort to give her life a real meaning. Cass isn't looking for a surrogate child so much as a family – one that she has convinced herself that she has been a vital part of through her weekly \$10 contributions. In Cass's eyes, the past 50 years have been spent selflessly taking care of her family. Despite her good intentions, these financial contributions have wholly replaced any more communicative correspondence. Had Cass been in closer touch with her family, she might've known that her brother was doing well and that he was actually better off than herself. Perhaps the transatlantic monetary exchange might've even been reversed. As it turns out, the Maguire family in Ireland has been all but forgotten about Cass and her meager financial contributions. The sum total, \$7,419.00, has sat unused, explicitly kept separate from her brother's finances, effectively proving that Cass has had literally zero effect on the family's financial situation.

After Cass shatters the “domestic atmosphere” it isn't long before her own ideas of domesticity are shattered. Where Lizzy was trying to purchase herself a family, Cass was under the impression that she had done so already, and had been making payments on it for half a century. However, Cass's 50-year self-imposed indentured servitude has been for naught. Her forced exile into the Eden House leads her to eventually embrace her fate and concede to having lived in an imagined past. As the play concludes, Cass can no longer see the audience, and she joins the other Eden House inmates in constructing and reconstituting a successful past that America never offered her.

At the onset, Cass fills the shoes left behind by Lizzy quite well. She emigrated to the States as a young adult, while leaving her siblings behind in Ireland. She has failed to produce any offspring, despite being involved in a long-term monogamous relationship. She also has a great love of the drink, which she employs overzealously to mask her failures in life. However, below these surface-level similarities, Friel's revised Irish-American of 1966 is radically different from her 1964 parallel.

Although only two years separate *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, Friel's depiction of Ireland and his views on emigration changed considerably. Of particular note is that *Loves* is set conspicuously in "the present in Ireland," unlike the majority of Friel's plays which are set in the fictional town of Ballybeg, County Donegal, as *Philadelphia* had been. This switch from a specific, fictional setting to a more general Ireland as an actual country suggests that Friel was intending to make a slightly more political statement. Audiences could forgive and accept Gar's emigration because he faced a specific set of circumstances in a specific town, and both were fictional. Cass, on the other hand, returns to Ireland broadly and generally; Harry's house might be in any affluent part of any Irish city, inviting Irish audiences to imagine Cass invading their own homes.

Cass's experience as an emigrant is also profoundly different than the emigrant stories featured in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*. In New York, Cass finds neither the reasonable fortune that Lizzy has accumulated, nor the wild success that Gar famously prophesized about. Cass's transatlantic sojourn is anything but triumphant.

CASS: And I don't go in for the fond memory racket! For fifty-two years I work one block away from Skid Row – deadbeats, drags, washouts, living in the past! Washing, scrubbing, fixing sandwiches – work so that you don't have no time to think, and if you did you thought of the future.

*(Fumbling greedily for the bottle) The past's gone. Good luck to it. And Gawd bless it. (Drinks. Then Lights another cigarette)*⁸²

Of the many deadbeats that surrounded Cass, she lived with Jeff Olson, an American who had lost his leg in the First World War. Cass and Jeff never married, though Friel makes it clear that she desperately wanted to, and they never produced any children. Although he doesn't physically appear in the play, Jeff is an ever-present character, permanently ingrained in Cass's American experience. Functionally he is Cass's Ben Burton, a benevolent American who takes Cass under his wing.

However, unlike the perfect American specimen of Ben Burton, Jeff is flawed both physically and emotionally. Cass is able to look past his missing leg, but she cannot overcome the lack of definition in their relationship. As the title of the play suggests, Cass loves Jeff, but marriage doesn't ever occur to him. In *Philadelphia*, Friel demonstrates that Ben is completely in tune with Lizzy and Con's needs; he instinctively brings the car around as Lizzy begins getting over emotional. Jeff is not in sync with Cass, and this is made evident when he affectionately offers her a small jewelry box one Christmas night:

*CASS: [...] he hobbles into the kitchen and comes back with this tiny box, and he sez, 'Here', like it was burning him; and I opens it, and there's this brooch, made like it was a shamrock with three leaves and all, and with green and white and orange diamonds plastered all over it – only they were glass I guess. And, hell, I dunno what happened to me; maybe I was drunk or something; but I began to cry. And poor Jeff he didn't know where to look, and he shouted, 'Jeeze, Cass, I gave some Irish bum a ham and cheese sandwich for it day before yesterday. You don't think I bought it?' and Gawd, I cried all the more then ... must ov been real drunk ... you know, he was so kind to me ... (Raucously) Hell, I hate Sundays!*⁸³

⁸² Friel, *Loves*, 19.

⁸³ Friel, *Loves*, 34.

Jeff's failure to meet Cass's emotional needs is exacerbated by his confusion. His attempt at a romantic gesture is sidetracked by a piece of quintessential Irish-American kitsch. To make matters worse, he sourced the tricolor brooch from an Irish bum; it is further evidence that the United States is no longer offering emigrants the attractive combination of housing, savings bonds, and job security available to Gar.

The differences between the anonymous Irish bum and Cass seem trivial; they both live on skid row, and although she now possesses the brooch, she was hoping for so much more. Both Jeff and her emigration to America have disappointed her. When Jeff passes away, Cass does not become his widow, but rather she becomes just another homeless Irish bum. At this point, 52 years into her American experience, Cass finally admits to having failed at both fortune and family in NY. Her last resort is to return to her biological family in Ireland, where she envisions a hero's welcome, yet receives anything but.

Friel's 1966 portrait of an emigrant is remarkably different from that which preceded it by only two years. Although they revolve around identical themes, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass Maguire* could scarcely be more different. The roles that America and Ireland play have almost been completely inverted. In Cass's experience, America has offered no hope for a future, while Ireland has been overflowing with opportunity for her brother Harry. *The Loves of Cass Maguire* would be Friel's first theatrical glimpse of a new Ireland, founded in new economic and social principles of success.

While *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* had demonstrated Ireland's precarious moment at the edge of economic development, *The Loves of Cass Maguire* is its first example of success with new policy. Whitaker's *First Programme for Economic Expansion* had created a plan for

economic expansion, yet as its title implies, it was only a first step. By inviting foreign investment the program addressed the most immediate economic influences on emigration, but it did little to address the social issues that had been identified in the 1954 report from the Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems.

This would change with the 1963 *Second Programme for Economic Expansion*, which specifically targeted social issues and emphasized reform for Ireland's educational system, which had become a priority for Taoiseach Sean Lemass. In a 1964 address:

*Lemass indicated that economic planning made no sense unless it was accompanied with educational planning: the government had decided, in the Second Programme, that improvements in social services, including education, 'must go hand in hand with economic progress.'*⁸⁴

Lemass initiated a period of “radical reform and expansion of Irish education”⁸⁵ in the mid-1960s that was intended to complement the economic expansion of the First Programme. In short, these reforms would completely overhaul the Irish educational system. For the first time, responsibility for primary and secondary schooling was nationalized and taken out of the hands of the churches, who had previously controlled early education. School was made compulsory and free up until the age of 15, and transportation would be provided free of charge to and from school for any children that required it. In regards to higher education, Lemass's government significantly increased the number of state-funded scholarships available for students attending

⁸⁴ John Walsh, “The Politics of Educational Expansion,” in *The Lemass Era: politics and Society in the Ireland of Seán Lemass*, ed. Brian Girvin and Gary Murphy (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005) 156.

⁸⁵ Walsh, “Expansion,” 146.

college, and the “Commission on Higher Education” was established to formulate a “definite state policy for the long-term development of third-level education.”⁸⁶

In 1965, the year between *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, Lemass backed a pivotal report entitled *Investment in Education*, which would help facilitate the many reforms proposed by Lemass’s government. The report specifically drew attention to “considerable inequalities between different socio-economic categories and regional groups” and it highlighted “a substantial shortfall in the supply of the education of qualified manpower for the projected requirements in the 1970s.”⁸⁷ The report provided the data necessary for Lemass to secure the considerable amount of funding necessary to enact his government’s aggressive modernization of Ireland’s educational system. The goal was simple: provide a modern workforce to fuel the Ireland’s burgeoning modern economy.

Along with this educational reform came considerable social reform. As educational control was wrested from the hands of the church, the considerable Roman Catholic influence in Ireland began to decline for the first time. This coincided with the Second Vatican Council’s culmination in 1965, which itself was a major paradigm shift in Catholicism. Although the changes would be slow, an incremental loosening of the strict Catholic mores that dominated Ireland would also have a profound effect on slowing emigration.

On top of these educational and religious changes, 1960s Ireland also experienced a monumental shift in communication technology. On December 31, 1961, Raidió Teilifís Éireann

⁸⁶ Walsh, “Expansion,” 150.

⁸⁷ Walsh, “Expansion,” 158.

(RTÉ) made the first Irish television broadcast,⁸⁸ introducing the country to the medium that had gained wild popularity in so many markets that Irish emigrants now called home. Ireland was very late to the television era, largely because there had been considerable political debate over whether or not the medium should be permitted in the country. The progressive politicians eventually prevailed, but the old guard was allowed the first broadcast. On New Year's Eve 1961, the first Irish television broadcast featured President Eamon de Valera and the Primate of All Ireland, Cardinal D'Alton. Both spoke out against the myriad evils that television might bring to Irish society.⁸⁹ The event was a curious, if apropos, sign of the times; it was concurrent with Ireland's embrace of modernity and global commerce on many levels.

Television provided Irish citizens access to far wider range of foreign content than film or theatre could, and programming from the United States quickly became very popular. Perhaps equally as significant, television provided a platform for actively discussing and debating contemporary social issues in a public forum: no longer were priests the primary arbiters of cultural change.

Of course it would take time for television to find its place in most homes and public houses in Ireland, as evidenced by Madge's reaction to Lizzy's description of her American television in *Philadelphia, Here I Come*:

*MADGE: [...] That Lizzy one'll look after him well, I suppose, if she can take time off from blatherin'. Garden front and back and a TV in the house of lords – I'll believe them things when I see them!*⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Prior to 1962, television in the Republic of Ireland did not officially exist. However, certain areas of Ireland had inadvertently been able to receive signals broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Ulster Television (UTV).

⁸⁹ For more on the establishment and development of television in Ireland, see: Robert J Savage, *Irish Television: The Political and Social Origins*, (Westport: Praeger, 1996).

⁹⁰ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 97.

Thus, at the rate that Ireland was changing, Ireland's future must have looked far brighter to Friel in 1966 than it would have upon his return from America in 1963. Consequently, his two Irish-American emigration plays, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, depict experiences that are respectively dissonant. The rigid Catholic mores and lack of opportunities for advancement at home force Gar O'Donnell to emigrate to the United States, where he understands that he will lose something intangible in his exile, but that it is the better of two unfortunate options. This is made clear by his Aunt Lizzy: an Irish emigrant whose life in the States is plush with material comforts, yet devoid of children.

By 1966 however, the tables have turned in Ireland's favor. Ireland's education system has been overhauled, investment in industry is gaining pace, and the Catholic Church is losing its stranglehold on Irish society. Modernization is sweeping in and Ireland, for the first time in its history, anticipates an overabundance of jobs for skilled workers in the near future. Suddenly emigration isn't the answer, and Friel captures this moment succinctly with *The Loves of Cass Maguire*. Her emigration experience is nearly opposite to that of Lizzy; Cass finds no comfort in New York, and arrives home to a wildly affluent Ireland that she cannot relate to. Her brother is a prosperous accountant and "big-deal businessman" and his children are successful as well; one is a doctor, one is an architect, one is a clergyman, and the youngest is a student. Even Cass's long-lost heartthrob, Connie Crowley, has moved to Dublin and become a successful businessman.

Cass's only success in emigration has been that she managed to scrape together ten dollars every week to send home to her family. She was surrounded by the detritus of urban failure in NY, and then returns home to find that everything has somehow gotten better in Ireland during her absence. That is to say everything has gotten better for everyone in Ireland except her.

Cass's self-imposed exile from Irish society as a young woman ultimately paves the way for her involuntary exile from the Irish society that she had hoped to return to.

Friel uses these Irish-Americans as bold theatrical tools; they personify emigration while at the same time reflect Ireland's constantly changing relationship with America. At times American characters serve as archetypes, but they also go well beyond that, often providing a point of reflection for Irish society during times of remarkable change. Cass and Lizzy do both, they are fictional examples of exile, but also step back into Ireland where they collude the past and present in an attempt to chart Ireland's direction.

As Friel finished writing *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, word of this forthcoming play attracted considerable press. His *Philadelphia* was still playing to packed houses in NY, and the production had put Friel in the spotlight. In an *Irish Independent* article that praised the ongoing success of *Philadelphia* in the States, Desmond Rushe concludes with a brief paragraph documenting the buzz about Friel's next play:

*Incidentally, I see that Brian Friel's new play, "The Loves of Cass Maguire," has already aroused much interest in America, and that David Merrick is anxious to have it premiered in New York. I fervently hope that this honor will stay where it belongs – in Ireland – and that Hilton Edwards will resist all pressure to have it otherwise.*⁹¹

David Merrick, the Broadway producer who had purchased the rights to Friel's play, was hoping for a repeat success, and both Friel and the director Hilton Edwards were on his side. *The Loves of Cass Maguire* would premiere on Broadway in October of 1966 after brief test runs in

⁹¹ Desmond Rushe, "Philadelphia Still Excites in New York," *Irish Independent*, March 16, 1966, 10.

Boston and Philadelphia. Rushe revisited the topic of an Irish premiere in an interview with Edwards for his *Irish Independent* column:

*“Normally I would want to put it on here first,” Mr. Edwards says, “but it is a question of economics. There is no point beyond the purely sentimental to justify a first performance in Ireland.” This is, indeed, a great pity.*⁹²

Edwards does offer that he “is hoping that he will take five actors with him from Ireland,” but even this concession wouldn’t come to fruition; when the production went into rehearsal, “the cast was almost entirely American, since Actors’ Equity was strict in the matter.”⁹³ Edwards offered the title part to the well-known Irish actress Ronnie Masterson. She had trained and acted at the Abbey and both Friel and Edwards were familiar with her work. They viewed her as an ideal fit for the part, even though at age 40 she was considerably younger than Cass had been written. However, Masterson ultimately turned down the role because her husband, actor Ray MacAnally, was booked elsewhere and she was unwilling to separate the family.⁹⁴

As Edwards filled in the ancillary roles, some from Ireland, some from America, some from the UK, the crucial lead was missing. Eventually Edwards settled on American Actress Ruth Gordon. Her age was exactly right, and having successfully performed in numerous Broadway shows over more than 50 years, Gordon pleased the producers, “although neither playwright not director were entirely persuaded of her suitability for the role.”⁹⁵

⁹² Desmond Rushe, “New Friel Work to have Boston Premiere,” *Irish Independent*, June 9, 1966, 12.

⁹³ Roche, *Theatre and Politics*, 49.

⁹⁴ Rushe, “Boston Premiere,” 12.

⁹⁵ Roche, *Theatre and Politics*, 49.

After *The Loves of Cass Maguire* previews in Boston, Merrick and Edwards had concerns with the play as written, so they “cut up and rearranged” the script in an effort to increase it’s chances of success in NY.⁹⁶ As the preview moved to Philadelphia, word reached Friel of the changes, and he responded with his legal team: “He threatened legal action in 1966 during the premiere [sic] run of *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, in the USA when, in his view, the powerful Merrick organization was playing fast and loose with his text.”⁹⁷ Consequently Friel’s script, exactly as written, was reinstated for the premiere run on Broadway.⁹⁸

So, on October 6, 1966, while *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* was still generating fame and fortune for Brian Friel, his *The Loves of Cass Maguire* opened on Broadway. The production was under a cloud of litigation, based on a script the management didn’t like, and featured a leading lady that neither the director nor the playwright were happy with. It closed in less than three weeks.

Friel describes the play “as a concerto with a solo piece for one voice – that’s the part of Cass – with the orchestration being provided by the other voices.”⁹⁹ He wasn’t shy about pointing out that his Irish-American *is* the play, and that the others are there for effect. He had expressed early concerns about Gordon playing the part, and these doubts were substantiated in print after the play opened. Even Desmond Rushe, a longtime Friel proponent and champion of the play, fingered Gordon as the reason why *Loves* folded:

⁹⁶ Roche, *Theatre and Politics*, 49.

⁹⁷ Patrick Burke, “Friel and Performance History,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*, ed. Anthony Roche, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 118.

⁹⁸ This was a notable shift in authorial attitude for Friel, who had welcomed changes to *Philadelphia, Here I Come*, as it was workshopped with Hilton Edwards and Tyrone Guthrie only two years prior. Although outside the scope of this project, it would seem as though the success of *Philadelphia* had caused Friel to become both more confident and less willing to adapt his writing to the tastes of others.

⁹⁹ Donal Kelly, “The Abbey People,” *Irish Press*, March 24, 1967, 11.

*But the great fault in the production [...] is the acting of Ruth Gordon as Cass. Miss Gordon looks ridiculously girlish and wrong to begin with, but more importantly, she never gets on Mr. Friel's wavelength, or even near it. She plays the part with considerable technical accomplishment, but the real essence of the tragic Cass escapes her. Mr. Friel's Cass is simple, human, and the subject of much compassion; Miss Gordon's Cass is rather glib, rather coarse, and a bit tiresome, except when the power of her lines lifts her.*¹⁰⁰

Although Rushe doesn't say it directly, he suggests that the production neglected the most important part of Cass's hyphenated identity: that her American façade is complimented by the fact that she is also Irish. This is the cause of her downfall, and the reason she should be "subject to much compassion." The coarse American is easy to put on stage; the first phase of Irish theatre featured her regularly. However, second phase plays demand more nuance and understanding of characters at pivotal turning points in their lives. This is true of Gar as well as Cass, and it is indicative of Ireland facing rapid modernization. Rushe ultimately concludes that the play, like its title character, needs to come home.

*The play has been given a generally unfavorable press here [in NY], and not without reason. A Dublin production with a different leading lady and some changes in technique would be most interesting.*¹⁰¹

This sentiment would be a familiar refrain among Irish reviewers who had seen the play in New York. They agreed that the production was flawed, Cass was miscast, and they wanted to see it on an Irish stage instead. Writing for the *Irish Press* Sheila Walsh draws specific attention to Gordon's nationality as an ill-fit for the play:

*Ruth Gordon the famous American actress was miscast as Cass. It would be interesting to see how an Irish Company would fare with it. There are rumours that we may see it in Dublin soon.*¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Desmond Rushe, "Technicalities Mar New Friel Play," *Irish Independent*, October 24, 1966, 6.

¹⁰¹ Rushe, "Technicalities," 6.

The rumors were correct. When the play folded in New York its production rights reverted back to Friel. He immediately signed on with the Abbey and said that he thought *The Loves of Cass Maguire* would “be received with more intelligence in Dublin.”¹⁰³ Tomas Mac Anna, the Abbey’s Artistic Director, took Friel’s concerns over the part of Cass seriously, and he brought in one of Ireland’s premiere actresses, Siobhán McKenna, to play the part.

Although originally an Abbey actor, McKenna had been working on Broadway and in film and television, and her role as Cass would mark her first return to the Abbey in 17 years. Bringing in a star of her magnitude was significant for both the Abbey and the production, and McKenna regarded the opportunity as charity, saying “I do feel I owe this to the theatre.”¹⁰⁴ She, too, regarded the American production as a miscast failure, saying

*I always wanted to do Brian Friel’s play. Brian knew I liked it [...] I had felt that it should begin its life on Irish soil with a native cast, not, as it happened in New York, where it closed after a few weeks. [...] I think it’s a happy play, and a terribly funny play at times, with an appeal for Irish audiences.*¹⁰⁵

McKenna hits on the other important consideration of theatre as an art form: its audience. She foregrounds the appeal for “Irish audiences” yet stops short of saying why. One broad suggestion has to do with the national representations found in the play. As previously discussed, *The Loves of Cass Maguire* features a modern, financially successful Ireland set against a

¹⁰² Sheila Walsh, “A Playwright, A Farmer, and a Painter,” *Irish Press*, January 4, 1967, 10.

¹⁰³ Kelly, “Abbey People,” 11.

¹⁰⁴ Des Hickey, “I’ll Play the Abbey for £25 a week” *Sunday Independent*, February 26, 1967, 24. McKenna would go on to reprise the role of Cass Maguire in the 1975 film adaptation, and would also play the part of Madge in the film of *Philadelphia* the same year.

¹⁰⁵ Hickey, “£25 a week,” 24.

crippled, dead-end rendition of America. Consequently, when the play was recast with Irish actors and staged at the Abbey in April 1967, it found considerably more success.

Seamus Kelly's review of the Abbey's production for the *Irish Times* foregrounded not only the appropriateness of McKenna in the role, but also of the importance of recognition in the audience:

[Cass] finds, *as so many returned Yanks must, that she has no place in the old world, and no hope in a return to the new world she has left.* [...] She [McKenna] achieves a splendid gross vulgarity in physique and costume; a wonderful whiskey voice, and a *complete sympathy with those of the audience who know what the play and her character is about.*¹⁰⁶

The subtext is that Irish audiences could understand and relate to the play, whereas American audiences the previous year could not. The review then concludes by plainly demonstrating the significance of the production in, and to, Ireland:

*"Cass MaGuire" offers a significant part to one of our most significant actresses, in a statement by Brian Friel which puts a contemporary Irish problem very compassionately on the stage.*¹⁰⁷

In fact, the play was such a success that RTÉ Television, Ireland's national broadcast organization, adapted *The Loves of Cass Maguire* for public television in 1975, and maintained McKenna in the title role. The television adaptation necessarily reached a much wider audience, where it was similarly received with strong reviews.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Seamus Kelly, "Friel's 'Cass MaGuire' at the Abbey" *Irish Times*, April 17, 1967, 6. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁷ Kelly, "Friel's Cass," 6.

¹⁰⁸ Curiously, as it reached much wider audiences via television, *The Loves of Cass Maguire* also found received some popular criticism in regards to what some viewers regarded as overt vulgarity. However, these complaints were largely focused on general concerns over vulgarity on television, and specifically McKenna playing a purposely unflattering role, rather than any focused concerns on the play specifically.

When contrasted with *The Loves of Cass Maguire* it is easy to see why *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* might have been more successful in America, while *Cass* only found its audience in Ireland. American audiences could relate to Gar as an immigrant; they could perhaps even see themselves as Lizzys and Cons, willing to take him under their wing and help him find a place in their country. However, *Cass* appeals specifically to an Irish audience, who can then project their own thoughts on emigration onto the stage. To oversimplify the plays, *Philadelphia* endorses the move to America, whereas *Loves* condemns it.

This assertion runs counter to much scholarship on Friel. In attempting to define a consistent political narrative in his work, scholars often confuse Friel's outspoken nationalism with optimism within his work. For instance, in Helen Lojek's examination of Friel's "Stage Irish-Americans" – a meaningful and insightful analysis of Friel's early Americans – she concludes that both *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, paint the same picture of Irish-Americans:

*Their divorce from Irish soil allows the lilt to fall from their language, blarney to degenerate into braggadocio, and spirituality to dry into materialism. The end result is a stereotype which affirms the native Irishman's decision NOT to emigrate, for to do so is to trade things of real value – family and land and the music of the language – for the shallow materialism and vulgarity of the Stage Irish-American.*¹⁰⁹

While the first sentence is certainly correct, there is a crucial difference between the "end result" of *Philadelphia* and that of *Loves*. Gar emigrated not because of a cold father, but because

¹⁰⁹ Helen Lojek "Stage Irish-Americans in the Plays of Brian Friel" in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 17 (December 1991): 2. 84. Emphasis original.

there was no future for him in Ireland. Brian Friel himself emphasized this in a 1964 interview with Peter Lennon:

PL: And how did he acquire integrity?

BF: By turning his back on Ireland and on his family.

PL: Isn't that the theme of Philadelphia?

BF: Yes. Gareth was leaving home not only in a local sense, but in a spiritual sense too. Even if his inarticulate father had responded to him at the crucial moment it would only have postponed the departure. He would have had to get away.¹¹⁰

Gar is an archetype for the myriad Irish emigrants who could not find a future in Ireland. Friel's nationalism is expressed in drawing attention to this fact, rather than burying it as earlier plays tended to do. *The Loves of Cass Maguire* reverses the economic lens, acknowledging Ireland's fiscal changes, but cautioning against American materialism in the process.

Perhaps another analogue for Lizzy isn't Cass, but her brother Harry. Like Lizzy, he has achieved financial success, but his marriage is troubled and most of his children have left home. In fact, when Cass raises a toast *as Gaeilge* upon her return in 1966, her Irish sister-in-law Alice responds with confusion and asks "German?"¹¹¹ This is Friel's nationalist bent coming through again, making a none-too-subtle dig at the modern culture of Ireland, where the indigenous language had been eroded such that Friel's emigrant is more fluent in spoken Irish than her native sister-in-law.¹¹²

While Lojek is right in pointing out how emigrants characters "trade things of real value" in their voyages, she misses that other side of the hyphen. Friel's emigrants do not wholly assimilate, but rather maintain their hyphenated identities indefinitely. Cass, for instance, is

¹¹⁰ Brian Friel, "In Interview with Peter Lennon" in ed. Christopher Murray, *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 2.

¹¹¹ Friel, *Loves*, 37.

¹¹² Lojek, "Stage Irish-Americans," 82.

among the least materialistic characters of Friel's canon: She has virtually no belongings and has devoted her entire life to supporting her family in Ireland. This is one more way that Friel employs American characters to reflect on changes in Irish society. Cass's asceticism is drawn in direct opposition to her brother Harry's crass materialism. Cass's link to Ireland may be 52 years old, but it has remained at the forefront of her character; perhaps this is why critics drew attention to the importance of casting Cass's nationality appropriately for performance.

In the 1960s Ireland was experiencing rapid social and economic change, and during that same time Friel's own views on Ireland and America were rapidly evolving as well. *Philadelphia* and *Loves* are only two years apart, but capture very different moments in Ireland's history. *Philadelphia* was written on the heels of Friel's first escape from "inbred and claustrophobic Ireland" and he had proudly noted that his American sojourn provided him a "sense of liberation" from Ireland. However, within a few years this sense of liberation was creeping into the rest of Ireland in the form of middle-class materialism, and it concerned Friel immensely. Looking back from 1970, Friel would remark that "the turn the Republic has taken over the past nine or ten years has been distressing, very disquieting. We have become a tenth-rate image of America – a disaster for any country."¹¹³ Despite both popular and financial success from the States, Friel ultimately concluded:

*I don't like America at all. It still has some virtues, and it's a very generous country. I loved it when I went there first and I was very enamored of it, but this left me very rapidly. Now I dislike it very much.*¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Brian Friel, "In Interview with Desmond Rushe" in ed. Christopher Murray, *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 27.

¹¹⁴ Friel, "Interview with Peter Lennon," 34.

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At the end of *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, after Cass has given up her meta-theatrical struggle, she relaxes into the comfort of an imagined parallel reality. In doing so, she imagines how her return to Ireland might have played out if she had found success in America:

*CASS: And when I came back home they were all down at Cork to meet me; and Harry and Alice and Momma; and Connie, he wants us to stay over with his folks in Dublin but Harry wouldn't hear of that; and all the cars drove up, one behind the other, like it was a parade or something, some of them with chauffeurs and all, right up Harry's big wide avenue, underneath all them golden chestnuts, and all our friends came in and we had such a party...*¹¹⁵

The scene that Cass describes is a familiar one, and it isn't fictional. Shortly before Friel wrote *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, one Irish-American did manage to receive that exact welcome upon his return "home" to Ireland. President John F. Kennedy had become something of a superhero to the Irish, and in 1963 he became the first American commander-in-chief to visit Ireland. President Kennedy was the apogee of the Irish-American emigration story, ultimately achieving the goal to which Gar had fantastically aspired in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*: President of the United States of America.

Kennedy's visit to Ireland marked a high point for Irish society; it was both an affirmation that emigration could be successful, and an acknowledgement of Ireland as an sovereign nation worthy of such a visit. Kennedy's assassination just months after his departure from Ireland would have a similarly profound effect the country. As Ireland struggled to come to

¹¹⁵ Friel, *Loves*, 65.

terms with Kennedy's death, his ghost would linger in Irish theatres as playwrights continued to probe Ireland's unique relationship with emigration.

2.4 JFK: THE RETURNED-EMIGRANT DREAM COMES AND GOES

In addition to his economic and social reforms, Seán Lemass had also been instrumental in establishing a political Irish connection with America. In 1963 Lemass invited John F. Kennedy, America's first Irish-Catholic president, to visit the Kennedy's ancestral homeland in Ireland. Kennedy accepted, and his arrival on June 26, 1963 marked the first time that an American president had set foot on Irish soil. After their meeting in Ireland, Kennedy returned the favor and in October of the same year, Lemass would become the first Taoiseach to visit the White House. Just several weeks later President Kennedy, who embodied the absolute pinnacle of the Irish-American Emigration Dream, would be assassinated. The event reverberated through Irish consciousness, and would be documented in the disparate plays of Michael McDonnell and Tom Murphy.

JFK's visit to Ireland was important on many levels. Kennedy was first "welcomed home" to the village where his paternal ancestors had lived in Wexford, and he then drove in a presidential motorcade to the port of New Ross to give a speech from the same quay that his great-grandfather, Patrick Kennedy, had emigrated from in 1848. His opening joke that it "took 115 years to make this trip" emphasized the continuity and strength of Irish ancestry; he was literally a living testament to a successful emigration. Kennedy then met with fifteen of his extended cousins at his ancestral farmstead, where a banner could be seen with the flags of the United States and Ireland intertwined. This was the beginning of a significant political link between the two nations.

The presidential visit not only bolstered immediate ties between the United States and Ireland, but it did so for the foreseeable future. Since Kennedy, nearly all American presidents have foregrounded their Irish ancestry, however distant it may be, and many of those have

embarked on similar public “journeys home” to visit Ireland.¹¹⁶ However, Kennedy’s appearance was also significant because it was an abrupt change from the United States’ previously guarded strategy in dealing with Ireland, namely in regards to the immediate challenges of emigration and Northern Ireland. Kennedy addressed both in his speeches, and his speech to the combined houses of Parliament in the Dáil stressed the importance of Ireland’s recent turn towards modernization.

But today this is no longer the country of hunger and famine that those emigrants left behind. It is not rich, and its progress is not yet complete, but it is, according to statistics, one of the best fed countries in the world. [...] You have modernized your economy, harnessed your rivers, diversified your industry, liberalized your trade, electrified your farms, accelerated your rate of growth, and improved the living standards of your people.

*The other nations of the world--in whom Ireland has long invested her people and her children--are now investing their capital as well as their vacations here in Ireland. This revolution is not yet over, nor will it be, I am sure, until a fully modern Irish economy shares in world prosperity.*¹¹⁷

His words were a clear sign to the people of Ireland that modernity was the appropriate way forward for Ireland, and that both Kennedy and the US were interested in Ireland’s financial wellbeing. Kennedy also praised the role of Irish emigrants worldwide, saying that they “have been among the best and most loyal citizens of the countries that they have gone to.”

Kennedy and his Irish homecoming would be immortalized in the psyche of the Irish people, who regarded him as one of their own and shared in his success. Fintan O’Toole explained that Kennedy struck the perfect balance of Irishness, Catholicism, sexiness, and

¹¹⁶ This continues to be true, as evidenced by the similar visits by Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Barak Obama. To be sure, these visits are now constructed primarily to capture the hearts and votes of the 40+ million Irish-Americans in the United States.

¹¹⁷ John F. Kennedy, *Address Before the Irish Parliament*, Dublin, June 28, 1963.
http://ua_tuathal.tripod.com/kennedy.html

success to appeal to a broad cross-section of Ireland. Kennedy's subsequent assassination in November of 1963 would prove tragic to both the Irish and Irish-Americans, who had regarded Kennedy as a type of hero. His lasting effects on Irish culture would be immortalized in many forums, including that of the theatre, where Michael McDonnell and Tom Murphy would look at how Kennedy's life and death impacted the Irish in both America and Ireland.

2.4.1 Michael McDonnell's *All Gods Die on Friday* (1966)

In 1966 O.Z. Whitehead introduced a new dimension to the prestigious Dublin Theatre Festival: an award for the best new one-act play. Whitehead was a successful Broadway and film actor and he was also a product of Ireland's newfound fondness for America; he had moved to Ireland three years prior and quickly established himself as a household name in the Irish theatre community.¹¹⁸ The annual "Whitehead Award for Drama" offered a cash prize to the winning playwright, along with the honor of having the play professionally produced as a part of the Dublin Theatre Festival's programming.

Michael McDonnell's 1966 *All Gods Die on Friday* was the first winner of the Whitehead Award for Drama. Like Whitehead, McDonnell was a hybrid Irish-American; he was the child of two recent Irish emigrants living in the States, and he returned to Ireland to pursue a degree in Irish literature from Trinity College Dublin. Admittedly both McDonnell and his play are on the periphery of my working definition of Irish theatre, but they make for a worthwhile

¹¹⁸ Whitehead had, in fact, *pioneered*, to Ireland in accordance with his Bahá'í faith.

brief exception to the rule if only because the production of *All Gods* emerged as an important part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1966.¹¹⁹

In fact, the lineup for the Dublin Theatre Festival that year provides clear evidence of Ireland's heightened interest in America. The *Irish Press* announced the festival's programming with the following introduction:

*There is an exceptionally strong Irish-American flavor in the programme for the Dublin Theatre Festival which starts Monday night next. Of the nine plays in English to be presented, four have close U.S. connections, which is a far higher ratio than in any previous year. On the other hand, I cannot find even one production mounted from across the channel.*¹²⁰

The focus on America is equally as significant as the complete lack of plays from the United Kingdom, and it was a telltale sign of Ireland's turn toward modernity. Both Whitehead and McDonnell's newfound successes in Dublin are testament to Ireland's fascination with America and Americans in the theatre. Whitehead, himself, was starring in Eugene O'Neill's *Hughie* during the festival, and McDonnell's *All Gods* was eagerly anticipated. Desmond Rushe continued his (above) article by declaring that, "Most interesting of all perhaps, will be the premiere of "All Gods Die on Friday" by Mick McDonnell."

All Gods Die on Friday is a quasi-fictional snapshot of life in an Irish pub in NY on the day that President Kennedy is assassinated. As the first theatrical representation directly acknowledging JFK's death, *All Gods* struck a chord with Irish audiences who had eagerly embraced Kennedy as one of their own. McDonnell was an unknown playwright, yet his short play eulogizing Kennedy became the most anticipated piece of the Dublin Theatre Festival,

¹¹⁹ See Appendix: A. My working definition of "Irish Theatre" places an emphasis on Irish origins, productions, and audiences, all of which the *All Gods* has.

¹²⁰ Rushe, "Theatre Festival has Strong Irish-American Flavor," *Irish Press*, September 27, 1966.

further evidence of how popular Kennedy remained to the Irish people, even three years after his death.

The play is built around a sense of inevitability. Not a minute passes without a passing mention of JFK or death, or both, and audiences going into the play knew all too well how a play set on November 22, 1963 was going to end. Therefore, the play is as much about the journey as it is about the resolution, and a motley cast of characters in a downtrodden Irish pub provide a glimpse into the profound importance of Kennedy's life and death to working-class Irish.

In keeping with both theatrical and literary tradition in Ireland, a wild and independent female character personifies Ireland herself. This was the case with Gar's mother in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, and Cass does it good service in *The Loves of Cass Maguire*; both plays feature the woman of *Eire* as headstrong and unbounded by societal rules. In this case she is manifest in McDonnell's protagonist. Molly Coogan is a widow who has managed an Irish pub in NY single-handedly since the passing of her husband many years before. All of the action of the play happens in the Coogan pub, which is decorated with various bits of Irish kitsch on the walls along with two large photos which make up the focal point of the small public house. One is Eamon de Valera, and the other is John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The play opens with Molly's morning ritual; she dusts off the photos and greets each leader familiarly, telling Kennedy "God be good to ya, there's your only equal this side a' heaven."¹²¹ Note that in the very first line of the play Molly's reverence toward Kennedy is foregrounded alongside his mortality.

Molly has a teenage son, Jimmy, who has applied to Harvard and they are anxiously awaiting a response from the school. From the onset it is clear that Jimmy is not Harvard material, nor does he want to attend the prestigious university. However, Molly is insistent that

¹²¹ McDonnell, *All Gods*, 2.

he follow directly in Kennedy's footsteps. "If a Protestant school was good enough for our president then it's good enough for my Jimmy so."¹²² Not unlike Friel's Cass, McDonnell's Molly regards herself as a martyr; she has worked every day for as many years as she can remember in order to support Jimmy and, she believes, to pay his way to Harvard. Using Kennedy as a model, Molly has convinced herself that if she works hard enough, Jimmy will become the next Irish-American president, and the Irish can keep their newfound place atop the world's pecking order. Unfortunately, just as Cass had been working so hard that she lost touch with the brother that she thought she was supporting, Molly is in the same danger. Her son simply wants to attend the state university, and he does not reciprocate the Kennedy-esque aspirations that his mother casts upon him.

Molly's infatuation with Kennedy resonates throughout the play, and she regularly defends his God-like status against the rants of her clientele.

*MOLLY: You're forgettin' that Kennedy took down all those old barriers. He took the sign off Harvard an' he took it off the White House – "Irish-Catholics need not apply." [...] The best Irishman God ever made. This country produced two great presidents in the last fifty years – an' there's their pictures for anyone ta see: Eamon de Valera an' John F. Kennedy. Pure-bred Irishmen!*¹²³

The irony of this homily is readily accessible to audiences, particularly Irish ones. Both de Valera and Kennedy were born Americans, and their lasting cultural significance is rooted in their hyphenated Irish-American identities. In fact, Kennedy joked about this during his visit to Ireland, telling the members of the Oireachtas (Irish National Parliament) that:

If this nation [Ireland] had achieved its present political and economic stature a century or so ago, my great grandfather might never have left

¹²² McDonnell, *All Gods*, 11.

¹²³ McDonnell, *All Gods*, 12.

*New Ross, and I might, if fortunate, be sitting down there with you. Of course, if your own President [de Valera] had never left Brooklyn, he might be standing up here instead of me.*¹²⁴

When Kennedy made the quip, his Irish audience let out a friendly chuckle at the thought of him and de Valera swapping roles. Both politicians were pivotal to defining midcentury national identity in Ireland and America. Within *All Gods*, McDonnell pays careful attention to the construction of national identity as well. Molly is a crass, hardened Irish publican, who will just as readily drink all night with the police as she will trade curses with a belligerent wanderer. However, when presented with the opportunity, she carefully tends to her “Irishness” when it might treat her well. When a local liquor salesman stops in, Molly quickly gussies up her “best stage-Irish accent” to win his favor, and hopefully, his booze:

MOLLY: (In her best stage-Irish accent) *Well, top a’ the mornin’, Bill. How’s the last of the gin-peddlin’ gentiles?*¹²⁵

Although Molly is surrounded by Americans throughout the play, she understands how “Irish” she needs to be for any given situation. This is an important feature of many American characters in Irish plays: they throw the otherwise everyday Irishness of Irish characters into relief. American characters ask Irish spectators to consider the difference between characters, Irish and otherwise, on stage, effectively holding the mirror up to themselves.¹²⁶ Friel also visits

¹²⁴ Kennedy, *Irish Parliament*.

¹²⁵ McDonnell, *All Gods*, 14.

¹²⁶ This “mirror” phrasing may well be unconsciously indebted to the title of Christopher Murray’s *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to Nation*, although my passing use of the term only overlaps with his book inasmuch as we are both interested in the very broad metaphor of theatrical representation acting as a mirror reflecting audiences own beliefs, fears, problems, etc.

this conundrum with *Philadelphia*, when Madge, Gar's surrogate mother, must face up to her maternal competition in the form of Gar's American Aunt Lizzy.

*(MADGE appears at the door of the shop. She refuses to look at the visitors. Her face is tight with disapproval. **Her accent is very precise.**)*

MADGE: Are there any Clarions to spare or are they all ordered?

PUBLIC: They're all ordered, Madge.

LIZZY: Doing big deals out there, honey, huh?

MADGE: Thank you, Gareth.

(MADGE withdraws.)

LIZZY: "Thank you, Gareth!" (She giggles to herself.)¹²⁷

Both Madge and Molly, it would seem, readily construct their Irishness through their voices, for the purposes of influencing the American characters opposite them. The characters, and by extension, the playwrights, use these moments of constructed Irishness to win favor with their Irish audiences, who might be been known to do the same. After all, it is the audiences who the playwrights are courting with their work, and without American characters, the Irish ones would not be able to experiment with such gradations in their Irishness.

The major American character that Molly is wooing in McDonnell's *All Gods*, however, never appears on stage. While Kennedy's presence looms over the play throughout, it takes a random, disheveled businessman to bring news of JFK's demise into Molly's pub. He bursts in, disturbing the regulars and demands to use the telephone: President Kennedy has been shot. Amidst disbelief, Molly turns to the radio for more information, while the businessman borrows the phone in a desperate attempt to sell his stock holdings before news of Kennedy's death is made public. The American suit is only concerned with his own financial well being, while Molly, the Catholic publican, fears for the security of Irish-Catholics collectively. Her instinctive

¹²⁷ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 63. Emphasis added.

reaction is one of disbelief followed immediately by guilt, as though the shooting is a penance for her own faults:

*MOLLY: Hospital? The poor thing. Ah, the creature, the best we ever had. Sure, he can't die. What'll we ever do? What's ta become of us atall, atall? I'll never be the same after this, never be the same. Sacred Heart of Jesus, I must have done some terrible thing, some dreadful thing, ta be punished like this. If there's no place in Heaven for a man like that, what's ta become of the rest of us atall, atall?*¹²⁸

As the play reaches its climax, Jimmy runs in to bring his mother the inevitable news of Kennedy's death. She is stunned into silence, staring face-to-face with Kennedy's portrait on the wall as her customers and friends filter out of the pub. When it is just Molly and Jimmy who remain on stage, Jimmy seizes the moment to tell his mother that he hasn't been accepted into Harvard after all. Not getting any reaction, he builds into an adolescent rant against Kennedy and his mother:

*JIMMY: [...] It was you wanted me to go to Harvard, not me. It was your dream, not mine – not even dad's. He only mentioned college, not Harvard. But that wasn't good enough for you. Oh, no, not for you and Mr. All-Everything. "The greatest Irishman that ever lived." Well I hated the greatest Irishman that ever lived, and I'm glad he's dead. Glad! Glad! And you know something else? You caused the hatred – you, with your comparisons, and imitations, driving, driving, to make me something I never wanted to be or could be! Jesus, protect me from people who do things in the Name of God or John F. Kennedy!*¹²⁹

When Molly finally responds, it is with similar vitriol. She might've expected the denial letter from Harvard – all of the other characters certainly did – but she could not tolerate her son desecrating the name of Kennedy in her pub. With first words that Molly speaks after learning of Kennedy's assassination she disowns her only son and kicks him out of her pub and her life:

¹²⁸ McDonnell, *All Gods*, 19.

¹²⁹ McDonnell, *All Gods*, 24-25.

MOLLY: Get out! Get out ta hell with the rest a'them, you poor ignoramus. How do you know what he meant to the Irish in this country? How could we ever make you understand even a little of what we felt for that man, even a little of what he did for us? (pause) There wasn't a one of us but could hold his head a little higher, make his back a little straighter, over what that man did. [...] Don't ya see, he showed us the good that was in us, what we could of or might have been – all of us – all the misfits and failures we thought we were. He succeeded for us. He was everything we might have been – two sides ta the one coin, that's all. And who's ta succeed for us now, Jimmy? Who's ta succeed for us now? [...] (Raging) How can I talk to you? Get out, before I break your bloody back. Get out, where ya belong, with the half-men and the failures.¹³⁰

Jimmy accepts the challenge, and his bitter farewell address echoes that of Gar's final, impassioned, goodbye to his former girlfriend, Katie. Both young men shout loudly about their freedom as they venture out toward an unknown American future, while it is clear that at the same time their hearts are quietly suffering:

GAR PUBLIC: And you'll die here! But I'm not stuck! I'm free! Free as the bloody wind!¹³¹

JIMMY: I don't care! I'm free now – that's all that matters! Free to fail on my own – free of you and free of him and free of promises made to dead men!¹³²

Molly responds to her only son by hurling a glass from behind the bar at him as he bolts out the front door. Jimmy was no JFK after all, and as it turns out, she was no Countess Rose either. It was as though JFK's presidency had been an oasis in Molly's desert of exile. For Molly, the death of her great Irish president was her own end as well. She believed that she had martyred herself in order to mother the next JFK, yet with the president assassinated and her son now exiled, both her dream and its inspiration failed her. Molly is left staring at Kennedy's

¹³⁰ McDonnell, *All Gods*, 24-25.

¹³¹ Friel, *Philadelphia*, 79.

¹³² McDonnell, *All Gods*, 25.

picture, and then the calendar next to it on the wall. She had yet to adjust the date for the day, and when she finally does so, revealing the current date in the massive bold print of a page-a-day calendar, both she and the audience are faced with the date so recently immortalized in the hearts of the audience members: November 22, 1963.

The action is a simple gesture to JFK and his massive influence on the Irish community. It is as though Molly is showing audiences: “This is what I was doing” in response to the quintessential generational question: ‘What were you doing when you heard that JFK was shot?’ *All Gods Die on Friday* may just be a small window into one Irish pub on that day, but it demonstrates that the effect of JFK’s assassination was massive and irreversible within the Irish community. Michael McDonnell’s title “*All Gods Die on Friday*” demands that it isn’t simply JFK that died that day, but that JFK’s assassination took out all other popular and religious gods as well. That certainly would prove true for Molly, who cannot understand how any loving god could allow the greatest living Irishman to be struck down in his prime. When the curtain finally falls on the play, Molly’s sense of despair and desolation have crippled her, such that she cries out Jesus Christ’s final exclamation from the cross “Oh my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” before collapsing onto the floor in the middle of her pub.

McDonnell said that he wrote the play after he had unwittingly found himself in an Irish bar in NY at the time when news broke of Kennedy’s assassination. Although the play itself is largely fictional, he had experienced its real-life equivalent on November 22, 1963. As an Irish-American, McDonnell would have had a keen appreciation for Kennedy’s importance within the Irish-emigrant community, and as a budding scholar, he was likely riding the Kennedy wave as he was finding his own success in the world as well. Thus, *All Gods Die on Friday* is a concise

historical artifact that documents Kennedy's role in Irish life both in its content and its production. As a play McDonnell frames *All Gods* as a snapshot of history happening in an Irish pub, while in production *All Gods* speaks of Kennedy's enduring importance to Irish audiences nearly three years later at the Dublin Theatre Festival.

Reviews for the production were generally positive, if short, given the play's one-act nature. The Irish Times headlined its primary article on the piece "The Theatrical Death of John F. Kennedy",¹³³ and Gus Smith with the *Sunday Independent* fairly sums up most of the other press with his concise rendition of how the play was presented:

*The build up is impressive enough with all the elements of good tragi-comedy. One is caught up in the tension [...] Anna Manahan reflects the stunning sense of sorrow and desolation superbly when the news breaks finally of the President's death.*¹³⁴

Smith's word choice "reflects" indicates what *All Gods* does best, and that is reflect a sense of loss that many Irish were still coming to terms with. There's a sense that the play has a deeper meaning than the other Dublin Theatre Festival offerings, not that it's necessarily better, but that it is a part of Ireland's unfinished grieving over the loss of Kennedy.

However, not all reviews were glowing, and the play's Achilles heel was that it dealt in a subject that was all too familiar. While many reviews cited the tears and sympathy of the piece, some accused it of finding those emotions too easily. As a one-act, it attempts much in its scant hour-long run time, and with the end inevitable from the onset, some reviewers grew weary of it well before the play had run its course. Such is the case with the Irish critic Colm Cronin, whose Irish Press column was known for its characteristic lack of restraint. I quote his review in full:

¹³³ "The Theatrical Death of John F Kennedy" *Irish Times*, October 4, 1966, 4.

¹³⁴ Gus Smith, "Festival 'Fire' at Abbey and Gaiety," *Sunday Independent*, October 9, 1966, 18.

*All Gods Die on Friday, the prizewinning one-act by Michael McDonnell, is a breast-beating piece of sentimentality that softly earned £100. Only for Anna Manahan it would be washed away in its own tears. She gives it more dignity that it deserves and Seamus Forde gives it more humour than it contains.*¹³⁵

Cronin concedes that the principal cast does more than its fair share of effort to help the play, but he considers it a non-starter. Much like *The Country Boy* before it, the primary claim against *All Gods Die on Sunday* is that the play is sentimental. This is a familiar refrain in theatre that deals with popular tragic events, as we will see in the next chapter when the Troubles are brought onto the Irish stage.

McDonnell's *All Gods* also seems to have been developed in parallel with Friel's own rendition of the grubby underbelly of Irish emigration circa 1966. Writing at the same time as Friel, McDonnell succeeded in creating the exact environment in which Cass Maguire might've found herself most comfortable. Although we only hear about the seedy underpinnings of New York from Cass, Molly Coogan's pub could easily stand in for Cass's kitchen, right down to the crippled war veteran who frequents the place.

The cast of Americans that McDonnell employs throughout his play add color and excitement to Molly's life, but they also serve as a framework surrounding Irish emigration at work. Molly (Irish), and her son Jimmy (Irish-American) play-out one archetypical emigrant generational difference; Molly desperately tries to cling to her Irish roots, and indeed to project those roots onto Kennedy and others, while Jimmy simply wants to be free of the old world that he has never known, yet which has always hung over his head. The others along the way give both Molly and Jimmy reason and opportunity to reflect on their Irishness, and their eventual parting is closely related to the exile in the other plays examined.

¹³⁵ Colm Cronin, "Colm Cronin," *Irish Press*, October 8, 1966, 9.

In a decade when Ireland had finally come face-to-face with its emigration problems, its theatres did the same. Exile and return intermingle on stage, and Americans in many forms are used to color and reflect on contemporary Irish values. If McDonnell's play does one thing striking and new, it is that it suggests that emigration and exile might be so deeply ingrained into Irish culture so as to follow the emigrants across the sea. The Coogans are already in America, yet the story of Molly and Jimmy follows the all-too-familiar emigrant/exile pattern. Though more verbal, Jimmy's leaving is not wholly unlike that of Gar before him, though there'll be no American Wake for Jimmy, as he needs only walk out the door in order to be on the streets of NY.

2.4.2 Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985)

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Ireland's strides towards economic expansion were broadly successful, effectively bringing an end to Ireland's once-endemic emigration problem. As such, with a strong economy and ample jobs available at home, fewer and fewer Irish young people were faced with the bleak economic outlook that had forced characters like Cass Maguire and Gar O'Donnell to try their luck in America. By the 1970s, emigration was no longer a requisite for Irish survival, and consequently the need to interrogate Irish-Americans on stage was changing greatly.

This is graphically illustrated by Ireland's own census findings: Persistent emigration and a dwindling population had been so entrenched in the Irish consciousness, that even the census documents reflected Ireland's de facto complacency with the situation. Beginning with Ireland's first official state census in 1926, and continuing through 1971, two of the primary headings on the census findings report were "*Decrease in Population*" and "*Estimated Net Emigration.*" The demographers who designed the report had done so assuming that a declining population and high rate of emigration were given parameters for Ireland. They had only allowed for the possibility of a growing population as a contingency, which meant that should Ireland experience net immigration, it would need to be stated as a *negative net emigration* – a curious census feature.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ See figure 2.5.

CENSUS OF POPULATION, 1926.								
TABLE 1.—SHOWING FOR EACH PROVINCE IN SAORSTAT EIREANN THE POPULATION AT EACH CENSUS SINCE 1881, AND THE NUMBER OF MARRIAGES, BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTERED IN EACH INTERCENSAL PERIOD SINCE 1871.								
Total Population		Figures for the Intercensal Period mentioned in last column						
Year	Persons	* Marriages Registered	* Births Registered	* Deaths Registered	Net Increase (Emi- gration minus Deaths)	Decrease in Population (+ = In- crease)	Net Emigration	Intercensal Period
SAORSTAT EIREANN.								
1881	3,870,020	176,458	1,036,682	718,125	318,557	183,167	501,724	1871-1881
1891	3,468,694	145,976	835,072	639,073	195,999	401,326	597,325	1881-1891

Figure 2.3 Ireland 1926 Census of Population Report¹³⁷

This practice continued through 1971 with the columns configured so that the intercensal population decrease was listed as a “positive” net emigration. Parenthetically, the census stated that an increase in population would be noted as a “+ = Increase” although in Ireland’s post-Famine history that had never happened. This would all change with the census report of 1979, as seen below in figure 1.5. The census column headings were changed to the conventional “*Change in Population*” and “*Estimated Net Migration*” titles, perhaps because the new census data required it: The 1979 census discovered the first period of net immigration in Ireland’s documented history.

¹³⁷ Central Statistics Office, “Census of Population, 1926,” Dublin, 1926, 2. Focus added.

CENSUS OF POPULATION, 1979

TABLE 1:- POPULATION OF EACH PROVINCE AT EACH CENSUS SINCE 1901; MARRIAGES, BIRTHS AND DEATHS REGISTERED, NATURAL INCREASE AND ESTIMATED NET MIGRATION IN EACH INTERCENSAL PERIOD SINCE 1891.

Total Population		Figures for the Intercensal Period						
Year	Persons	Marrriages Registered	Births Registered	Deaths Registered	Natural Increase (Births minus Deaths)	Change in Population	Estimated Net Migration	Intercensal Period
TOTAL								
1901	3,221,823	148,134	737,934	588,391	149,543	- 82,135	- 261,539	1901-1911
1911	3,110,688	153,674	713,700	534,305	179,404	- 82,135	- 261,539	1901-1911

Figure 2.4 Ireland 1979 Census of Population Report¹³⁸

Getting to that point had taken considerable work on the part of the newly fully independent Irish government of the 1950s and 1960s. The net population gain documented in 1979 provided evidence that the “Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems” had succeeded in the eradication of one of Ireland’s most significant socio-economic problems.

As such, unlike earlier decades, emigration largely fades from the Irish stage for a time, with comparatively few plays featuring American emigration being staged in the 1970s. One notable exception, however, is playwright Tom Murphy, whose introspective dramas seek to reconcile Ireland’s dark corners. An occasional emigrant to the UK himself, Murphy lived, worked, and drank in the Irish emigrant ghettos, and his experience would greatly color his work. By the time he moved back to Ireland in 1970, he had developed a keen awareness of the peculiarities of Irish emigrant life. The emigrants that he lived among

had a sense of being betrayed by the country of their origin here, and they also felt that they had betrayed that country. They were carrying a most curious guilt that they were very much inferior to the people they had left behind, and that they

¹³⁸ Central Statistics Office, “Census of Population, 1979,” Dublin, 1979. Focus added.

*didn't belong [abroad.] When they came back for the summer sojourn, they found that they didn't quite belong [in Ireland] either. Strange dichotomies had grown up in them, and they didn't know what to do with themselves, with their freedom, with their money, with this fragmented, fractured identity.*¹³⁹

The fractured identity of the Irish emigrant would become a significant thread throughout Tom Murphy's work, and although a majority of his emigrants are English, as he was, Murphy occasionally turns his focus towards American emigration, as with his 1972 play *The White House*. Much like Michael McDonnell's *All Gods Die on Friday*, Murphy's *The White House* is primarily concerned with chronicling the effects of Kennedy's assassination on the Irish people, this time in a small town in Ireland.

The Abbey Theatre produced *The White House* for a short run in March of 1972. The play is set in east Galway, in a pub that has been creatively restyled as homage to John F. Kennedy and consequently named "The White House." The publican, JJ, plays up his likeness to Kennedy, and has created the pub to be a progressive meeting-house of sorts. JJ is a mentor and hero to the local boys, and he actively encourages them to follow their dreams and, like Kennedy, live up to their potential. The play features two acts, which anachronistically contrast the post-emigration disillusionment of 1972 (act one) against the pre-emigration excitement and expectations of 1963 (act two.)

The play begins in the present of 1972, when three friends are reunited with the one of their crew, Michael, who had emigrated. Over heavy drink the meeting turns sour, as it becomes evident that none of the young men has realized his dreams. The "White House," their safe haven and intellectual home, is in a desperate state of disrepair, and JJ, their former mentor, has become

¹³⁹ Tom Murphy, "In Conversation with Michael Billington," ed. Nicholas Grene *Talking About Tom Murphy*, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2002) 96.

a worthless drunk vagrant. The second act takes the audience and characters back to 1963, when the pub is fresh and new, and the young men are inspired and ready to set off to change the world. When the exact date is revealed, November 22, 1963, Irish audiences can immediately locate the source of discord between the past and future. Although all the young men are full of promise and optimism as the play ends in 1963, the audience knows the tragedy that awaits them, both in terms of Kennedy's assassination and the character's resultant collective failure to succeed.

Unlike McDonnell, Murphy does not attempt to claim that Kennedy's death wholly caused his Irish characters to fail. However, he demonstrates that the promise featured in JJ's "White House" pub in the early 1960s was inexorably linked to Kennedy's success. The audience is left to fill in the gap between 1963 and 1972, while Murphy simply makes it clear that the intervening years have not been kind to any of his characters.

The lasting impact of *The White House*, however, is that it paved the way for one of Tom Murphy's enduring masterpieces, *Conversations on a Homecoming*. Murphy is known to revise his plays, even after production and publication; this was especially true with *The White House*. Beginning in the early 1980s, Murphy forged a relationship with Garry Hynes and Druid Theatre, and they collaborated to radically rework Murphy's *The White House* into a new play for Druid's 1985 season. This new play, *Conversations on a Homecoming*, would effectively provide a dramatic bookend to a period of theatre production that had so thoroughly documented Ireland's struggle with emigration.

Conversations on a Homecoming, as the title implies, focuses exclusively on the first act of *The White House*, and expands Michael's 1972 homecoming to fill an entire play. The characters talk about the good old days in 1963, but we do not travel back in time, and the clear

focus on the day that Kennedy was shot is absent from the refined play altogether. The most significant character change in the play has to do with that of the returned-emigrant, Michael. In *The White House* he has recently returned from England, whereas his hyphenated identity becomes Irish-American in *Conversations on a Homecoming*. Consequently his lack of success in America becomes a focal point of the production, and one that is directly accessible to Irish audiences:

*To experience Tom Murphy's Conversations on a Homecoming for the first time is like meeting some old roué of an uncle who emigrated to American before you were born but whose escapades have become a part of family lore.*¹⁴⁰

Michael returns to Ireland from the States only to be caught telling the same lies that he told his mates almost ten years ago. Given the pedantic squabbling between the characters, and the false sense of bravado that permeates the air in the “White House,” there is a sense that audiences have seen this all before. Michael and his friends are simply older versions of Gar and his mates in Ballybeg. They drink too much and try to impress one another with stories that never happened, and only occasionally call each other’s bluff.

Friel uses this stagnant situation in *Philadelphia* to give Gar a reason to leave, and Murphy demonstrates that some things never change. Despite Michael's emigration, his life States-side remains impotent, and his finances don’t seem to have benefited from his emigration at all. In fact, it is Michael’s friend Liam who seems to be the best off of all of them, and he wears his financial success in a “slight American accent:”

LIAM entering, car keys swinging, about the same age as JUNIOR; well-dressed and groomed: expensive, heavy pinstripe, double-breasted suit, a newspaper neatly folded sticking out of his pocket for effect. He is a

¹⁴⁰ Brian Brennan, “Waiting for JJ,” review of *Conversations on a Homecoming* by Tom Murphy, *Sunday Independent*, Feb 16, 1992, 36.

*farmer, an estate agent, a travel agent, he owns property ... he affects a slight American accent; a bit stupid and insensitive – seemingly the requisites of success.*¹⁴¹

Thus Murphy defines the requisites of success as “a slight American accent, a bit stupid and insensitive.” As Liam has no ties to America, his slight accent is likely due to consumption of popular culture in the form of television and films. This is used as a comic underscoring to Michael, the Irish-American actor struggling to find work creating that very media, who notably has not picked up an American accent during his nine years abroad.

Michael’s cohort attempts to convince him that JJ has devolved into a hopeless alcoholic. At first Michael holds out hope that he will catch up with his old mentor, but it eventually becomes clear that JJ has literally gone vagrant, and that there is no hope for his return. This turn of events now colors their memories of the golden days in the pub before Michael’s emigration, and while Michael maintains that JJ’s optimism was productive, the others now regard it as manufactured and hollow. They claim that JJ is, and always was, a sham, espousing Kennedy’s progressive rhetoric simply because he had none of his own.

The conversation occasionally comes back to why Michael has returned, and he avoids answering each time. As the evening comes to a close, the focus shifts to the foundering pub and its lone heiress, the 17 year-old Anna who has been working behind the bar. Michael hasn’t been forthright about how long he intends to stay in Ireland, and it slowly comes out that he is considering restoring the “White House” to its former glory. When he asks Anne out on a date for the next day, his friends see through his plan and address him as the foreigner that he is. Although they welcomed his visit, he has no place in the town now that he has emigrated. They

¹⁴¹ Tom Murphy, *Conversations on a Homecoming*, (Dublin: Gallery Books, 1985) 10.

explain that Liam has his own desires for Anne and the pub, and that Michael mustn't interfere. Liam explains the rules to him: He may return to Ireland to die, but he cannot return to make a home in his hometown and threaten upsetting the balance of things.

After his friends collectively inform him that he is to keep his hands off both Anne and the "White House" Michael makes amends and has a drunken epiphany:

MICHAEL: I'm dead sober. And I'm certainly not as confused as I was.
TOM: (Pacifactory) Ary! You're only an eejit, Ridge! (MICHAEL nods)
PEGGY: Y'are. (MICHAEL nods)
TOM: (Mock gruffness.) Y'are!
MICHAEL: But I know what I cam home for.
TOM: Come on, we'll walk yeh down.
MICHAEL: No, I'm – okay.¹⁴²

Thus, Michael is left alone in the pub as it closes, and he calls off the date with Anne, citing his imminent departure:

MICHAEL: (Whispers) I have to go in the morning.
ANNE: (Silently) What?
MICHAEL: Have to go in the morning. (He smiles, shrugs) They've probably cut down the rest of the wood by now, anyway.
ANNE: There's still the stream.
MICHAEL: Yeh. But I have to go. Tell JJ I'm sorry I didn't see him. Tell him...
(He wants to add something but cannot find the words yet)... Tell him I love him.

She nods, she smiles, she knows. He waits for another moment to admire her, then he walks off. ANNE continues in the window as at the beginning of the play, smiling her gentle hope out at the night.)

Ultimately Michael's return to the pub of his youth is reconciled when he decides to close that chapter in his life. He decides to leave before seeing JJ so that his memories of the inspiring years of Kennedy's reign can live on in his mind. His desire to rebuild the pub, and perhaps court

¹⁴² Murphy, *Conversations*, 73.

JJ's daughter Anne, was a hasty attempt to go back to a past that is long gone. Michael's victory in the play is that he realizes this before it is too late; he chooses to return "home" to NY rather than endeavor to rekindle a pub in Kennedy's honor ten years after his death.

Michael's return to Ireland becomes one of a formal goodbye to both the pub and the friends that he remembers from his youth. "The White House" pub, once a symbol of the Irish-American Dream, is now beyond repair; neither it nor Michael have found success in their American recastings. However the play ends with a classic sense of stasis being restored. With the Irish-American on his way back home to America, life in Ireland can go on unimpeded: JJ can be just another worthless drunk on the streets, and Liam can marry Anne and refashion "The White House" back into another traditional Irish pub, or better, sell it, free from the encumbrances of the Kennedy legacy.

In his *Tom Murphy: The Politics of Magic*, Irish critic Fintan O'Toole highlights the primary irony in Murphy's use of America in *Conversations*. Although Michael is the returned-yank, he has ultimately failed to live up to the level of American success ascribed onto his return by the characters around him. Liam, on the other hand,

*is the true spawn of JJ's Kennedy-style idealism. For the naïve adoption of American notions in the Sixties has benefitted no one but Liam [... and] his adoption of American mannerisms goes hand-in-hand with a rabid nationalism. [...] He is prepared to fight for the northern nationalists, at least while he is in a pub, [...] He is entirely unaware of any possible contradiction between his own Americanized image and the traditions of Ireland.*¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Fintan O'Toole, *Tom Murphy: The Politics of Magic*, (Dublin: New Island Books, 1994) 172.

Thus, once again we see American characters being employed in order to focus attention on the Irish characters themselves, this time specifically in regards to Ireland's tumultuous relationship with American capitalism and modernization. It is Liam, "the mean little businessman," who has been most influenced by Ireland's American shift, whereas Michael is simply an out-of-work actor who has failed to find success in America. Liam's newfound infatuation with Irish nationalism in the North is also indicative of his Irish-American aspirations. As we will see in the next chapter, the increasing tensions in the North would soon displace emigration as Ireland's primary cultural concern.

While Michael might serve to embody what Friel's Gar found in his 1964 American emigration, the far more troubling aspect of the play has to do with what those who stayed in Ireland have found on their native soil. Much like Friel's *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, *Conversations* demonstrates that considerable material wealth became available during the modernization of Ireland, but that it often came at the expense of friends, family, and culture. In both cases, American characters are used to dissect the material changes in Ireland since their departure, and these Irish-Americans are generally disappointed by what they discover upon their return "home." Cass is befuddled by her brother's posh house, accented by a conspicuous cupid fountain in his garden, and Michael believes that Liam's shrewd materialism is in direct opposition to the "socialist ideals" that they had professed ten years earlier. In both cases, the returned yanks reflect on the changes in their hometowns, yet they are powerless to change things themselves.

Tom Murphy labels his plays "dark comedy" wherein he employs humor to make the fundamental crises of his characters palatable. Like Friel, Murphy has become a cultural icon and a guardian of a society in the throes of rapid change. He does not attempt to offer discreet

answers, but rather to probe Irish society and cause people to ask questions when they see the reality of their lives reflected back at them in the theatre. Although Murphy's plays enjoy production throughout the western world, Brian Brennan emphasizes the importance of local audiences who can understand the nuance of Murphy's writing: "*Conversations on a Homecoming* crystallizes a uniquely Irish experience. Many of the laughs in the Abbey are laughs of recognition."¹⁴⁴

2.5 CONCLUSIONS

Both Friel and Murphy were acutely aware of the rapid changes sweeping through Irish society in the 1960s. Although they could not foresee the major turn Irish Theatre would take, they recognized that the modernization of Ireland brought about radical social change, and they endeavored to track this change through the theatre. As Ireland became more fixated on America and American capitalism, American characters became increasingly important on the Irish stage.

Friel's 1964 *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* began a new epoch for Irish theatre, marked by a departure from realism as well as a new role for the American emigrant. While Gar and his alter ego struggle to decide what to do, Lizzy, Con, and Ben demonstrate that America isn't all bad. When Lizzy makes Gar an offer that he can't refuse, his decision to emigrate and embrace the American hyphen is the lesser of two evils: He could find no future for himself in Ireland, and America offered him both freedom and cold hard cash. As America offered the same to Ireland, Friel captures an Ireland teetering on the precipice of modern capitalism.

¹⁴⁴ Brennan, "Waiting," 36.

Two years later, Friel's 1966 *The Loves of Cass Maguire* featured an Irish-American returning "home" to Ireland permanently. In the two years between *Philadelphia* and *Loves*, Ireland instituted a sweeping series of reforms specifically to educate and nurture a more modern workforce, and the fruits of these changes were evident in Friel's rapidly changing views on emigration. When Cass returns after spending 50 years working in the slums of NY, she discovers that her brother in Ireland has found considerable financial success. So too have his children, although their success is reflected in their working far from home and never seeing their parents. Cass's disillusionment upon her return to an Ireland that she doesn't recognize ultimately lands her in a retirement home, where she reflects on the unfortunate state of her brother's prosperous, yet dysfunctional family. As the play closes, she has lost touch with her only allies, the audience, and is finally left with nothing but dreams of what might've been.

Cass's dreams are influenced by Ireland's most renowned American, president John F. Kennedy. Kennedy's distant Irish ancestry secured him a place as an honorary Irishman, and his visit to the young nation in 1963 cemented both his popularity and his Irishness throughout the Irish and Irish-American communities. Consequently, his assassination later that year was devastating to the Irish who had lauded him as the shining example of Irish-American emigration done right. Playwright Michael McDonnell captured this relationship succinctly in his award-winning 1966 *All Gods Die on Friday*. The play demonstrated the importance of Kennedy to the Irish-American community via his portrait's shrine-like status on a decrepit pub's wall. When the news breaks of Kennedy's death, life in that pub forever changes. Without their savior and guiding light, a family crumbles and all faith is lost, both in Kennedy and God above.

Tom Murphy also charted Ireland's relationship with America via a photograph of Kennedy on the pub wall, only by 1972 the photo is dusty and neglected, like the pub that houses

it. *The White House* and its follow-up play *Conversations on a Homecoming* again place the returned Irish-American emigrant center stage, this time in a foundering pub called “The White House.” However, by 1972, American capitalism has taken hold in Ireland, and the most “American” character is one of the boys who has stayed in Ireland. Murphy employs this dark irony to demonstrate that the capitalist American attitude is not necessarily related to place. While Michael hasn’t found spiritual or financial success in America, his Irish parallel, Liam, has traded one for the other in Ireland.

All of these plays employ significant American characters in order to reflect on the rapidly changing state of emigration in Ireland. As it transitioned from an epidemic to a non-issue, Irish playwrights grappled with how the myriad changes effecting emigration in Irish society might be impacting Irish culture over time. Their sharpest tool for the dissection: American characters.

The extent to which these plays were keeping pace with Ireland’s changing cultural milieu is also reflected in the rapidity with which they were consumed. While the 1960s saw a significant shift in how Irish theatre was being produced, it also brought television into the marketplace. As one of the most important changes in the history of media and information distribution, television was a considerable step toward the cultural Americanization of Ireland, and broadcasts began in Ireland at precisely the same time that Ireland’s economic system was transitioning toward a American model of free, global enterprise.

In the decade following the introduction of television to Ireland, there was a great push to televise Ireland’s modern classics of the theatre. Within the span of two years in the mid-1970s, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, and *The White House* were all adapted for television and aired to wide audiences in Ireland for free. Although these plays had all been

popular in Ireland's large amateur theatre circuit, television brought the plays to countless more eyes and ears than the theatre ever could. In doing so, the nuance of Tom Murphy's criticism of a changing Ireland struck a vein:

*The extent to which The White House and Conversations on a Homecoming touched the raw nerve of social change in Ireland by illuminating the fact that the king's new clothes were a cowboy suit was clear from the reaction which the plays provoked. When The White House was screened by RTÉ television in 1977, it met a response which was the modern equivalent of the riots which greeted The Playboy of the Western World and The Plough and the Stars.*¹⁴⁵

This was proof that Murphy was in step with his Irish audiences, and that his indictment of an Americanized Ireland was not simply local to Tuam, but that it has reverberated throughout the country.

As the Irish economy prospered and stabilized in the 1970s, a new concern began to dominate Ireland's popular consciousness. The Troubles in the North had erupted in 1969, and had reached a fever pitch in the early 1970s. Tom Murphy addresses the topic in *Conversations on a Homecoming*, with his Irish-American mistakenly bringing it up as a joke:

MICHAEL: (joking) You didn't consider taking up the gun and marching on the North?

JUNIOR: We thought about it. (MICHAEL laughs) Serious.

MICHAEL: What?

JUNIOR: We did.

LIAM: We nearly did.

JUNIOR: Serious.

LIAM: Shoot us a few Prods.

(MICHAEL looks at TOM)

TOM: It's very bad up there.

MICHAEL: I know, I've been reading but.

LIAM: We nearly did, one night.

TOM: The way the Catholics are being treated.

¹⁴⁵ O'Toole, *Politics of Magic*, 181.

MICHAEL: (Trying to conceal his disbelief) Yeh?

It quickly becomes clear that the North is no joking matter, and both Friel and Murphy would soon shift the focus of their next plays to the Troubles. With the emigration situation presumably solved, the next generation of Americans to hit the Irish stage would be more concerned with peacemaking than profiteering. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how playwrights employed American characters in the hopes of making sense of the Troubles for audiences on both sides of the polarizing sectarian struggle in Northern Ireland.

3.0 THE TROUBLES ON STAGE 1969-1999

*Given its history, both ancient and modern, Northern Ireland is unlikely to ever know perfect peace, for the troubles have added fresh grievances to ancient differences and there are many fresh and painful scars.*¹⁴⁶

- McKittrick & McVea, 2002

3.1 THE TROUBLES

As the Republic of Ireland began to emerge from its battle against chronic emigration in the 1960s, another longstanding cultural and political struggle reignited in the North. Increasingly violent sectarian clashes began to attract not just the attention of Ireland and the UK, but international media outlets as well. It soon became clear that the trouble in Northern Ireland represented a major cultural and political crisis.

The “Troubles,” as the conflict would become known, roughly refers to the considerable sectarian violence taking place primarily, but not exclusively, in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s through the early 2000s. The Troubles is one facet of a historical struggle that reaches back decades, perhaps even millennia if myth and ancient history are taken into consideration.

¹⁴⁶ David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2002), xi.

Regardless of its origination, the conflict in Northern Ireland is at once religious, cultural, and political, and it is as enduring as it is pervasive.

“Hundreds of books and millions of words have been written on the troubles”¹⁴⁷ with countless more being published every year. For good reason, the topic is complex and its history continues to be renegotiated as new facts are revealed and others disproven. Historical narratives on all sides of the Troubles are polarized and inconsistent, and there are many important facets that may never be fully uncovered.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, it is well outside the scope of this project to attempt any sort of comprehensive history of the Troubles. Instead, this chapter will simply begin with a cursory overview of the conflict, and salient details will be expanded in order to provide context for major points of intersection between the Troubles, its theatrical representation, and the American characters that are employed therein.

The most significant inciting incident of the Troubles can be traced to the partition of Ireland in 1920-22. During that time, lengthy negotiations between Irish nationalists and the British government in Westminster concluded with the separation of the island of Ireland along religious and political lines. The southern twenty-six counties, with their Catholic/Nationalist majorities, would go on to become the Irish Free State, and eventually the fully independent Republic of Ireland. The remaining northern six counties, with their Protestant/Unionist majorities, would remain a part of the United Kingdom christened Northern Ireland.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense*, x.

¹⁴⁸ One of the most important of these has to do with the level of information available to government officials at any given time, and to what extent the Troubles were shaped or steered by British government involvement and infiltration.

¹⁴⁹ Note that the terms Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist remain problematic and open to debate. This study will employ the general “Catholic” and

In short, the partition of Ireland had serious repercussions. The Catholic minority in the North considered themselves Irish and generally aspired towards a unified Ireland, as did many people living in the 26 counties. Meanwhile, the Protestant majority identified as British, and feared that a growing Catholic population would threaten the North's future as part of the United Kingdom. Partition in the early 1920s met with considerable violence, sparking the development of paramilitary organizations that further polarized the communities.

As part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland had its own parliament and local government, which is commonly referred to as "Stormont," after its location on the Stormont Estate east of Belfast. Stormont's legislative powers were devolved from those of the UK, and as such, laws in the North did not necessarily mirror those in the rest of the UK. This becomes especially apparent after the Ireland Act of 1949, which guaranteed that Northern Ireland could only become a part of the Republic of Ireland if it was decided by a majority vote. Intent on maintaining union with the United Kingdom, Stormont employed a system of gerrymandering and disenfranchisement specifically designed to prevent the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland from participating in local government, and to thwart any future referendum on Irish unification.

Inequality in governance and civil rights grew in the North throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, eventually leading to civil unrest. Subsequently, sectarian violence became increasingly frequent in the late 1960s, escalating into organized attacks such as the Burntollet Bridge ambush (January 4, 1969) and the Castlereagh power station bombing (March 30, 1969.) Eventually the conflict would devolve into widespread rioting with the Battle of the Bogside in

"Protestant" nomenclature as appropriate to refer to the separate communities in the North, except in certain instances where heightened political motives or historical information dictates otherwise. See Appendix: A for more details.

August 1969. After three days of continuous urban warfare, it became clear that Northern security forces could not control the situation – in many cases the Protestant police force had made it worse – and Stormont was forced to defer to London for military support.

Thus, on August 14, 1969, the British Army was deployed into Northern Ireland, marking a critical turning point in Northern Irish history and signaling the beginning of a period now known as the Troubles. The involvement of London and the British Army radically changed the political dynamic of the conflict, precisely as the arena was gaining worldwide attention.

Although the seeds for the Troubles had been planted in the 1920s, two specific conditions need to be more closely considered to understand why the North descended into sectarian warfare in 1969, and why the conflict would become so prominently featured in the arts.

First, the Education Act of 1947 had brought considerable reforms to Northern Ireland's educational system.¹⁵⁰ The most significant of these was the establishment of merit-based secondary education that was free. Under this new system, students would sit an exam to determine an appropriate path in school according to their abilities and attitudes. The top 25% of students would attend exclusive "grammar schools," which then shepherded students into university. The remaining 75% of students would attend "secondary modern schools" or "technical schools" which would provide a more general practical education, intended to prepare students to enter the workforce.

¹⁵⁰ The "Education Act of 1947" refers to the Northern Irish implementation of the sweeping educational reforms that took place in England and Wales with the "Education Act of 1944," commonly known as the "Butler Act." Further, this reconstruction of the UK's educational system would serve as inspiration for the reforms implemented in Ireland during the 1960s, as documented in the previous chapter.

The result of the Education Act of 1947 was a radical leveling of the educational playing field. No longer was higher education the exclusive domain of the wealthy; after 1947 any student who passed the exam at a high level would receive an appropriate and rigorous academic education for free. Higher education became based on a student's intellectual ability to achieve, rather than their parent's economic ability to pay. This meant that previously disadvantaged populations, particularly the working-class, were allowed access to higher-education for the first time. Thus, by the 1960s there was an entire generation of well-educated working-class people who could now recognize their social status as second-class citizens and question the systematic disenfranchisement that had become the norm in Northern Ireland. Some of these people would become community organizers; others would become significant writers or artists who documented the struggle in their work.

The second spark that would help ignite the Troubles was the worldwide proliferation of civil-rights movements during the 1960s. This, in combination with the advancements in communication technology and television, meant that not only was there an educated population who was acutely aware of their social position, but at the same time they could watch communities around the world fighting for civil rights and winning.

Outright religious discrimination was the status quo in Northern Ireland by the late 1960s. The Stormont government had pursued a plan to keep the Protestant majority firmly in power, thereby hoping to establish and maintain a peaceful government, simply by keeping the growing Catholic minority out of it. Unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, which had adopted "one man, one vote" by 1950, Northern Ireland maintained a system of qualified plural voting which allowed Protestant business owners seven or more votes each, while many Catholic adults were

not entitled to vote at all.¹⁵¹ This, in combination with the gerrymandering of voting districts meant that even predominantly Catholic areas would vote in favor of the status quo:

*These types of discrimination were so blatant that the Cameron Commission investigation of 1968 issued a report critical of the local electoral system. The Commission reported that in Derry, while Catholics made up over 60 per cent of the electorate, due to the districting system, they won only 40 per cent of the County Borough seats. [...] This is only one example among many in which the gerrymandering of districts produced Unionist majorities on local councils in communities that were predominantly Catholic.*¹⁵²

Systematic oppression was not only electoral in the North, but it was physical as well. The Stormont government maintained the Special Powers Act of 1922, which had originally been created as a type of emergency martial law to maintain order immediately following partition. The law granted police unrestricted search and seizure powers, as well as internment without trial for unrestricted and unspecified amounts of time. The Special Powers Act also prescribed guilt, stating that if a person:

*does any act of such nature as to be prejudicial to the preservation of the peace or maintenance of order in Northern Ireland [...] he shall be deemed to be guilty*¹⁵³

The wording of the 1922 law made it clear that anything “prejudicial to the maintenance of order in Northern Ireland” could be punished by indefinite jail time without trial; thus any type of dissent could be suppressed alongside violence. In the event that an activist did receive a

¹⁵¹ Voting rights were based on land and business ownership, as well as tenancy. Business owners – 90% of whom were Protestant – were allowed multiple votes, according to the value of their properties. Among the working class, only official tenant/rentpayers were allowed to vote, with a maximum two votes per dwelling. Thus, in households with multiple adults – the norm for working-class Catholic families – many adults were prevented from voting altogether.

¹⁵² Landon Hancock, “Northern Ireland: Troubles Brewing,” *Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland, Conflict Archive on the Internet* 1998. <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/landon.htm>>

¹⁵³ John Darby, *Conflict in Northern Ireland: The Development of a Polarised Community* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1976), 56.

court date and go to trial, the jury system allowed only eligible voters to serve jury duty, ensuring that juries were primarily Protestant.

Consequently, as this newly educated and empowered generation of working-class individuals recognized injustice in their homeland, and they also witnessed similarly disempowered communities mobilizing to action elsewhere in the world. This would lead directly to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in 1967. NICRA was modeled after similar American civil rights efforts, and the organization sought to end discrimination through documentation and publicity alongside a campaign of peaceful protests and marches.

However, much like civil rights movements elsewhere in the world, many of the peaceful marches were disrupted by violence. This is especially true in Northern Ireland, where existing paramilitary organizations on both sides would use the public demonstrations as a sectarian battlefield. It is important to point out that the original marches and demonstrations in the 1960s were not about the unification of Ireland. NICRA was advocating for “British rights for British citizens,” insisting that all citizens in Northern Ireland should be entitled to equal rights that were already available elsewhere in the United Kingdom. However, Unionist organizations, such as the UVF and UDA regarded NICRA as an inherently Nationalist organization, and existing sectarian tensions prevented much of the Protestant working-class from joining in the civil rights movement.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ This is documented very clearly in Tony Novosel's *Northern Ireland's Lost Opportunity: The Frustrated Promise of Political Loyalism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2013). In short, that protestant paramilitary leadership recognized the opportunity for a political path toward collaborative peace that would unite the working-classes, however due to ongoing violence on the ground and rising popular tensions, it was never implemented.

As the Troubles evolved in the decades that would follow, Unionist fears regarding unification would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The British government was slow to react to the Northern Ireland civil rights movement, and without “British rights for British citizens” the largely Catholic protesters were left to look for other paths to equality, such as the unification of Ireland. Thus, the primary focus of the Troubles slowly shifted from civil rights to the unification of Ireland, and the paramilitary groups on each side were largely responsible for the radical polarization of public opinion.

After decades of sectarian struggles, the simple mention of Northern Ireland still conjures up thoughts of violence and paramilitary organizations. The urgency of the situation brought it to the forefront of Irish politics and society in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Like the topic of emigration that had preceded it, the Troubles pervaded Irish consciousness, and consequently the stage would become a primary point of engagement for Irish artists and citizens who wanted to wrestle with the Troubles without taking up arms.

3.1.1 Staging the Trauma of the Troubles

The Abbey Theatre faced a peculiar problem following partition. It had been founded as a nationalist institution dedicated to creating a specifically Irish theatre, but the definition of “Irish” became increasingly problematic as the 20th century progressed. As the self-described “national theatre of Ireland” the Abbey was intended to represent the whole island of Ireland; after partition that meant an inherent island-nation of Ireland that was distinct from the political

boundaries that separated the Republic from Northern Ireland.¹⁵⁵ Consequently, the Abbey occasionally produced work from Protestant and Northern playwrights alongside its traditional programming, which tended to lean heavily toward nationalist sympathies. However, the Troubles presented the Abbey with a new challenge.

As the 1960s drew to a close, sectarian violence in the North was spreading and international media outlets were beginning to take note. Newspapers and television programs around the world were covering the Troubles, yet the subject had never been approached on Ireland's own national stage. While emigration had been an easy target for the Abbey, the Troubles represented something different altogether. No longer was there one archetypal story to tell; the civil unrest in Northern Ireland was deeply seeded and multifarious. Further, it was radically polarizing, and even those artists linked most closely to the Troubles approached the subject with trepidation. Brian Friel explained as much in February of 1970:

*I don't think I can write about this, about the situation in the North. Because, first of all, I am emotionally too much involved about it; secondly, because the thing is in transition at the moment. A play about the civil rights situation in the North won't be written, I hope, for another ten or 15 years.*¹⁵⁶

As it turned out, Friel himself would be the first major playwright to break the theatrical silence surrounding the Troubles. Despite Friel's hope that the topic wouldn't be broached for a decade or more, it became unavoidable in early 1972, when British troops opened fire on a Civil Rights march in Derry, Northern Ireland, killing fourteen people and wounding many more. There were no British casualties, and witnesses contend that those shot, including several

¹⁵⁵ This itself, is a clear sign of the Abbey's unabashed nationalist origins.

¹⁵⁶ Brian Friel. "The Future of Irish Drama," *The Irish Times*, February 12, 1970, 14.

children, were all unarmed. The event would quickly become immortalized throughout Ireland as “Bloody Sunday” and Brian Friel would no longer be able to keep the Troubles out of his work.

The tragedy was shocking in and of itself, but many people would regard the resultant official inquiry as the most damaging. Lord John Passmore Widgery, an English aristocrat, was named to head a ‘Tribunal of Inquiry’ into the events of Bloody Sunday, and his official conclusion was that:

*There would have been no deaths in Londonderry on 30 January if those who organized the illegal march had not thereby created a highly dangerous situation [...and] there is no reason to suppose that the soldiers would have opened fire if they had not been fired upon first.*¹⁵⁷

Lord Widgery’s report ultimately concluded that “There was no general breakdown in discipline.” It was an affront to the Catholic community throughout Ireland, and instantly changed the sectarian landscape in Northern Ireland. Although the ruling would eventually be overturned by the Saville Inquiry in 2010, the wounds had been left open for nearly 40 years, and the event became a touchpoint for the Troubles, just as the 1916 uprising had done for the Irish independence movement.

Immediately following Bloody Sunday the Troubles took a serious turn for the worst. Membership in paramilitary organizations skyrocketed, as did funding from Irish-American organizations in the States. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) would supposedly come “under instruction to kill every British Soldier [it] could”¹⁵⁸ and the years that followed would prove to be the bloodiest of the entire conflict; more people would die as a result of sectarian violence in 1972 and 1973 than during any other years in recent Irish history.

¹⁵⁷ Lord Widgery, *Bloody Sunday: Lord Widgery’s Report of Events in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, on 30 January 1972* (London: The Stationery Office, 2001), 97 – 101.

¹⁵⁸ Brian Lacy, *Siege City: The Story of Derry and Londonderry* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990), 267.

Violence wasn't the only response to Bloody Sunday. On the street in Derry that day was Brian Friel, who bore witness to the event and managed to avoid harm amidst the gunfire by crawling behind a parked car.¹⁵⁹ While others took up arms in response, Friel took up his pen and inked *The Freedom of the City*, which was commissioned by Tomás Mac Anna on behalf of the Abbey for production the following year. The play is supposedly fictional, set two years prior to Bloody Sunday and several blocks away, but it is fair to say that the similarities between Bloody Sunday and *Freedom* are too close to ignore.

The production would symbolize the Abbey's acceptance of the Troubles as a major paradigm in Irish life, no longer confined to the North. Although Derry is relatively far away from Dublin, the events of Bloody Sunday resonated strongly throughout the island, and Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* provided the first opportunity for many people to directly interact with and experience a slice of the Troubles on stage.

Most significant to this study, is that Friel chooses an American Sociologist character as the primary catalyst for meaning in his play. This American is employed as an outside expert, and his presence distances the audience from the action considerably. He lectures directly to the audience, and is specifically used to redirect audience attention from sectarian violence to what Friel believes are its underlying causes: poverty and politics.

Working within an Irish context, David Lloyd makes a convincing argument that trauma and colonization are both based around many of the same paradigms:

Trauma entails violent intrusion and a sense of utter objectification that annihilates the person as subject or agent. This is no less apt a description of the

¹⁵⁹ Friel, "In Interview with Fintan O'Toole (1982)," in *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries and Interviews: 1964 – 1999*, ed. Christopher Murray (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 110.

*effects of colonization: the overwhelming technological, military and economic power of the colonizer, the violence and programatically excessive atrocities committed in the course of putting down resistance to intrusion, the deliberate destruction of the symbolic and practical resources of whole populations. It would seem that we can map the psychological effects of trauma onto the cultures that undergo colonization.*¹⁶⁰

Although he specifically applies this idea to the potato famine of mid-nineteenth century Ireland, it is clearly of relevance to Bloody Sunday – one afternoon where trauma and colonization so acutely collided. Lloyd goes on to quote Judith Herman on the perpetrator's (read: colonizer's) methods of defense:

Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that nobody listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalization. . . The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.¹⁶¹

Herman's theory perfectly models the United Kingdom's formal response to Bloody Sunday. Although the presence of British troops in Northern Ireland after the Battle of the Bogside in 1969 had changed the dynamics of the Troubles, it was the Widgery Inquiry in 1972 that categorically changed the United Kingdom's role in Northern Ireland. British soldiers had initially entered the North on a peacekeeping mission to quell sectarian violence, but after Bloody Sunday and the resultant cover-up, the Catholic community had reason to regard the military as a co-conspirator in the Troubles. Rather than slow the violence, the British Army effectively became just another well-armed force among many in the North.

Thus the role of the Abbey theatre became increasingly significant. The official lines of justice regarding Bloody Sunday had failed to provide any truth or closure for the population of

¹⁶⁰ David Lloyd, "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?" *Interventions* 2:2 (2000): 214.

¹⁶¹ Judith Herman, as quoted in Lloyd, "Colonial Trauma," 214.

Ireland, so it was up to the national theatre to pick up where international law had foundered. By placing the trauma of Bloody Sunday and its resultant inquiry on the national stage, the Abbey could offer audiences a forum to engage with the Troubles without resorting to violence. With an accredited American expert as their guide, audiences not only got a taste of the Troubles, but also a introduction to the politics of poverty that make such atrocities possible.

3.2 BRIAN FRIEL: *THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY* (1973)

During the 1960s Brian Friel had established himself as a major playwright, one whose plays focused on specifically Irish cultural issues, both historical and current. However, Friel firmly believed that the growing unrest in the North was unsuitable as dramatic material,¹⁶² and most other playwrights and theatres agreed, including the Abbey, whose management had avoided “Troubles Plays” altogether. Bloody Sunday and the Widgery Inquiry reversed this topical embargo almost overnight. The events of 1972 would incite Friel to finally write the contemporary Troubles into his drama, and onto the national stage. Whether it was the proximity to his home, or the simple fact that Friel himself had taken part in the marches on Bloody Sunday,¹⁶³ the tragedy would put the Troubles at the front and center of his next production. Perhaps even more importantly, the Abbey Theatre commissioned the nation’s first Troubles play, and Friel once again chose an American character as the arbiter of meaning for a complex Irish problem.

The Freedom of the City opened just thirteen months after Bloody Sunday and less than a year after the Widgery report. The production was born out of a sense of immediacy; Tomás Mac Anna had just taken over as Artistic Director of the Abbey, and the Troubles were of paramount concern in Ireland:

On 30 January 1972, ‘Bloody Sunday’, thirteen civilians were shot dead in Derry by the Parachute Regiment, following a civil rights march in the city. In February the British Embassy in Dublin was burned down; an IRA reprisal unit killed seven

¹⁶² Wolfgang Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics: Brian Friel’s *The Freedom of the City* and its Early Reception,” in *Irish Literature and Culture*, ed. M. Kenneally (Gerards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992), 115.

¹⁶³ Friel, “Interview with Fintan O’Toole,” 110.

*people in a bomb attack on Aldershot, HQ of the paratroopers; in March Stormont, the Northern Ireland Parliament, was prorogued; and on 21 July, 'Bloody Friday', nine people were killed in twenty-two bomb attacks in Belfast. It looked as if anything remotely resembling civil society was breaking down in the north. As these events unfolded, Brian Friel was writing The Freedom of the City (17 January 1973), his first play expressly for the new Abbey.*¹⁶⁴

Although *Freedom* would be the first Troubles play for the Abbey, the national theatre had brought another of Friel's works back to the stage in 1972 to address the "psychological and emotional" issues of contemporary Ireland.¹⁶⁵ Immediately prior to taking the artistic director seat at the Abbey, Mac Anna collaborated with Friel to reprise *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* for the national theatre. The play was chosen for its topical relevance, this time with an emphasis placed on the play's powerful focus on memory, rather than emigration:

*The grip of memory, and the urgent requirement to recall exactly, has a more than personal intensity in an Ireland now being drawn back into reliving and re-enacting concerns and conflicts that had not been resolved even though the opposing vociferations had seemed to lie quiet for a long time.*¹⁶⁶

While Mac Anna was directing *Philadelphia* in 1972 tensions were escalating in the North, and it became clear that the national theatre needed something far more substantial than *Philadelphia*'s tangential relevance to the North. The Abbey needed to truly engage with the Troubles directly. Mac Anna identified the cultural void that had been left by the Widgery Tribunal and signaled his new leadership position at the Abbey by commissioning Friel to write a Troubles play specifically for the national theatre. Due process had failed the people of Ireland in regards to finding justice after Bloody Sunday, so Mac Anna opened up the Abbey's stage as

¹⁶⁴ Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999; Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1999), 194. Note that the parenthetical date is somewhat misleading, as *Freedom* officially opened at the Abbey on February 20, 1973.

¹⁶⁵ Welch, *Form and Pressure*, 194.

¹⁶⁶ Welch, *Form and Pressure*, 194.

an alternative forum to explore the trauma of Bloody Sunday. In doing so, the Irish national theatre featured and publicized the very event that the British government had attempted to bury.¹⁶⁷

It was a significant move for the national theatre to recognize and pursue such a hot issue. As noted in the previous chapter, Earnest Blythe's tenure at the Abbey (1941-1967) had largely been marked by conservative programming, and did little to encourage innovative artistic or political engagement. With Bloody Sunday and its aftermath already playing as "news" on television sets around the country – a relatively new phenomena in Ireland – Mac Anna recognized that the Abbey needed to find a way to engage audiences who were already accustomed to visual representations of the conflict. Rather than ignore the prominent media coverage, Friel integrated the role of broadcast television into his assessment of the Troubles with *Freedom*. The American medium of television is used as a counterpoint to the American sociologist character that Friel employs as the lone objective expert within the play. The latter attempts to create meaning and understanding throughout the play, while the former sensationalizes and obscures facts in order to arouse interest and, ultimately, ratings.

The Freedom of the City would become the national theatre's first official recognition of the Troubles' significance to Ireland as a nation. The play blazed a path for "Troubles drama," laying the foundation for a new genre of Irish theatre, as Chris Morash summarizes:

¹⁶⁷ The strong language used in reference to the failure of the Widergy Inquiry is consistent with the findings of the exhaustive Saville Inquiry in 2010. Virtually all organizations involved in the Troubles look with consternation at the Widergy report; in hindsight the attempted cover-up only served to further polarize communities and escalate violence.

*Even though it is chronologically one of the earliest Troubles plays to deal with the post-1969 conflict, *The Freedom of the City* is also the genre's end, its fullest working out and its critique.*¹⁶⁸

The Freedom of the City is the 800-lb gorilla of Troubles theatre. It is not the first play about sectarian unrest in the North, but it is the most significant and enduring. It was written by the most important contemporary Irish playwright, commissioned and produced by the Abbey Theatre, and it was created with a sense of urgency and relevance to Ireland that is rarely equaled on any national stage. Consequently, the structure of this chapter reflects this imbalance; considerably more space is dedicated to this seminal Troubles play than to the important plays that would follow in its wake.

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Friel set *The Freedom of the City* in 1970, as opposed to 1972, as a token gesture to separate the play from the event. First and foremost, this time frame “ensured that the play would be seen as a response to events, rather than a reproduction of those events.”¹⁶⁹ It would have been impossible to recreate the reality of Bloody Sunday on the stage. By developing a fictional story that is analogous to Bloody Sunday, Friel maintains control over the plot, free from the implicit constraints of history. Thus Friel’s characters can be representative of a community, rather than stuck in the shadows of any specific victims. Their names echo those of the deceased, but are fictitious monikers conjured up specifically for the play.

¹⁶⁸ Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601 – 2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 248.

¹⁶⁹ George O’Brien, *Brian Friel* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1989), 82.

As with *Philadelphia*, memory plays a significant role in *Freedom* as well. Friel's setting of the play in 1970 is somewhat anachronistic; civil rights marches were few and far between in Derry that year, and the British army was not generally involved in them.¹⁷⁰ Therefore at the time of production in 1973 Friel intended the Abbey's audiences to regard the action on stage as fictional, a broad composite of the civil rights movement, rather than a reenactment of Bloody Sunday.

What then, is *The Freedom of the City* about? This is a point that Friel felt the need to take a public stand on before *Freedom* opened on the Abbey's stage, and it has been a platform for discussion ever since. Friel maintains that the play was originally going to be a historical drama that focused on evictions in the eighteenth century, to be titled *John Butt's Bothy*.¹⁷¹ The story follows that the events of Bloody Sunday sparked a realization for Friel, who then used the tragedy as a setting for the play that he had already been working on for some time.

Quite simply, *The Freedom of the City* is about three main characters, Lily, Michael, and Skinner, who are lying dead on stage as the play begins. The play then picks up hours earlier when the trio have come under attack from water cannons, rubber bullets and CS gas during an otherwise peaceful civil rights demonstration. They seek refuge in the first open door they find, which happens to be the side entrance of Derry's Guildhall, and without knowing it the three find themselves alone in the mayor's parlor. They decide to stay and wait until things have calmed down outside, meanwhile taking advantage of their surroundings and exchanging stories. All are poor, unemployed and Catholic. Lily is the mother figure, with eleven children of her own,

¹⁷⁰ D. E. S. Maxwell, *Brian Friel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973), 105.

¹⁷¹ Brian Friel, "In Interview with Eavan Boland (1973)," in *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries and Interviews: 1964 – 1999*, ed. Christopher Murray (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 58.

Skinner is the rebellious carefree wanderer, and Michael, while poor, has serious middle-class aspirations.

Outside the Guildhall, we see and hear the events surrounding the situation unfold. Sensational television reports depict fifty armed gunmen inside the Guildhall, and the army responds by surrounding the building, carrying with it formidable munitions. In counterbalancing scenes we watch the subsequent tribunal of inquiry unfold, as expert witnesses give testimony to the biased judge. The play finishes a split second before it began, with Lily, Michael and Skinner standing peacefully and unarmed with their hands above their heads staring into army searchlights while the judge gives his report, taken verbatim from Widgery's Bloody Sunday Report. After the army is unconditionally exonerated, Friel leaves audiences with a grim tableau:

*The entire stage is now black, except for a battery of spotlights beaming on the faces of the three. Pause. Then the air is filled with a fifteen-second burst of automatic fire. It stops. The three stand as before, staring out, their hands above their heads.*¹⁷²

This story of injustice in Northern Ireland is presented episodically with regular interruptions by an outside expert: the American sociologist Dr. Philip Alexander Dodds. Introduced in the stage directions as "an elderly American professor with an informal manner,"¹⁷³ Dr. Dodds is the primary device through which Friel attempts to steer audiences away from the Troubles and toward what he believes is its underlying cause: Dodds is a self-professed expert in "inherited poverty or the culture of poverty or more accurately the subculture of poverty,"¹⁷⁴ and throughout the play he exists outside the action, never interacting with any

¹⁷² Brian Friel, *The Freedom of the City in Selected Plays of Brian Friel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 168-9.

¹⁷³ Friel, *Freedom*, 110.

¹⁷⁴ Friel, *Freedom*, 110.

other characters. Instead, his role is to lecture directly to the audience about poverty as a cultural and political force. Unbeknownst to Dr. Dodds, the audience is concurrently witnessing the interplay of poverty and politics as the dramatic action of *Freedom* unfolds on stage immediately behind the American expert on the subject.

Viscerally, Irish audiences were overwhelmed with the parallels between *The Freedom of the City* and Bloody Sunday, despite the fictional setting. However, Friel regarded Bloody Sunday as peripheral to his original intent with the play, which was to focus on the politics of poverty. In fact, Friel attempted to shape audience members' perception of the play before they had a chance to see it. Four days prior to the premiere of *Freedom* at the Abbey, Friel addressed the content of his play directly:

*The trouble about this particular play in many ways is that people are going to find something immediate in it, some kind of reportage. And I don't think that's in it at all. Very often an accident in history will bring about a meeting-point, a kind of fusion for you. And this is what happened. This is a play about poverty.*¹⁷⁵

Friel points to poverty as the main theme of the play, maintaining that Lily, Michael and Skinner are victims of a political and cultural system as much as they are murder victims. Friel's insistence that the play is about poverty is one that would become a recurring theme in interviews and articles for many years to come, with critics and authors sparring over what the play is truly "about." The answer, of course, is "both and." The play is absolutely about poverty, just as it is certainly about the political unrest in the North. Much of the poverty in the North was deeply seeded in politics; working-class Catholics were systematically denied both employment and the votes necessary to achieve equality. Friel was eager to highlight the political and cultural underpinnings of the Troubles. These were very important issues to foreground for Dublin and

¹⁷⁵ Friel, "Interview with Eavan Boland," 58.

international audiences who could otherwise easily misinterpret the violence as mindless and sectarian. Friel hoped to steer blame away from violent hooliganism and back toward a historical and intentional bias in Northern Ireland which undermined so many of the surface level problems and solutions.

Thus, the American Dr. Dodds is not just another character in *Freedom*. He is the sole theatrical device that Friel employs to direct meaning for his audience. Without Dodds, the play could be dismissed as an angry reaction to an unfortunate event. By including an objective American expert, Friel encourages audiences to recognize poverty as a problem that penetrates society even more deeply than the Troubles. Dodd's argument that poverty creates a subculture of its own, and that this is consistent across macro-cultures, demonstrates that impoverished Catholics in Northern Ireland are much the same as disenfranchised communities anyplace. With the unrest of Troubles isolated from its participants, Friel had hoped to encourage audiences to look beneath the ostensibly sectarian conflict. Thus, the role of Dodds helps Friel to shift the focus of *Freedom* away from what is going on in the North, and instead question why it is happening.

Critical understanding of this crucial American character within Friel's canon is, at best, scattered. F. C. McGrath notes the popular discord surrounding the character of Dodds, stating that the American:

*presents the most difficult interpretive puzzle in the play. Critics have not been able to judge whether Friel is satirizing Dodds's ivory tower detachment from the personal tragedies he comments on or whether through Dodds Friel directs our attention to the issue of poverty.*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ F. C. McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post) Colonial Drama*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 111-2.

Friel's outspoken insistence that *Freedom* is a play about poverty and the fact that he exclusively uses Dodds to establish this context and meaning suggest that the latter argument carries far more weight. Friel specifically employs Dodds to direct audience attention to poverty, and it is precisely this tactic that makes *Freedom* something more enduring than an angry docudrama about Bloody Sunday.

However, as shown with *Philadelphia*, Friel's intentions are rarely singular, and the issue of "ivory tower detachment" remains an important one. It is here that Irish/American history plays a significant role. Friel does use the character of Dr. Dodds as a critical force within the play, but his concerns lie not with the academy. Just as *Philadelphia* demonstrated that America offered both promise and problems for emigrants, *Freedom* showcases an American scholar's cogent analysis of poverty underpinning the Troubles, while at the same time questioning the United States foreign policy regarding civil rights abuses in Northern Ireland.

The Troubles presented a complicated platform for engagement between the United States and Ireland. The Irish-American population that had helped to get Kennedy elected did not want to sit idly by while injustices in Northern Ireland were being readily delivered to their television sets and news publications:

*Whatever their backgrounds, however, Americans were given as full a treatment of the [Troubles] as the format of their news media would permit. News reports, television specials, Time magazine cover stories, and almost daily newspaper coverage catalogued the crisis.*¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Dennis J. Clark, *Irish Blood: Northern Ireland and the American Conscience* (London: National University Publications, 1977), 22.

Irish-Americans also tended to divide along religious lines in their opinion of current events in Northern Ireland. Given the atrocities carried out by paramilitary groups on both sides, it was easy for Americans side strongly with their ancestral loyalties; regardless of who an Irish-American might consider to be “their people”, there were victims among them. Thus, the partisan flames reignited within Irish emigrant communities, and the major players in the North took notice.

Since the turn of the century, the United States had been a major source of funding for activist organizations within Ireland, and the Troubles brought this to the fore. In 1969 Irish activists Bernadette Devlin (NICRA) and the Rev. Ian Paisley (DUP), among many others, toured the United States to raise awareness, support, and most importantly, funding, for their causes. Devlin alone raised over \$200,000 for NICRA, in large part due to the “‘ancients’ who remembered the 1920s and the crusade for Irish independence.”¹⁷⁸

That same year the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was revived. As violence escalated in the North, questions over the purpose of the IRA caused the group to split into two competing factions. The Official IRA (OIRA) maintained its Marxist ideals of uniting Ireland as a socialist republic, whereas the Provisional IRA (IRA) took a more offensive and militant role in combatting the British forces in Northern Ireland. Although both groups made it a priority to protect Catholic communities in the North, it was the Provisional IRA who would become the dominant force among republican paramilitary groups. This was due in large part to the fact that a large percentage of the groups funding came from Irish-Catholic communities in the United

¹⁷⁸ Clark, *Irish Blood*, 19.

States, who typically favored old-fashioned calls to freedom over the socialist agenda adopted by the Officials.¹⁷⁹

The official stance of the United States government, on the other hand, was one of detachment. Although individual politicians, such as Edward Kennedy and James Hanley, were urging the U.S. to take a more active role in Northern Ireland, the Nixon administration maintained that the problem was outside the scope of US national interests. This was made clear in an official letter from the State Department, which declared:

*The controversy in Northern Ireland has arisen over questions of civil rights under the internal law of the United Kingdom and, through the delegation of power by the Government in London, the internal law of Northern Ireland itself. The United Kingdom is a friendly country which, unlike certain other countries with civil rights problems, has a basic structure of democratic institutions and political freedom. [... U.S. Intervention] would be as difficult to justify as intervention by a foreign government in a civil rights controversy in this country.*¹⁸⁰

It should be noted that Congressman James Hanley, to whom this letter was addressed, had not been advocating for military or significant political actions in Northern Ireland. Rather his proposal to the president was that the U.S. should “speak out against religious hatred and discrimination practiced in Northern Ireland against Irish Catholics.”¹⁸¹ Hanley and other politicians were seeking an official recognition of the ongoing Troubles, to reflect the significant

¹⁷⁹ The history and fragmentation of the IRA is complex and the subject of many entire volumes. The split between the PIRA and the OIRA in 1969 was not widely understood even among republicans at the time, and much of what we know continues to be renegotiated as information becomes available. Among the best books on the subject are Peter Taylor’s *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein* and McKittrick and McVea’s *Making Sense of the Troubles*.

¹⁸⁰ Seán Cronin, *Washington’s Irish Policy 1916-1986* (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1987), 293-4.

¹⁸¹ Cronin, *Washington’s Irish Policy*, 291.

engagement that the American public already had with the crisis through television, print media, grassroots activism, and direct financial contributions.

Instead of a recognition, the State Department's dismissal highlighted the importance of "friendly" relations with the UK, and concluded with a gross display of (presumably unintentional) indiscretion:

*We do not suggest that Northern Ireland's problems are over. People with extreme views have not disappeared. **We can only hope that the wisdom of the majority of the people will prevail.** For, in the end, nothing lasting can be achieved unless the people of Northern Ireland achieve it themselves.*¹⁸²

The root cause of conflict in the North, of course, was exactly that. The "current wisdom of the majority of the people" was prevailing, and that wisdom dictated that the Catholic minority should be disenfranchised and subject to different laws from other citizens of the UK.

Thus, Friel's seemingly awkward construction of Dr. Dodds demonstrates the initial reluctance of the United States to get officially involved in the Troubles, while at the same time depicting the considerable support from independent voices in the US. This is also evidenced in the source material from which Friel created the character of Dr. Dodds. His speeches were taken almost exclusively from the work of the American anthropologist Oscar Lewis, whose book *La Vida: a Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty* had won the 1967 National Book Award.¹⁸³

Lewis's work was as important as it was popular in the late 1960s. Based on extensive fieldwork, he theorized that poverty was not exclusively an economic condition, but instead that

¹⁸² Cronin, *Washington's Irish Policy*, 292. Emphasis added.

¹⁸³ Lewis won the 1967 National Book Award in the category "Science, Philosophy, and Religion" in the US.

it was a cultural phenomenon which freely transcended borders. The thrust of his argument was that those living in poverty, virtually anywhere, would share a similar set of inherent traits and values that inform their actions and mindset.

Friel's application of Lewis's theory is constructed using the same pseudo-fictional distance that separates the primary action of *Freedom* from Bloody Sunday. Both Dr. Dodds and the Judge speak at times using direct quotes from their real-life counterparts (Lewis and Widgery, respectively) and Friel's collusion of these two realia highlight the significance of this fictional play as it relates to the real world Troubles. Audiences are invited to revel in the cogent fictional story that takes place within the Guildhall at the heart of *Freedom*, but Dodds persistently deflects focus away from that story, encouraging audiences to contextualize what they see within a much wider framework. As an American academic, his inclusion in the play not only steers meaning toward poverty, but also situates the Troubles within a heightened international discourse.

Within the world of *Freedom*, Dodd's Lewis-esque lectures are wholly disconnected from the action. He never once refers to the characters, situation, or even Ireland in any direct sense. Thus, his nuanced view of poverty is clinical and precise, in stark contrast to the mood of the main dramatic action, which ranges from flippant to scathing, but is all purely Irish. Though Dodds is not aware of the action unfolding behind him on stage, his assertions regarding the impoverished are constantly verified by the poor Irish trio who have found themselves in the Guildhall.

For instance, as Dodds speaks about poverty and the impoverished, the action of the play follows his lead:

DODDS: [...] People with a culture of poverty suffer much less from repression than we of the middle class suffer, and indeed, if I may make

the suggestion with due qualification, they often have a hell of a lot more fun than we have.

(DODDS goes off left. The dressing-room door is flung open. SKINNER is dressed in splendid mayoral robe and chain and wears an enormous ceremonial hat jauntily on his head...) ¹⁸⁴

Note the tenor of Dodds's discourse; he is neither immediately condescending nor sympathetic. The play progresses much as if Dodds was giving a lecture and the action on stage is dramatic accompaniment, or an unreferenced PowerPoint presentation. Here Dodds engages with the audience directly. Although he has addressed the audience before, this time it carries a certain poignancy, as he begins this lecture with: "middle class people – with deference, people like you and me – we..." ¹⁸⁵

This breach of the fourth wall has an interesting effect. As a foreigner, Dodds implicates the Irish audiences at the Abbey, directly addressing their demographic and economic place in society. The audience is middle-class and guilty. ¹⁸⁶ It would be unlikely that many people seeing the play could relate to the abject poverty of Skinner who has no job and no home, much less Lily, who has eleven kids and a sick husband all living in a two room flat with no running water "except what's running down the walls. Haaaaa!" ¹⁸⁷

However, Dodds forbids the audience from relating too closely with the three victims. His definition of "middle-class" as "people like you and me" asserts that audience members have

¹⁸⁴ Friel, *Freedom*, 135.

¹⁸⁵ Friel, *Freedom*, 135.

¹⁸⁶ This project makes mention of the "middle-class" status of the Abbey's patronage only in the most general sense, as Friel does, simply to highlight the clear economic distinction between metropolitan theatre-goers in Dublin and the abject poverty of the central Irish characters in *The Freedom of the City*. An in-depth socio-economic study of the Abbey's patronage would be telling, but is outside the scope of this project.

¹⁸⁷ Friel, *Freedom*, 137.

more in common with him, a distant American, than they do with their fellow Irishmen onstage. Thus, any criticisms of Dodds' objective detachment from the Troubles, or his inaction, are directly transferrable to the "middle-class" audience members whom he embraces as peers during his lecture. Once again Friel employs the American to upset and reshape meaning; Dodds entered the play as a foreigner but quickly demonstrates that the Irish victims within the play do not participate in the same middle-class culture that he and the audience share.

The cultural focus that Dodds brings to *Freedom* (via Lewis) is in sharp contrast to the construction of memory that the Abbey previously employed in response to the emerging Troubles. *Philadelphia* emphasizes the imperfection and construction of memory, suggesting that historical accuracy is at once separate from, and inferior to, personal memory. *Freedom* demands the opposite. This watershed Troubles play highlights how history is constructed and influenced, and by alternating the action in the Guildhall with the subsequent Widgery Inquiry, Friel demands that justice is found in historical accuracy, rather than emotive memory. The audience cannot believe the judge's verdict simply because it is wholly discordant with the real action that they are experiencing concurrently on stage. *Freedom* leaves memory largely out of the equation, instead presenting audiences with a political history that is clearly flawed and an American professor who insists that a culture of poverty allows for such things.

Mac Anna commissioned the play from Friel and personally directed it because it was the type of straightforward political engagement with the Troubles that the Abbey needed to bring to the stage as the North was descending into violence. By bringing a doppelgänger for Bloody Sunday to the stage so close to the actual event, Tomás Mac Anna and Brian Friel helped to bring the Abbey's audiences one step closer to understanding the Troubles, effectively ending the moratorium surrounding the sectarian debate on the national stage.

Regarded, even in recent years, as “perhaps the most overtly political”¹⁸⁸ of Friel’s work, the critical response that met the original production *The Freedom of the City* was as varied as one could expect of partisan Irish audiences. The Troubles were never more brutal than the years surrounding the premiere of *Freedom*, as evidenced by the simple fact that on the day the play premiered, “two soldiers were shot dead, five people were injured by bombs or gunshots and British troops fired ‘rubber bullets to disperse crowds’ in Belfast.”¹⁸⁹ This violence was not related to the production, but a sample of what Irish audiences would have been faced with on a daily basis, either personally or via media outlets, before departing for the theatre during the run of *Freedom* at the Abbey in 1973.

With the Troubles on everyone’s minds, there is no doubt that audiences and critics alike brought in their own perspectives to the Abbey during the initial run of *Freedom*. In general, reviews in Irish papers were mixed, with some “unreservedly” praising the play and others rather critical; the *Irish Times* fell squarely in the middle with a cautious, “neutral review.”¹⁹⁰ The *Irish Press* review, by John Boland, gave a thorough analysis of the play and poked at the question central to artwork relating to audiences and traumatic events:

*“The Freedom of the City” is a nobly conceived and moving play, and it’s just a pity that one feels that many of the emotional effects it creates in the audience are just that bit too easily gained.*¹⁹¹

In short, is Friel exploiting the trauma surrounding the Troubles?

¹⁸⁸ Gerry Colgan, “Friel’s Bloody Sunday” in *The Irish Times*, 24 April 1999.

¹⁸⁹ Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 113.

¹⁹⁰ Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 114.

¹⁹¹ John Boland, “Brian Friel Play at the Abbey: Moving Piece of Theatre,” review of *The Freedom of the City* by Brian Friel, *Irish Press*, February 21, 1973, 6.

While it could be argued that Friel was using the gravity of Bloody Sunday for his own means, his claimed intent was to harness the audience's emotion and redirect it towards poverty. The 1973 production of *Freedom* at the Abbey may lean on Irish audiences' sympathies, but it does so methodically in order to uncover an underlying problem. The play is Friel's personal response to the trauma, and in Mac Anna's hands at the Abbey it becomes a national response and offering to traumatized Irish audiences, whether they were on the march that day or not.

As for audiences, they flocked to the production. Although it had been rushed to the stage in the wake of Bloody Sunday, the play was a popular success and “ran for nine weeks in Dublin to 24,500 people.”¹⁹² Critically, however, the response to the play was all over the map. The unconventional format of the play, combined with the connection to a highly polarized topic, made critical engagement with *Freedom* problematic.

The Unionist/Protestant/Loyalist/British response to the play was as expected: hostile. The malevolence published in many Northern reviews was colorful, largely focusing around the themes of exploitation and propaganda. For instance, Ken Nixon's review in the *Belfast Newsletter* was titled “A Trickle of Cheap Tears for ‘Freedom’” and it chronicles his experience leaving the production in “emotional disgust” over the “mawkish propaganda” intended “to give a sympathetic Dublin audience a cheap cry.”¹⁹³

Betty Lowry in the *Belfast Telegraph* managed to climb above the disparagement with a perfect snapshot of the moment:

The parallels with Bloody Sunday and the Widgery Tribunal are obvious. So obvious that as a critic I found it impossible to view the play objectively. I have

¹⁹² J. Slemon, “Letter to the Editor,” *Cork Examiner*, September 26, 1973: quoted in Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 114.

¹⁹³ Ken Nixon, J. Slemon, “Trickle of Cheap Tears for ‘Freedom’” *Belfast Newsletter*, February 22, 1973: quoted in Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 118.

*my own views on Bloody Sunday and the Widgery Tribunal. [. . .] If the play could be regarded as fiction I would say that . . . it is . . . good. It has tension, humour, dramatic irony and insight into character. But it cannot be regarded as fiction. It is Bloody Sunday in Derry.*¹⁹⁴

A concurrent production was staged in London, opening a week after the Dublin premiere, and playing to a very different audience base. As in the North, *Freedom* came under a lot of heat from the English press. However, it had a slightly different spin. English reviewers used the term ‘propaganda’ with fervor similar to their Northern counterparts; however, “Bloody Sunday and the Widgery Tribunal are *not* mentioned in nine out of twelve papers.”¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, the three reviews that did mention Bloody Sunday were all “written by Irishmen and/or published in papers which had not taken the semi-official British line in their reports about the tragic events in Derry on 30 January 1972.”¹⁹⁶ It seems clear that published reviews faced two main obstacles: First, just as with audience members themselves, each reviewer brought his or her own political persuasion to the theatre. Second, many of these reviewers were also faced with the task of writing for publications with certain traditions of catering to specific audiences. Zach reaches the conclusion that for this particular production, published reviews may not be an adequate yardstick measure:

*Most of the London papers keep details about the play and its production to a minimum and do not mention the positive reaction of the audience. Thus we feel that most of the London critics did their best – or worst – to keep their readers away from Friel’s play.*¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Betty Lowry, quoted in Liz Curtis, *Ireland: The Propaganda War: The British Media and the Battle for Hearts and Minds* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 51.

¹⁹⁵ Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 119.

¹⁹⁶ Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 119.

¹⁹⁷ Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 119 - 120.

In the following two years, 1974-5, the play would travel to both New York and Germany (in translation). Reviews in both places were similarly withdrawn, generally dismissing the play as a production that would only play properly to its intended Irish audience. While New York reviews were mixed, the *New York Times* review by English-born critic Clive Barnes was seen to be reason enough for the show to close after just nine performances – “before it could find an audience.”¹⁹⁸ Barnes' unionist allegiances were later explored in several Irish papers after he had played a crucial role in removing *The Freedom of the City* from the New York theatre scene.¹⁹⁹ Reviewers missed the point that Friel was trying to drive home through Dr. Dodds, and in fact, many seem to have missed Dodds completely. Criticism abroad seemed to focus on logistical issues, such as: why weren't the Irishmen just arrested immediately, that could never happen in real life, and why doesn't Friel offer any comprehensive solutions to the Troubles?²⁰⁰

Given the material within the play and its relation to Bloody Sunday, perhaps more critics could have benefited from a dose of Betty Lowry's honesty towards the situation.²⁰¹ Although Bloody Sunday did generate a very immediate and angry response from Friel, which he undoubtedly harnessed in writing *The Freedom of the City*, the critical response was equally hot – with slander and praise competing for airtime. Audiences were left to sift through the wreckage of Bloody Sunday in the media, while Friel and the Abbey invited them to unpack their trauma in the theatre.

¹⁹⁸ Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 122.

¹⁹⁹ Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 123.

²⁰⁰ To paraphrase Zach's thorough examination of reviews that *Freedom* received while abroad. Zach, “Criticism, Theatre and Politics,” 122.

²⁰¹ See her previous quote; note 195.

The Freedom of the City gave Irish audiences a chance to engage with the event and prompted them to question the rhetoric of both sides of the sectarian debate, which was often heightened by corresponding media outlets. While audiences may not have left the theatre focused exclusively on the poverty underpinning the Troubles, as Friel had originally intended, they likely broadened their understanding of the many forces at play in the North. If nothing else, Friel's American sociologist character foregrounded poverty as a significant aspect of the Troubles, and encouraged audiences to look beyond the religious and political divides that conventional media tended to magnify. While not all audiences were prepared to consider alternative Troubles narratives in 1973, *Freedom* would go on to become recognized as one of Friel's enduring masterpieces, thanks in part an American character giving voice to Friel's own socio-political perspective. Ultimately the play demonstrated to audiences that there was a lot more to the Troubles than the television was reporting.

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Throughout the early days of the conflict in Northern Ireland, the official stance of the United States had been one of maintaining an objective distance from the situation, personified by Friel's American Dr. Philip Alexander Dodds. What Friel did not know, is that behind the façade of political deference, the United States was poised to take a more active role in the conflict.

While President Nixon's visit to Ireland in October of 1970 had made no mention of the Northern situation at all, his appointment of John Moore to the US Ambassador post in Ireland demonstrated that the White House was taking the situation seriously. Moore's family had been deeply involved with Irish politics and activism on both sides of the Atlantic for generations, and

he would become instrumental in shifting the role of the United States in Northern Ireland from one of casual observer to active participant:

*By 1975 the United States had a vested interest in the kind of settlement that would pacify if not resolve the Northern Ireland troubles. The State Department was kept well informed of all developments and their meaning by Ambassador Moore, whose expert knowledge of the Irish question served the United States well from April 1969 to June 1975. His reports suggest a gradual shift in US policy from the "neutrality" of William P. Rogers to what would grow into much deeper involvement in the Carter and Reagan administrations. At a certain point, the State Department had an indirect role in bringing Unionists and Nationalists to conferences without revealing its hand.*²⁰²

Thus, as *Freedom* was playing to audiences around the world, the wheels of US foreign policy were already turning. During the next US presidential election season in 1976, the topic would become a major issue. A week before the election New York was too close to call, and an Ancient Order of Hibernians - Irish National Caucus delegation met with Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter to clarify his position on Northern Ireland; it was the most significant topic to the large Irish-American population of New York. Carter responded that he wanted to:

*be sure that the world knows [...that he] understands the special problems of Ireland [...and that] it is a mistake for our country's government to stand quiet on the struggle of the Irish for peace, for the respect of human rights, and for unifying Ireland.*²⁰³

Suddenly both the UK and Ireland took notice: Here was a US presidential candidate not only advocating action, but also implicitly endorsing unification. Carter swept the Irish-American vote, carried New York, and was elected President of the United States, thanks in part to the millions of Irish-American votes he garnered.

²⁰² Cronin, *Washington's Irish Policy*, 311.

²⁰³ Cronin, *Washington's Irish Policy*, 312.

3.3 DOMINIC BEHAN: *EURÓPÉ* (1978)

Shortly after President Carter took office, he addressed the Northern Irish situation directly. Although his rhetoric is somewhat more diplomatic than in his previous campaign statement, his focus on the subject is notable. While maintaining an official course of “impartiality”, Carter went on to declare that

*The United States wholeheartedly supports peaceful means for finding a just solution that involves both parts of the community of Northern Ireland and protects human rights and guarantees freedom from discrimination. [...] At the same time, the people of Northern Ireland should know that they have our complete support in their quest for a peaceful and just society. [...] I admire the many true friends of Northern Ireland in this country who speak out for peace. Emotions run high on this subject, and the easiest course is not to stand up for conciliation. I place myself firmly on the side of those who seek peace and reject violence in Northern Ireland.*²⁰⁴

By the late 1970s the United States was becoming increasingly vocal in its approach to the Troubles, a considerable change from the silence of years past. This created an interesting tension: The United States was playing an active role in the peace process in the North, but its efforts – like so many of those in the Troubles – were often shrouded in secrecy. On the surface the Irish public saw the US making obtuse claims about a lasting peace in Ireland without any firm action to back them up.

The situation would provide dramatic material for another Troubles play, this one by the noted musician and writer Dominic Behan. Behan had grown up in a Republican family in Dublin, along with brothers Brian and Brendan who were both accomplished playwrights and musicians in their own right. Dominic had been a political activist since the early 1950s, and his

²⁰⁴ Jimmy Carter, “Northern Ireland Statement on US Foreign Policy”, August 30, 1977. Published by Gerhard Peters and John T. Wolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=8014>

songs and writing reflected his nationalist and socialist agenda. In the early 1970s, the Lyric Theatre in Belfast picked up one of Behan's early Troubles television plays, *The Folk Singer*, and commissioned him to adapt it to the stage for production in Northern Ireland.

In Belfast, the Lyric Theatre had also showcased other early dramatic work dealing with the conflict, such as John Boyd's *Flats* and John Wilson Hare's *Between Two Shadows*. The theatre's location made it a prime candidate for staging Troubles work. Although the Abbey's mission was to represent the entire island of Ireland, the Lyric found its own niche as the North's premiere playhouse.

In 1978 the influential songwriter and musician Dominic Behan brought a new comedy to the Lyric called *Európe*. The script was never published, and is believed to have been lost to time, but reviews, extant synopses, and interviews paint a very clear picture of another significant Troubles play that placed an American mediator at the center of the sectarian chasm in Northern Ireland.

Behan's *Európe* is set in contemporaneously in 1978 and takes place in the lounge of a generic Belfast hotel. There is a Catholic waiter "Mr. Hogan" who works alongside a Protestant barman, "Billy Perry." Once again, at the center of the play is an American psychology professor, "Dr. Foster," who is trying to make sense of the Troubles as the hotel comes under a bomb scare.

Friel's earlier play had been crafted to direct attention toward the underlying causes of the Troubles, and Behan takes a different approach entirely with *Európe*. Instead of looking toward causes, he uses the American character in his play to highlight the ironies of the sectarian conflict, especially as they appear to an outside observer:

The playwright may be on the right track when one considers that it appears inexplicable to outside observers that Protestants and Catholics, both from the

*lower income bracket, are not bonded together in struggle for economic betterment.*²⁰⁵

Unlike Dr. Dodds before him, Behan's Dr. Foster is quick to voice his own opinions on the Troubles directly. In doing so, he quickly sets off a reaction from the waiter and barman responsible for serving him at the hotel. Although they are fundamentally opposed to one another, the two hotel staff members have no troubles banding together in order to rebuke the American psychologist. The play echoes the Irish and British trepidation toward Carter's ambitious campaign promise regarding US involvement in Irish peace and unification:

*In his play, Mr. Behan adds the irony that both traditions, despite their opposing outlooks, are virtually certain to unite in opposition to outsiders who are foolish enough to voice their opinion on how to resolve the Northern situation.*²⁰⁶

Without a doubt, Behan's play had elements of flippant parody, taking "a 'dig' at almost every major element in the North's conflict."²⁰⁷ The American professor was used to highlight the absurdity of the conflict as it might appear if viewed by any impartial, outside observers.

As a foreigner, Dr. Foster is chastised, but is spared from any violence. Another impartial character, a local boy turned pop star called Danny Blake, is not so lucky. Blake is a Belfast native who has put money before God, and consequently becomes the focal point of the play's conclusion. When the Provos and UVF inevitably turn to violence at the end of the play, it is not each other that they kill, but rather the pop star Danny Blake. The opposing paramilitary gunmen join together in murderous paradox:

²⁰⁵ Alan Murray, "Behan Play on North's 'Malady'," review of *Európe* by Dominic Behan in *Irish Press*, March 8, 1978, 5.

²⁰⁶ Murray, "Behan Play," 5.

²⁰⁷ Murray, "Behan Play," 5.

*The climax of the play, when Danny Blake is shot dead by both the Provisional I.R.A. and the U.V.F. because he neither professes Catholic nor Protestant allegiance, is brilliantly done.*²⁰⁸

As for Dr. Foster, the American, he survives the altercation largely unscathed. The *Irish Press* reviewer Alan Murray noted the role as particularly well-played in the Lyric's Production.

*Another fine performance is given by Cecil Allen as the visiting American psychiatrist, Dr. Foster, which is a difficult part to play convincingly, without making the character too much of a goofy Yank.*²⁰⁹

Cecil Allen was likely cast into the role of Dr. Foster due to his extensive experience in the United States, and what he calls a "passable" American accent.²¹⁰ He had attended Indiana University and the University of Minnesota, before returning to Dublin where he worked as actor on stage and screen, and later as a teacher and writer. Allen's success in the role is ascribed to his avoidance of the "goofy Yank" stereotype, a sign that American characters regularly trod the Irish stage, but only occasionally did so effectively. In this case, Dr. Foster is an American earnestly attempting to understand and reconcile the conflict, and his failure to do so is based upon the other characters' unwillingness to comply, rather than his own ineptitude.

Allen had been cast into the role from Dublin, and he freely offers that he was uncomfortable performing in the play amidst the sectarian violence in and around Belfast at the time:

*Belfast was not a peaceful city when the play was in rehearsal and during the run. The sectarian violence in the North was happening all around but I never experienced any of it and I was very glad when the production finished.*²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Murray, "Behan Play," 5. How, exactly, this curious ending was such a "brilliant" end to what the reviewer otherwise considers "a flop" is unknown.

²⁰⁹ Murray, "Behan Play," 5.

²¹⁰ Cecil Allen, email message to author, February 8, 2013.

²¹¹ Cecil Allen, email message to author, February 8, 2013.

Behan's *Európe* would not achieve a place in the Irish theatre canon as *Freedom* had, but the play provides an interesting look into the role of American characters participating in the Troubles during President Carter's tenure. Although Carter had made one of the boldest claims to action in Ireland for a US president, his actions once in office were largely restrained by the considerable political gesturing necessary to keep the peace between the United States and the United Kingdom.

In 1979 news broke that the British government had ordered 3,500 pistols and automatic rifles from Sturm, Ruger & Co. in Connecticut. These weapons were destined for use by the RUC in Northern Ireland, and there was a sharp public backlash in the US and Ireland against arms manufactured in the United States being sold directly to be used in the Troubles. President Jimmy Carter stepped in and together with the State Department's Munitions Control Division prohibited the sale, much to the dismay of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The event was emblematic of the balancing act between Washington and London over the Troubles; Thatcher wanted US assistance in eradicating the terrorists from Northern Ireland, while American politicians wanted her to support cross-party negotiations in the North. The result was a near stalemate: Neither the United States nor the United Kingdom could risk a wholesale dismissal of their ally's adjurations; the cold war was still in full effect, and among international powerhouses the US and UK needed one another's support. Thus, the Troubles progressed into and through the 1980s, with very slow progress made toward peace.²¹²

3.4 MARIE JONES: *NOW YOU'RE TALKIN'* (1985)

Now You're Talkin' is the most comically entertaining, politically relevant and socially compassionate play about Northern Ireland since Friel's *Freedom of the City*.²¹³

The 1980s saw violence continue unabated in Northern Ireland, while the rest of the world looked on with increasing consternation. In the 1980 US presidential race, Ireland was missing from the Republican platform entirely, and when Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, news outlets feared that his presidency would bring about a Pro-British shift in US foreign policy.²¹⁴ Once inaugurated, his initial stance echoed that of Nixon: the Troubles was an internal conflict within the UK and the US had no intentions of involvement, direct or otherwise.

Less than two months later, the hunger strikes began at Long Kesh Prison outside Belfast. Bobby Sands died on May 5, 1981, and nine more hunger strikers would follow that summer. The hunger strikes became another milestone in the Troubles, and Reagan saw increasing pressure from Irish organizations to intervene.²¹⁵ In the early 1980s Reagan met regularly with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, often behind closed doors, and a well-organized Irish lobby helped to ensure that the heads of state were discussing the Northern Ireland situation, if not readily agreeing upon any solutions.

In 1983 the New Ireland Forum was created to develop a democratic process towards a lasting peace in the North. The forum was a Nationalist think tank, attempting to establish a

²¹³ *Evening Press*, October 1, 1985. Quoted in Claudia W. Harris, ed, *The Charabanc Theatre Company Four Plays* (Gerrard's Cross, Colin Smyth, Ltd: 2006), xxxvi.

²¹⁴ Chris Parkin, "Reagan's Victory Sparked Fears of North Policy Shift," *Irish Independent*, December 30, 2010. <http://www.independent.ie/national-news/reagans-victory-sparked-fears-of-north-policy-shift-2478381.html>

²¹⁵ Cronin, *Washington's Irish Policy*, 320-321.

political, rather than violent, means of progress in the Troubles. Notably the forum left out organizations involved in paramilitary activity, such as Sinn Féin, the political wing of the Provisional IRA. In December of the same year, the IRA bombed Harrods department store in London, killing six people, including one American, which further escalated the United States interest in the conflict.

The New Ireland Forum summarized its findings into three potential courses of action, which it presented in May of 1984. A month later, Reagan travelled to Ireland, but his visit was brief and largely focused around a JFK-esque “return” to his ancestral home in Ballyporeen, County Tipperary. Nowhere in his speech did he mention anything about the unrest in Northern Ireland, which had been going on for over fifteen years by that point. Nor did he mention the New Ireland Forum, whose detailed report for finding peace in Ireland had just been published. Instead, he began his keynote speech with “I feel like I’m going to drown everyone in a bath of nostalgia” and then he continued to do just that.²¹⁶ The speech was simply about the recent discovery of his “Irishness,” and in sum the brief visit likely had more to do with Reagan’s reelection campaign than it did with serious political matters.

Margaret Thatcher, however, did respond directly to the New Ireland Forum report. Her response was the infamous “that’s out, that’s out, that’s out” speech, where she summarily dismissed each option in its entirety. The move created doubt that a diplomatic solution could be found, even amongst ranks of politicians who were willing to engage in talks.

In the US, the Irish-American political movement was gaining momentum. United States congressman Tip O’Neill, Senators Ted Kennedy and Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Governor

²¹⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks to the Citizens of Ballyporeen, Ireland (June 3, 1984)” *University of Virginia, Miller Center*
<http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/5863>

Hugh Casey led the political charge advocating for significant US aid in Northern Ireland. Dubbed the “four horsemen”, this influential group had direct contact with Reagan, Thatcher, and Irish Taoisigh Charles Haughey and Garret FitzGerald. The group was later expanded and formally christened as the “Friends of Ireland in Congress” and this organization would play a major role in paving the way for the Anglo-Irish Agreement in May of 1985.

In hindsight, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a crucial step towards finding a platform for peace. It reiterated that Northern Ireland could only join with the Republic of Ireland via a majority vote, and it offered Ireland an advisory role in the Northern government. This agreement also helped to secure the US financial aid that had proven so elusive. Although the agreement was exclusively between Ireland and the United Kingdom, Ronald Reagan and Tip O’Neill celebrated the event in the oval office, announcing that the United States would support the effort with an annual \$85 million in aid to Northern Ireland.²¹⁷

The agreement may have been considered a victory for the politicians who had crafted it, but it was met with consternation and outright hostility from the paramilitary organizations that were directly responsible for the ongoing violence in the North. Neither republican nor unionist leaders had been invited to the negotiations. Both factions considered the outcome unacceptable. Unionists saw it as paving the way to a united Ireland, and republicans were offended that the resolution accepted UK control over Northern Ireland. Consequently, although the agreement was a political step forward for Ireland and the UK, it did not address the primary symptom of the contemporary Troubles: sectarian violence. Ultimately the Anglo-Irish Agreement would demonstrate that in order to achieve a lasting peace, paramilitary organizations needed to be a part of the discussion.

²¹⁷ Cronin, *Washington’s Irish*, 321.

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Needless to say, in the early 1980s, there was a lot of talking going on, and much of it was behind closed doors. Hence, “talking” becomes the titular theme when Charabanc Theatre Company decided to tackle the Troubles with its 1985 play *Now You’re Talkin’*.

Charabanc Theatre Company was founded in 1983 by Marie Jones, Maureen Macauley, Eleanor Methven, Carol Moore, and Brenda Winter. Together, these five Belfast actors had recognized the lack of good female roles and stories in contemporary Irish theatre, and decided to do something about it.

*In Ireland, theatrical narratives are frequently the means used to present the dilemmas confronting the culture, and Charabanc Theatre Company worked hard first to recapture and then to present theatrically these cultural narratives from the point of view of women.*²¹⁸

Primary in Charabanc’s mission was that its plays “focus on women committed to improving their own lives and strengthening their communities.”²¹⁹ The company also placed an emphasis on collaborative playwriting, and attempted to craft plays out of collected oral histories. While Charabanc is rightfully heralded as a major breakthrough in Northern Irish theatre due to its ostensibly feminist origins, its legacy transcends such narrow categorization.

*The remedy Charabanc Theatre Company offers goes beyond redefining gender issues. The company was devoted to exploring the various issues confronting their polarized Northern Irish community; in fact, many of their original plays and productions of extant works address the political divisions directly.*²²⁰

²¹⁸ Harris, *Charabanc*, xii.

²¹⁹ Harris, *Charabanc*, xxi.

²²⁰ Harris, *Charabanc*, xxxii.

In 1985 Charabanc premiered *Now You're Talkin*, a play that took a direct look at sectarianism and reconciliation efforts in the North. Somewhat similar to *Európe*, *Now You're Talkin* represented the Troubles with both comedy and pointed criticism. The play was written by Marie Jones and company, and the action is centered around an American character called Carter O'Donaghue. Carter runs the "Portrock Reconciliation Centre," a destination retreat where people are supposed to find peace with themselves, set aside political and religious differences, and ultimately learn to love those with whom they share the splendor of Northern Ireland.²²¹ In Charabanc's rendition of a reconciliation center, Carter, the American leader, is a touchy-feely type who attempts to transcend the Troubles via political correctness and awkward games. His efforts are futile against the tough Belfast women in attendance, and they ultimately decide to take matters into their own hands by ousting the American and beginning peace talks in earnest on their own.

Charabanc was comprised of both Catholic and Protestant women, brought together through their work in the theatre. As they started producing their own plays, it was important that the women would not be restricted to playing only their own religion. In *Now You're Talkin'* the five primary female characters who attend the retreat are intended to be a cross section of the Northern Irish population, as listed in the preliminary character summary:

VERONICA – republican Catholic

COLETTE – moderate Catholic

MADELINE – Catholic in heritage, doesn't really care about sectarian debate

JACKIE – moderate Protestant

THELMA – uncompromising Protestant

CARTER – American supervision of reconciliation center

²²¹ "Portrock Centre" is fictional, although it was likely loosely based on the Corrymeela Community Centre which is located in a similar idyllic seaside location outside Belfast, and also promotes personal and political peace. Corrymeela is not, nor has ever been, run by an American – that is purely the invention of Charabanc for *Now You're Talkin*.

Carter, the lone American character, is tasked with reconciling sectarian differences between the women over a weekend. His given name is obviously taken directly from the recently ousted US president Jimmy Carter, whose campaign promises regarding Northern Ireland had raised concerns east of the Atlantic, yet had not dramatically changed US foreign policy. The character of Carter in *Now You're Talkin'* also carries significance in his surname: O'Donaghue. While the earlier Americans found in Troubles plays have fulfilled the role of American-as-objective-outsider, Carter O'Donaghue is notably an Irish-American.²²² The importance of Irish ancestry to American characters would become increasingly significant in Irish theatre, and in this case, it makes Carter's interest in the reconciliation vested. His role as an Irish-American adds to his disillusionment; his Irish heritage makes him consider himself much more connected to the situation than he actually is.

During the first act of the play, Carter leads the group through a series of seemingly inane exercises. His intent is to create a sense of community among the women, but his tactics are often childish at best and ill-considered and offensive at worst. Carter's methods bottom out at the end of Act I as he attempts to get the women to dance and role-play along with "The Farmer and the Cow Man Should Be Friends."

CARTER [...] Even though they had their territorial feuds they still managed to live together in peace and harmony in Oklahoma. Now, we're going to see if we can do the same thing right here. Jackie, Thelma, you two are going to be the "farmers", so you get on this side. The rest of you

²²² Perhaps tangential to this project, it is worth noting that the use of "O'Donoghue" as a surname may be in reference to the Irish-American Phil Donohue, a major celebrity near the height of his career when *Now You're Talkin'* was written in the 1980s. It could be argued that the *The Phil Donohue Show* was centered around its own brand of "reconciliation" and would thus make a very appropriate namesake for Carter O'Donoghue in Charabanc's *Now You're Talkin'*.

will be “cow men”, so you get on that side. Right now, let’s see if we can make this work, okay?

[...]

COLETTE: Cause they’re Protestants i.e. “farmers” and we’re Catholics i.e. “cow men”, right?

*CARTER: Right. Jackie, take it away.*²²³

Initially the women play along, with the exception of Veronica, the republican Catholic.

She participates only to make a mockery of the game:

VERONICA: (moving seductively towards CARTER and lifting her skirt). I’ve come for ma boy. How’s about you comin’ up to my haystack sometime? God, you’re a dickhead!

*CARTER: (pulling VERONICA to one side). Now, Veronica, you’ve tried to be destructive in every exercise. You must not burden everyone with your negativity. For your own sake, try and cooperate. Things are possible. Please?*²²⁴

This interaction succinctly displays one way that Charabanc was processing the international scope of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The characters represent real-world factions; Carter stands in for the United States government while Veronica embodies the IRA. As the Troubles had progressed through the 1970s and into the 1980s, the IRA became one of the primary points of discussion between the US, UK, and Ireland.

On a popular level, the IRA had been highly successful in seducing Irish-Americans to finance the fight in Northern Ireland; a majority of the IRA’s funding came from private individuals in the US. This was illegal and government officials, including Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, publicly warned US citizens not to contribute to the violence in Northern Ireland. However, the UK and US addressed the complex subject of the IRA very

²²³ Marie Jones and Company, “Now You’re Talkin,” in Claudia W. Harris, ed, *The Charabanc Theatre Company Four Plays* (Gerrard’s Cross, Colin Smyth, Ltd: 2006), 21.

²²⁴ Jones and Co., “Now You’re Talkin,” 22.

differently. Thatcher condemned the organization as “enemies of democracy and of freedom too” and warned Americans that their financial support of the organization “buys the deaths of Irishmen.”²²⁵

Politicians in the United States had to follow a slightly different path with regards to the IRA. Because the Irish republican movement had broad support in the US, American politicians were quick to condemn specific instances of violence, but less willing to make derogatory generalizations about Irish paramilitary organizations. Another key difference was that the US was interested in talking to the republican leadership, whereas the UK refused to engage in political discussions with those considered common criminals under UK law.²²⁶

This distinction is made clear in Charabanc’s *Now You’re Talkin’* when the American Carter is frustrated with Veronica, but makes repeated efforts to integrate her into the group. After his game of “The Farmer and the Cow Man Should be Friends” dissolved into sectarian sparring, he uses his pacifist rhetoric to make an emotional appeal to the women. He attempts to explain to them that hatred is a choice, but his words fall on deaf ears as he is kicked out of the meeting in his own retreat center:

CARTER: You, ask yourselves, why is our dear country devastated by violence? Shall I tell you why. Shall I? [...] Until you get rid of these emotions, you will keep fighting, you will keep hating, you will destroy yourselves, you will destroy your land. So, it’s up to you. The choice is yours. You can have good emotions or you can feel bad emotions. You can feel hate or you can feel love. Now, which do you want?

JACKIE: (lunging after CARTER). Yes! Yes! We do hate each other! We bloody well hate each other! That’s what all this is about. What the hell do you know about it? You don’t know anything about it! Why don’t you just fuck off? (CARTER runs offstage.)

²²⁵ Cronin, *Washington’s Irish Policy*, 323.

²²⁶ Central to the hunger strikes of 1981 was the UK’s repeal of “Special Category Status” for prisoners of the Troubles.

LX BLACKOUT. END OF FIRST ACT.²²⁷

At the beginning of Act II, Carter makes one last ditch effort at reconciliation, and again he is verbally attacked by the women. This time Thelma and Veronica collaborate to tear him down:

THELMA: Listen here, you, do you think I'm stupid? I could teach you a thing or two! You Yanks comin' over here . . . clear away back to your own country and sort out your own cowboys and Indians! Aye, and what about all them war stories, all them poor soldiers you got killed in Vietnam for nothin'!

[...]

*VERONICA: Carter, why don't you just fuck off? We have nothing to say to you, all right?*²²⁸

The irony here is that as Thelma and Veronica join forces to humiliate Carter, they become participants in a successful reconciliation of their own. This echoes the cross-party collaboration featured in Dominic Behan's *Európe*, which had played to Belfast audiences several years earlier. Representatives from the two most virulently opposed communities in Northern Ireland are again seen joining forces in order to discredit and oppose a common enemy: the intrusive Yank who attempts to intervene in the Troubles.

In Charabanc's *Now You're Talkin'* the two women who oust Carter represent the most radically opposed sectarian viewpoints; Veronica is the republican and Thelma is the "unyielding protestant." Consequently, as the women unite against Carter, they unwittingly cast aside their differences and begin to work together in earnest towards a shared goal.

Once Carter has been banished from the room, the women delve into meaningful conversation about what might inspire a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Of course, these

²²⁷ Jones and Co., "Now You're Talkin'," 23.

²²⁸ Jones and Co., "Now You're Talkin'," 25.

answers don't come easy, and the women don't agree, but the fact that they are talking is a major victory. Soon the women find out that Carter has gone to the press, and the women discover that they have become a media sensation, with news outlets reporting that "a group of women have barricaded themselves in [...] not yet stated their demands [...] and] are not believed to be armed."²²⁹

Much like the trio in Friel's *Freedom of the City*, the women are unwittingly thrust into a high-profile role in the Troubles, and newspaper reporters and photographers are clamoring outside to speak with them. They decide to seize the opportunity to make a public statement about the Troubles, but struggle to come to terms with what they should say during their five minutes of fame. Their discussion quickly turns to spirited debate, and then outright argument. Veronica, the republican, is the most hotheaded of the bunch, and as the tension rises she flippantly breaks into a condescending rendition of "We Shall Overcome," which drives the other women past their breaking point. A fight ensues and the women bind Veronica's hands and feet, and then gag her with a scarf.

It is Collette, the moderate Catholic, who lashes into Veronica once she is fully restrained, gagged, and tied to the bedframe:

*COLLETTE: How's that feel Veronica? Somebody's silenced you for a change! God, I'm so sick of people like you! You see, I know you and your sort, you don't fool me. I'm tired of the violence, of what people like you have done to this country. Why can't you leave well alone? Green, bloody fascists! You don't liberate anybody. You oppress them! (Stops – shocked at what they have done.) I'm sorry, it simply had to be done for your own good...*²³⁰

²²⁹ Jones and Co., "Now You're Talkin," 37.

²³⁰ Jones and Co., "Now You're Talkin," 42.

The decision of the four women to silence and ignore the one republican voice was a somber reminder of the current state of Northern Irish political affairs, where the Anglo-Irish Agreement had just met with radical disagreement from paramilitary groups precisely because those most engaged in the Troubles had been systematically denied a voice in the negotiations. Thus the women's actions mirror the actual state of the peace process in Northern Ireland by 1985, whereas (the character) Carter's policy of allowing everyone a voice – even if he disagreed with what they had to say – echoed President Carter's early speech stressing the importance of “peaceful means for finding a just solution that involves both parts of the community of Northern Ireland.”

The play can also be read as a poignant rebuttal against the factions that were urging America to intervene more directly in the conflict. Charabanc's enduring message seems to endorse the policies of the Nixon and Reagan administrations, primarily that the only solution that could be effective in the North is one that comes from the people of Northern Ireland themselves.

In terms of production, *Now You're Talkin'* differs considerably from the previously examined plays performed at the Lyric, Abbey, and Gaiety Theatres. Charabanc's modus operandi was community-based, and so too was their performance schedule. In the case of *Now You're Talkin'* the play ran for the majority of 1985, and it toured extensively throughout Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the UK, and as well as playing a few weeks internationally. In total, it played to audiences in a total of 35 separate venues. Many of these performances were conducted in schools in Northern Ireland, and a plurality were staged in community centers in and around Belfast. Charabanc's focus on Northern Ireland's oral history

and sense of community meant that success was to be found in bringing the play to audiences who might not otherwise attend productions in major theatres.

During Charabanc's 1985 tour, the production was often previewed in newspapers, rather than reviewed, in order to promote its brief appearance in each community center or school, as it would often play just once or twice before moving on to a new location. For instance, the *Leitrim Observer* offered a preview of what was in store for audiences when Charabanc brought *Now You're Talkin'* to the Hawk's Well Theatre in Sligo:

*"Now You're Talkin'" brings you on a trip to "Atlantic View" Rortrock, [sic] for a few days away from the kids, the housework, and Him Indoors. Join the five women on a week-end of encounter and reconciliation with the American evangelist for peace, Carter. Will he persuade them? Perhaps he will win over the nervous Jackie or Colette – unemployed and disillusioned. But who could move the bitter and suspicious Veronica, or the cosy, suburban Thelma, or Madeline, the goodtime girl with a brother in the Kesh?*²³¹

Again, the focus is clearly on the American catalyst in the play, this time referred to as the "American evangelist for peace, Carter." With a name obviously indebted to the previous president of the United States, Charabanc's Carter, and his questionable influence over the Belfast women, featured heavily in press surrounding the show as it visited communities throughout Ireland.

That is not to say that the show did not enjoy success via more traditional theatre outlets. *Now You're Talkin'* featured prominently in the 1985 Edinburgh Fringe Festival, followed by an extended run at the Drill Hall Arts Center, London. The production was also one of the

²³¹ "All Aboard – Charabanc are Coming Your Way" *Leitrim Observer*, Oct 12, 1985, 7.

headlining plays for the 1985 Dublin Theatre Festival, thanks in part to a special £11,500 grant from the British Council dedicated to “funding British shows abroad.”²³²

When *Now You're Talkin'* premiered at the Belfast Civic Arts Theatre, the *Irish Times* reviewer Ray Rosenfield was quick to note the production's topical relevance to “the working-class women of Belfast whom the Charabanc Theatre Company continue to interview and have put on stage.” Rosenfield goes on to draw attention to the American centerpiece of the production:

*a well-meaning young American who is over-confident of the healing power of leisure and communication. It is a recipe for disaster mitigated only by the characteristic sharp Belfast wit and the exchange of home truths.*²³³

Another *Irish Times* reviewer, Sam McAughtry, takes the importance of the play a step further, demonstrating that *Now You're Talkin'*'s sharp dismissal of the “cliché-purring American counsellor” carries with it “a most unexpected bonus: a blazing insight, a new possibility for Northern Ireland.”

*The Yank tells the women that they don't really hate each other. And as one, they race at him, to put his thinking right: Carol Scanlan, playing one of the Protestants, pummels his chest: “We do hate each other! We hate each other's guts! What would you know about it?” Until then, Carol's character has been shy, a little unsure. It was the swift and fierce change that came over her that brought laughter and wild applause from the Belfast audience, people better qualified than any other to appreciate the bitter truth of the comment.*²³⁴

McAughtry's “blazing insight” is based upon the Belfast audience around him witnessing Charabanc's honest treatment of the sectarian chasm fueling the troubles. His sudden realization

²³² Louise Creagh, “Festival's Bonus,” *Irish Press*, September 10, 1985, 16.

²³³ Ray Rosenfield, “Now You're Talking' in Belfast,” review of *Now You're Talkin'*, by Charabanc Theatre Co. *Irish Times*, March 22, 1985, 12.

²³⁴ Sam McAughtry, “Hate, Hate Me Do...,” review of *Now You're Talkin'* by Charabanc Theatre Co. *Irish Times*, March 27, 1985, 11.

is that hate needn't beget violence: that the American ideal of cross-party reconciliation is misguided, when efforts should instead be directed toward stopping the violence, rather than the hatred.

*If the Irish are good at anything, it's hating, and the Northerners are the most dynamic Irish on the island. Their hate is 150 octane. It suddenly struck me, watching and feeling the audience identify with the story, that we have hated for so long now that it would do us no harm if that's all we did.*²³⁵

The enduring impact of *Now You're Talkin* suggests that Charabanc is representing the quiet, but vast, majority of Northern Ireland. They may hate each other, and viciously resist any American efforts to intervene, but their hatred is not directly responsible for the sectarian violence being perpetuated by the very few. In fact, the women of *Now You're Talkin* are willing to put aside their hatred and join their voices together in order to combat the violence that is plaguing their shared community.

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Despite the cultural relevance of *Now You're Talkin* to both the Troubles and 1980s Irish-American relations, Charabanc could not have predicted the how long and winding the road to peace would be. It would take another decade of violence and negotiation before the seeds from the Anglo-Irish Agreement would germinate and grow into a well-supported peace process for Northern Ireland. Moreover, the hallmarks of the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement are precisely the issues that Charabanc was wrestling with: Official American moderation and the inclusion of paramilitary factions as political equals within the formal peace process.

²³⁵ McAughtry, "Hate, Hate Me Do...," 11.

3.5 FRANK MCGUINNESS: *DOLLY WEST'S KITCHEN* (1999)

*Frank McGuinness' latest work tells how the arrival of the Allied Troops in Derry changes everything.*²³⁶

... So goes the tagline for the premiere of *Dolly West's Kitchen* at the Abbey Theatre. If Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* was the Troubles' "fullest working out" on stage, than Frank McGuinness's *Dolly West's Kitchen* is likely its most apt coda. Written shortly after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, *Dolly West's Kitchen* trades the pseudo-documentary of *Freedom* for an allegorical fiction set against World War II in Donegal.

Unlike the plays discussed earlier, *Dolly West's Kitchen* is not a "Troubles play" in a traditional sense. The action of the play is historical, while the issues presented are many and contemporary. The conflict in Northern Ireland is just one theme addressed by the play, alongside questions of sexual identity, politics, neutrality, and nationalism, among others. Like the writers that have come before him in this volume, McGuinness employs American characters as catalysts that shape the action of the play while at the same time speaking to the current state of affairs between Ireland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The earlier plays herein addressed the Troubles directly and exclusively, but McGuinness's post-peace agreement play demonstrates that the Troubles no longer had to dominate a production to be addressed. In his 1999 *Dolly West's Kitchen*, McGuinness adeptly weaves sectarian issues into a historical play

²³⁶ "Theatre" *Irish Independent*, October 12, 1999, 60.

that addresses a changing Ireland via two Americans who are brought into a troubled home to set things right.

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During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Northern Ireland peace process moved forward slowly and with uncertainty. Reagan's foreign policy was constructed around the Cold War, leaving little incentive for the US to risk its relationship with the UK by pursuing active involvement in Northern Ireland. Sectarian violence continued, but at levels much lower than in the previous decades, and paramilitary leaders became increasingly interested in a peaceful and political solution to the conflict.

In 1992, with the Cold War largely behind the US, Bill Clinton hit the campaign trail and asserted a renewed interest in US involvement in Northern Ireland:

*Because Clinton saw foreign policy through a domestic prism, Ireland was perceived as a fountainhead for ethnic voters who might support an Irish-American presidential candidate. [...] At the April 6, 1992, meeting Clinton made a campaign promise to the audience that if he were elected, he would appoint a special envoy to Northern Ireland and grant a visa to Gerry Adams or any other legally elected official. [...] He gave the audience the impression that he understood and empathized with Irish-American attitudes toward the Northern Ireland problem.*²³⁷

Clinton's campaigning was successful, and sparked a resurgence in the Irish-American lobby. Organizations such as Irish-Americans for Clinton-Gore (IACG) and Americans for a New Irish Agenda (ANIA) were established and they quickly attained "considerable access to

²³⁷ Joseph E. Thompson, *American Policy and Northern Ireland: A Saga of Peacebuilding* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 166-167.

the new president.”²³⁸ Perhaps more importantly, the Irish-American mindset regarding involvement in Northern Ireland had changed significantly:

*After a twenty-year battle, Irish constitutional nationalism finally had supplanted the militant nationalism of NORAIID and armed-struggle republicanism. Irish-America was now prepared to send peacemakers instead of guns.*²³⁹

The change was generational. The older generation of Irish-Americans who had been instrumental in funding the IRA at the onset of the Troubles had viewed the conflict as an extension of the original IRA’s “glory days” as freedom fighters at the turn of the century.²⁴⁰ As such, their “Brits Out Now” approach toward Irish unity was a non-starter for US presidents looking to maintain favorable relations with the UK. After 25 years of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, a new generation of Irish-Americans became focused on finding a peaceful solution, rather than imposing a militant one. Clinton did not cause this shift in opinion, but he recognized it and used it much to his, and eventually Northern Ireland’s, advantage.

Clinton was not alone. In 1992 Taoiseach Albert Reynolds took office and had also foregrounded his desire to reinvigorate the Northern Irish peace process. Together with British Prime Minister John Major, who had supplanted Thatcher in 1990, the heads-of-state published the influential Downing Street Declaration in December 1993. The declaration asserted that the future of Northern Ireland should be determined by the people of Ireland, both in the North and in the Republic, and that paramilitary leaders would be included in forthcoming moderated peace talks provided a cease-fire was maintained.

²³⁸ Timothy J. Lynch, *Turf War: The Clinton Administration and Northern Ireland* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 43.

²³⁹ Lynch, *Turf War*, 43.

²⁴⁰ The original or “Old” Irish Republican Army was originally established as the official military for the newly declared Republic of Ireland.

In 1994 Clinton helped to entice IRA leadership cooperation by authorizing a visa for Gerry Adams to visit the US. The move was followed by a full IRA ceasefire announced on August 31, 1994, helping to pave the way for Sinn Fein to be included in official political discussions regarding the future of Northern Ireland. The cease-fire was the most significant political tack that the IRA had made during the Troubles, and although it was suspended for a period in 1996, it was an important milestone toward establishing an environment in which cross-party peace talks might be possible.

Later that year, Clinton made good on his other major campaign promise by appointing the American Senator George Mitchell as the first US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland. The position was the result of two years of talks with Irish and British officials, and the end result positioned Mitchell to become the central moderator for the peace process in Northern Ireland. All of the earlier dramatic portrayals of an American attempting to moderate the Troubles had been purely fictional, but with Senator Mitchell's arrival in Belfast, the fiction became a reality.

Within two years of taking office, Clinton had made the United States a major player in Northern Ireland's peace process. Along with the strong Irish-American lobby, Clinton had secured congressional support for the International Fund for Ireland, a major international organization that had been established in 1986 to "tackle the underlying causes of sectarianism and violence and to build reconciliation."²⁴¹ Clinton also became the first US president to visit Northern Ireland, and his visit differed greatly from the nostalgic campaign-stops of his

²⁴¹ International Fund For Ireland, Homepage Description, last accessed 9 May 2013. <http://www.internationalfundforireland.com/>

predecessors. Clinton not only addressed the Troubles, but discussed them almost exclusively in front of a crowd of 50,000+ in Belfast:

*Last year's cease-fire of the Irish Republican Army, joined by the combined Loyalist military command, marked a turning point in the history of Northern Ireland. Now is the time to sustain that momentum and lock in the gains of peace. [...] This twin track initiative gives the parties a chance to begin preliminary talks in ways in which all views will be represented and all voices will be heard. It also established an international body to address the issue of arms decommissioning. I hope the parties will seize this opportunity. Engaging in honest dialogue is not an act of surrender, it is an act of strength and common sense. [...] The United States will help to secure the tangible benefits of peace.*²⁴²

On the same trip, president Clinton met with the Democratic Unionist leader Rev. Ian Paisley, Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble, as well as the head of Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams. It would be the first of many trips to Northern Ireland for Clinton, as he and Senator Mitchell worked to bring competing factions face to face with one another for moderated talks towards a peaceful solution to the Troubles.

Mitchell established a basic framework for the peace negotiations in the form of what became known as the “Mitchell Principles.” As a prerequisite for negotiations, all parties had to agree to: 1) exclusively democratic and peaceful work towards a solution; 2) the disarmament of all paramilitary organizations and an end to violence; and 3) accept any solution agreed upon by all parties.²⁴³ In September, 1997 Sinn Fein agreed to the principles, and the final installment of cross-party talks would lead to the signing of the landmark Belfast Agreement, commonly referred to as the Good Friday Peace Agreement.

²⁴² Bill Clinton, “Proud Traditions Coming Together” (speech, Belfast, November 30, 1995) http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9511/clinton_ireland/transcript.html

²⁴³ This is a condensed list of Mitchell’s six principles for negotiation, compiled by the author.

*White House diplomacy in the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 is the forerunner – the dry run – of a new policy process that would be entrenched in the crucial White House diplomacy leading to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.*²⁴⁴

As mentioned earlier, the Anglo-Irish Agreement had established many of the central terms for Northern Ireland's peace process, but they would not have an opportunity to be fully implemented until paramilitary organizations entered the discussion and ultimately agreed to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The Good Friday Agreement was actually two agreements, one established international understanding between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, and the other provided a pathway to peace for paramilitary organizations and political parties in Northern Ireland. At its core, the agreement recognized that the current majority of people in Northern Ireland wished to remain a part of the United Kingdom, and that a substantial minority wanted a united Ireland. Both of these views were deemed legitimate. It was decided that the national status of Northern Ireland could only be determined by popular vote, and that regardless of that status (NI as part of Ireland or the UK) any person living in Northern Ireland would be free to choose their preferred national identity and citizenship: Irish, British, or both.

Politically, the agreement made both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom relinquish all formal territorial claims to Northern Ireland. It established a renewed framework for local governance and policing, and enforced the European Convention of Human Rights to prevent future abuses of civil rights. The agreement also demanded the complete and continued cease-fire of all participating paramilitary organizations, and included a process for the decommissioning of arms stockpiles in accordance with an independent international

²⁴⁴ Lynch, *Turf War*, 21.

commission. Finally, the agreement arranged for the early release of prisoners from the conflict, and it established the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to monitor the state Northern Ireland and promote reconciliation.

The Agreement was formally accepted and signed on Good Friday, 1998, and was ratified by popular referendum in both the Republic of Ireland (94.4% in favor) and Northern Ireland (71.1% in favor.) Like the rest of the Troubles, the peace process has been a protracted operation, with numerous setbacks and delays, but it marches forward maintaining considerable support popularly, politically, and internationally.

* * *

Not long after President Clinton and Senator Mitchell had played a key role in establishing a foundational agreement for peace in Northern Ireland, the Abbey Theatre would bring a new work from one of Ulster's most prominent playwrights to the national stage. Featuring two prominent American characters brought into an Irish home to solve its problems, *Dolly West's Kitchen* provides a fresh depiction of the American in Irish theatre.

The play focuses on the West family who live in a remote house in a Donegal border town during and after the Second World War, or "the emergency" as the conflict was known in Ireland. Dolly West lives in the house along with her mother Rima, her younger brother Justin, her older sister Esther with husband Ned, and the young housekeeper Anna. From the onset it is clear that the family is in trouble; Dolly is frustrated, Justin is struggling with his identity, and Esther's marriage with Ned is childless and loveless. The situation is stagnant, and Rima the matriarch of the household, knows that her days are numbered.

Word comes that Alec, a British Army Officer and former suitor of Dolly's, is stationed nearby in Derry with American troops. Dolly is happy to hear it and prepares for a visit while Justin, a young Irish Army Sergeant, makes a futile attempt to block the visit by declaring that "no man will be welcome here wearing the uniform of the British Army."²⁴⁵ The West sisters find Justin's opposition to the visit amusing, and Rima, his mother, demonstrates her clever and advisory position in the house by responding to each of Justin's thin threats with a smart retort of her own.

Alec arrives from Derry as planned, followed by Rima, who returns from town with two unexpected visitors. While in the pub she spied Marco and Jamie, two American soldiers, and she instinctively knew that they would be the outside influence that her household so desperately needed:

*MARCO: I am Marco Delaviccario. This is my Irish-American cousin, Jamie O'Brien. We signed up together. Jamie brought the clothes he was standing in and a change of underwear. I brought one taffeta dress and a change of high heels. Who knows what might happen in the heat of battle?*²⁴⁶

Jamie is as quiet and reserved as Marco is flamboyant and camp. As the play progresses the guests couple-off with the Wests; Alec with Dolly, Justin with Marco, and Jamie finds himself caught between Anna and Esther. Ultimately he agrees to forge a life with Anna, but not before fathering a child with Esther, who had previously been unsuccessful in conception with her husband Ned. Having seen the family taken care of, Rima passes away peacefully in her chair, glass of whiskey in hand.

²⁴⁵ Frank McGuinness, "Dolly West's Kitchen" in *Plays 2* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 187.

²⁴⁶ McGuinness, *Dolly West*, 203.

In many ways, *Dolly West's Kitchen* reverses the trend in bringing American characters to the Irish stage. An Irish character forces the Americans into the action, rather than the other way around. It is a transitional piece caught between major Irish paradigms: It was written and produced in 1999, during the tail end of the Troubles, and in early stages of the Celtic Tiger. It is also an outlier due to its combination of a World War II setting and modern themes, making it an anachronistic period-play. McGuinness has the luxury of writing with hindsight, placing into a historical context the seeds for the future relations between America and Ireland. Quite the opposite of the returned emigrants who preceded them, Marco and Jamie show the capacity to love and produce offspring, yet not in any traditional sense; Justin and Marco live happily together in the family house, while Jamie has been caught between two women. He fathers a child with Ester, but she decides to raise the child into her existing marriage, and Jamie, too, finds his love in the arms of Anna. The Americans have come into the household and made it a better place, but largely through collaboration, not design.

Marco's campy American confidence establishes his role in the play as a clear outsider, and these qualities help bring an otherwise frustrated and angry young Justin out of the closet and into a comfortable existence as a homosexual man. He and Marco move forward with the support of the West family within their isolated world, where they have all that they need. Jamie is framed as an American outsider who gets caught between two women, and ultimately it is the Irish women who have control of his future; Esther denies him and Anna accepts him.

Unlike the American characters examined previously in this chapter, it is significant that Marco and Jamie didn't come to Dolly West's kitchen under their own power; it was Rima, the omniscient West matriarch, who brought the Americans into her home so that they would sort out the troubled family. Much as the previous plays had stressed that the Troubles in Northern

Ireland would never be fixed by outsiders coming in, *Dolly West* demonstrates that Americans could play a significant role in resolving Irish problems, but only if the impetus for their involvement came from the Irish themselves. Thus, the enduring political assertions throughout the Troubles that claimed Northern Ireland would only come to peace if the Irish and British governments both wanted it were, in part, true. The missing ingredients were simply American moderation and the inclusion of all involved parties, even the violent ones.

In *Dolly West's Kitchen*, it is the Irish who chose to transform themselves, using the Americans as catalysts. These particular American characters exist by virtue of their American iconography, typically without the professional credentials so commonly found attached to American characters in earlier Troubles plays. Although Marco and Jamie refer to their hyphenated nationalities as Italian- and Irish-American respectively, the others around them do not. Their hyphens are intra-American identifiers, monikers they choose to embrace, as opposed to the earlier "Irish-American" label imposed upon all who emigrated, however brief their stay abroad might have been.

Jamie, in particular, is interesting because he is an Irish-American exclusively by title. Unlike the previous Irish-Americans studied in the first chapter, Jamie does not claim to be "returning home" to Ireland. His visit was simply due to his military orders, and the chance meeting of Rima finding him in a pub. His Irish-American heritage is simply background information. In many ways Jamie's character is indicative of the new generation of Irish-American involvement in Northern Ireland, where the goal was an enduring peace rather than a reclamation of some ancestral territorial struggle.

Dolly West's Kitchen received mixed reviews in its initial performance at the Abbey. Writing for the *Irish Independent*, Bruce Arnold missed the play's parallels to contemporary Ireland, and instead lambasted the piece for its historical inaccuracies, stressing that "In historical plays, verisimilitude is important."²⁴⁷ The lengthy review made no mention of the major American characters whatsoever.

The *Irish Times* reviewer David Nowlan does better, acknowledging the tremendous importance of an American character shepherding a young Irishman out of the closet. Homosexuality in Ireland had only been decriminalized in 1993, and when the play was performed in 1999, legislation to prevent discrimination based on sexual preference was pending.²⁴⁸ Nowlan goes on to assert that McGuinness:

*wants to compare and contrast the loyalties and enmities in the dinner party with the loyalties and enmities of the parties engaged in, or neutral in, the world war. [...] McGuinness has provided a wealth of challenging insights into social attitudes and military objectives as he weaves his complex web of words along the way.*²⁴⁹

It is clear that McGuinness's play has considerable relevance beyond its stated historical setting. In the wake of successful American moderation of Ireland's peace talks, McGuinness features two Americans being brought into his hometown to help Irish and British characters resolve myriad problems. Sectarianism and national identity compete with sexual identity and

²⁴⁷ Bruce Arnold, "War Drama Had No Real Theme," review of *Dolly West's Kitchen* by Frank McGuinness, *Irish Independent*, October 8, 1999, 15.

²⁴⁸ The "Equal Status Act" that assured equal rights regardless of sexual orientation was passed on April 26, 2000. This supplemented the 1998 Employment Equality Act which prevent discrimination in hiring.

²⁴⁹ David Nowlan, "Ambitious Play with a Logical Fallacy: *Dolly West's Kitchen*," review of *Dolly West's Kitchen*, by Frank McGuinness, *Irish Times*, October 8, 1999, 12.

marriage as a mélange of 1990s topics are featured in McGuinness's historical drama. As he notes in the introduction to *Plays 2*:

*I suppose these plays are about change. Are they comedies? When they want to be. Have they good manners? They push their luck on occasion, but don't we all? They try to know themselves from the inside out. That knowledge transforms them from that I thought they would be into what they actually became. I like to believe that they have a life of their own, but then I would.*²⁵⁰

While *Dolly West's Kitchen* is not a traditional Troubles play, it remains a fine example of Irish theatre documenting contemporary Ireland's struggles. It is an emergent piece, one which uses a distant war to speak to the current one, with quiet optimism that the Troubles might subside as easily as the problems in his play. It is at once a late Troubles play and an early Celtic Tiger play, referencing both the peace process and the social reforms that would accompany the Celtic Tiger economic surge beginning in the late 1990s.

The play's Americans are transitional as well. Marco and Jamie are chosen to bring liberation and escape to rural Donegal. They break through stereotypes and are well-rounded characters that help the West family move on with their lives. They remain outsiders, but are outsiders who are brought in, rather than turned away from or mocked. Against a backdrop of war these Americans bring a forward momentum to the action without reverting to the stereotypical psychologists of many Troubles plays, or the materialist and nostalgic Irish-Americans so commonly found in both early emigration plays and later Celtic Tiger plays.

²⁵⁰ Frank McGuinness, "Introduction" in *Plays 2* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), ix.

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

As the recent protests and rioting in Belfast have demonstrated, the sectarian unrest in Northern Ireland is far from finished. However, with broad support from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the Good Friday Agreement has provided a stable base for the peace process for the past fifteen years. There have been many hurdles along the way, but with the major paramilitary organizations now engaged in a peaceful political process, sectarian violence has become increasingly sporadic and largely relegated to dissident splinter organizations, such as the Real IRA, Óglaigh na hÉireann, and factions of the UVF.²⁵¹ Leaders on all sides are now outspoken and united against the ill-conceived factions perpetuating violence in the face of peaceful and democratic progress. While protests and demonstrations continue from both sides in the North, there is good reason for cautious optimism for a lasting peace to be achieved for Northern Ireland.

There have been numerous plays produced about the Troubles, and so long as there are Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, these plays will continue to be crafted. However, as violence gives way to diplomacy, it is my hope that the term “Troubles” will evolve to become a term denoting a fixed period in Ireland’s history, rather than a perpetual state of unrest in the North. There is good cause to believe that the “Troubles” may have effectively ended with

²⁵¹ It should also be noted that much of the remaining violence is topically unrelated to the Troubles. Many of the recent paramilitary murders have been within or between factions on the same side of the sectarian debate, often over territorial claims or drugs. While the intersection of criminal activity and Irish paramilitary organizations, particularly regarding drugs, is a subject for another project, it is important to note that the rare instances of contemporary violence in the North are only rarely related to the sectarian Catholic/Protestant struggle.

the Good Friday Peace Agreement, and that Northern Ireland is now on a stable path towards the democratic and peaceful determination of its own future.

Consequently, as the situation has come under control, the case for foreign intervention has diminished accordingly. Politicians and playwrights no longer need “objective” American characters or caricatures to intervene in the history, politics, or identity issues at stake in Northern Ireland. While sectarian tensions will continue to persist and be interrogated on the Irish stage, the past decade has demonstrated that plays exploring sectarianism now generally do so without significant foreigners involved. The Good Friday Peace Agreement paved the way for the inhabitants of the island of Ireland to move forward in peace, and its playwrights seem to be doing the same.

4.0 THE CELTIC TIGER AND AMERICA

*Change has been so fast, Irish society was and is faced with a whole new phenomenon. Having resolved so many problems in previous years and having become used to doing so, we are now faced with trying to solve problems of which we have no experience, such as: newfound and undreamed of affluence; a dismantling of institutions; multiculturalism; fall-out from scandals.*²⁵²

- Fr. Harry Bohan, Céiftin Centre for Values-Led Change

Father Harry Bohan's introduction to *Freedom: Licence or Liberty? Engaging with a Transforming Ireland* demonstrates that Ireland's great economic boom, which spanned the mid 1990s and the early 2000s, brought with it some unforeseen challenges. Globalization, inflation, and unprecedented growth redefined the Irish economy, while immigration, shifting social mores and an increasingly problematic definition of "Irishness" shook the pastoral foundations of Irish culture and identity.

This period of sweeping change in Ireland has become known as the "Celtic Tiger," a term coined in 1997 by Morgan Stanley economist Kevin Gardiner. At its inception, the "Celtic Tiger" moniker was simply intended to illustrate the similarity between Ireland's rapid economic expansion and that of Southeast Asia in the early 1990s. Gardiner suggested that Ireland's runaway economic growth, if left unchecked, could lead to a crash similar to the 1997 Asian

²⁵² Fr. Harry Bohan, *Freedom: Licence or Liberty? Engaging with a Transforming Ireland* (Dublin: Veritas, 2007), 12.

financial crisis that had started in Thailand, spread throughout Southeast Asia, and had major worldwide repercussions thereafter.

Thus, from the moment the term Celtic Tiger was coined, its future collapse was forewarned. Again and again, both in Ireland and abroad, economists insisted that prolonged double-digit economic growth was unsustainable. However, on the street the Celtic Tiger was seen as something of an economic savior; it was embraced as a one-way economic shift that had erased unemployment and made Ireland affluent, almost overnight. Even as late as 2004-6 it was unthinkable to many people in Ireland that the Celtic Tiger might actually be a period that would come to an end, much less that it could collapse as quickly as it had materialized.²⁵³

During the boom years, Ireland was faced with not only economic changes, but material ones as well. The sudden influx of jobs, disposable income, and immigrants meant that Irish society was faced with a set of problems unlike any the nation had previously seen. The archetypical Irish culture based in agrarian living around small towns gave way to clichéd nostalgia for a romanticized Ireland. Newly wealthy Dubliners, in particular, used their disposable income to consume their nationality. *Riverdance* became a runaway hit after finding its audience first in well-heeled Dubliners. Its premiere run in 1995 sold out 120,000 tickets at Dublin's Point Theatre, and the production has since become an annual fixture at the Gaiety, Ireland's largest receiving theatre, where it is booked for the entirety of every summer.

Similarly, the promise of a "traditional Irish experience" – which had long been marketed toward package tourists – became appealing to affluent Irish consumers alongside international tourists. Dubliners were encouraged to embrace their Irish heritage at eateries such as Johnnie

²⁵³ I cite these years specifically because I was living in Dublin during that time. While this "popular belief" is anecdotal, it is supported by the fervor with which economists warned of the impending economic collapse.

Fox's, which bills itself as "one of Ireland's oldest and most famous traditional Irish pubs" while offering a diverse selection of fine wines ranging up to €165 (\$212) with an extensive menu to match.²⁵⁴ The pub, located in the mountains 25 minutes away from Dublin, is well away from the tourist trail and requires a car for access. While it boasts of numerous high-profile foreign visitors, its primary clientele is Irish. Moreover, Johnnie Fox's seemingly redundant tagline, which places a clear emphasis on the Irishness of an establishment located in Ireland, is a poignant example of the desire to commodify, market, and sell Irishness to Dubliners.

The increasing commercialization of Irishness marketed toward the Irish themselves was emblematic of the changes that the Celtic Tiger brought to Irish society. The affluence and excess of a booming economy called into question Ireland's national identity, and scholars such as sociologist Fr. Bohan, quoted above, were quick to note that Ireland's culture was rapidly changing. Economists understood how the Celtic Tiger had emerged and where it might end up, but social scientists and artists were left with the here-and-now, as Ireland's newfound wealth created a milieu largely antithetical to its traditions.

4.1.1 Celtic Tiger Background

In order to understand the Celtic Tiger economic phenomenon, it must first be deconstructed into two distinct parts, which I'll call the Good Tiger and the Bad Tiger.²⁵⁵ The

²⁵⁴ Johnnie Fox's Pub, Menu, <http://www.jfp.ie> last accessed May 9, 2013. Prices and exchange rate are current as of March, 2013.

²⁵⁵ Yiannia Kitromilides, "The Irish Tragedy," in *The Euro Crisis*, ed. Philip Arestis and Malcolm Sawyer (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 166. The informal "good/bad tiger" terminology is of my own invention, though not original and likely used elsewhere.

Good Tiger awoke in the early 1990s, and brought unprecedented growth, prosperity, and employment to Ireland, largely through foreign direct investment (FDI). It is this side of the Celtic Tiger that is of primary importance to this study; beginning circa 1994 and running into 2001 was a period of dramatic growth and change that had straightforward origins. Ireland was in the right place at the right time, and thanks to earlier decisions regarding educational priorities and the encouragement of foreign investment, Ireland stood to benefit from the concurrent consolidation of the EU and rapid expansion of American business interests.

The Bad Tiger, on the other hand, took over in 2001 and was driven by Irish bankers, real estate developers, and politicians who, via deregulation and corruption, artificially perpetuated the Tiger's unsustainable rate of growth for their own profit. This latter period of the Celtic Tiger is a fascinating study in its own right, but ultimately has little significance to this chapter. It is widely understood that Ireland's post-2001 growth was the result of dishonest, reckless, and often criminal financial activity within Ireland, and the studies have already been written.²⁵⁶

Consequently, the Bad Tiger will be set aside in favor of an examination of the first, and most important, phase of the Celtic Tiger and its resultant American characters. Both foreign and American investment in Ireland had stabilized by 2001, thus this study will focus on the earlier Good Tiger, when American interests and investment were directly driving expansion, thereby influencing cultural change. Ireland has long interrogated its cultural issues on stage, and theatre

Dividing the Celtic Tiger into two distinct periods of study has become the conventional way to understand the Irish economic phenomenon, as succinctly evidenced by the Kitromilides article.

²⁵⁶ See: Fintan O'Toole, *Ship of Fools; How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009) and David J. Lynch, *When the Luck of the Irish Ran Out* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

from the early period of the Celtic Tiger features numerous American characters doing just that, thus making for an apt bookend to this study.

The foundation for the early Celtic Tiger boom can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s, as Irish politicians such as Sean Lemass were struggling to stem emigration. In doing so, they invested heavily in higher education, and attempted to reverse Ireland's previous protectionist and agricultural focus. Involvement with the European Economic Community (EEC) would help to modernize Ireland's infrastructure and bring money for development, while low corporate tax rates made Ireland an appealing location for foreign businesses.²⁵⁷

By the early 1990s, Ireland was primed for success. This was due in part to decades of strategic planning, but was also simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time. As the EEC morphed and grew into the European Union, Ireland benefitted from both Free Trade and the emergence of the EU Economic and Monetary Union. The path towards a single European monetary unit, the Euro, meant that Ireland's banking system saw increased oversight from the EU, and its currency became inherently stable and increasingly worthy of foreign investment.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ The mid-century changes to Ireland's cultural and political landscapes are examined in significantly more detail in Chapter 1. Essentially, the vast majority of changes intended to slow emigration in the 1960s would go on to become the foundation for the Celtic Tiger economy.

²⁵⁸ This is, perhaps, an oversimplification. The emphasis here is that Ireland entered the 1990s as a small country with its own currency and a decade later it was a major player adopting the Euro. Ireland's path to this single currency was rife with hurdles, such as the Irish Pound being forced to break parity with the UK Sterling Pound in 1979 and the 1993 Exchange Rate Mechanism Crisis, but ultimately the path to a single currency was crucial in

Parallel to these developments in Ireland, the United States was experiencing its own boom years. The internet bubble created a wealth of tech companies with rapidly expanding portfolios who were eager to tap into the European market. In Ireland, these companies found the ideal conditions for expansion. Ireland's educated workforce, low corporate taxation rate, and political neutrality within the security of the EU made it an appealing location for foreign investment. However, it wasn't just Ireland's political posturing that attracted the attention of American companies. With English as the native language, a mild climate, and direct flights already in operation to many major cities in the US, Ireland was the ideal location in practical terms as well as political. Among the British Isles, Ireland offered a considerably lower cost of living than the UK, and because it was comparatively underdeveloped, both land and construction costs were lower than similar UK locations. Consequently, Ireland's political, practical, and financial advantages were impossible for companies to ignore. Numerous major American companies (e.g. Intel, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Netscape, Gateway, etc.) all chose Ireland for their European headquarters, each investing billions of dollars and together employing over 100,000 Irish workers.

*Technology companies, especially American technology companies, were emerging as central players in Ireland's economy. Over the past decade, [1986-1996] employment at U.S.-owned companies had increased by 44 percent – four times as fast as overall employment growth in non-Irish firms – and now accounted for almost half of the jobs at foreign-owned businesses in Ireland. [...] Soon, 40 percent of the computer software sold in Europe would come from Ireland.*²⁵⁹

supporting the Celtic Tiger economy. This is discussed in great detail in David J. Lynch's *When the Luck of the Irish Ran Out*.

²⁵⁹ Lynch, *Luck Ran Out*, 83.

Ireland's shift from a protectionist agricultural state to a globalized technology center was rapid and direct. Intel's 55-acre campus outside Dublin had previously been a stud farm; Hewlett-Packard's site was formerly a meat packing facility.²⁶⁰ The swift change in Ireland's economy brought about a corresponding shift in Ireland's culture. As personal income and property values went through the roof, church attendance slowly began to drop off and American media permeated Ireland. The cultural change was so significant that the aforementioned sociologist Father Harry Bohan founded the Céifin Centre for Values-Led Change in 1998 in order to "reflect, debate and direct values-led change in Irish society."²⁶¹ Bohan's contributions were recognized to be of national importance several years later when the Taoiseach named him to the Irish Taskforce on Active Citizenship, whose mission it was to organize "a nationwide consultation process [and] gather views on what it means to be an active citizen in 21st century Ireland."²⁶² According to Taoiseach Bertie Ahern:

*In essence, Active Citizenship is about shared values and price of place and country. In the past we took some of these things for granted, but in today's World we need to invest more time and effort in articulating and nurturing these values.*²⁶³

Essentially, the Celtic Tiger had made such an impact on Irish culture that there developed a national need for an interrogation and redefinition of Ireland's "shared values" and "price of place". The Active Citizenship Taskforce and Fr. Bohan's Céifin Centre are just two popular examples of how people sought to reflect on the Celtic Tiger's cultural impact. Another

²⁶⁰ Lynch, *Luck Ran Out*, 59.

²⁶¹ Fr. Bohan, *Freedom*, 5.

²⁶² The Wheel, "Taskforce on Active Citizenship," last accessed May 9, 2013.

<http://www.wheel.ie/content/taskforce-active-citizenship>

²⁶³ Bertie Ahern, *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship* (Dublin: Secretariat of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007), 5.

major forum for this exploration was the theatre, the same place where Irish artists had previously wrestled with cultural paradigms such as emigration and the Troubles, each explored in the previous two chapters.

4.1.2 Celtic Tiger Theatre

Just as Ireland's economy was expanding and its cultural tastes were changing, so too was its theatrical landscape. In 1995 the Dublin Fringe Festival was established, which would become an important breeding ground for new Irish theatrical work. In 2000, the Project Arts Centre opened its new building that featured two purpose-built performance spaces. Located on prime real estate in the middle of Temple Bar in Dublin's city center, the Project further enabled small companies to mount productions without the traditional vetting process found at theatres such as the Abbey.

Ireland's intellectual and critical theatre infrastructure also developed rapidly throughout the Celtic Tiger period. The Irish Theatre Institute (ITI) was established in 1994 to "support and acknowledge the achievements and ambition of Irish theatre artists and companies across all aspects of theatre practice."²⁶⁴ The ITI developed a centralized online forum and database to facilitate interaction and collaboration between Irish theatre practitioners, and it also published the Irish Playography Project, a comprehensive online archive of all plays produced in Ireland, which has proven invaluable in encouraging and enabling the field of Irish theatre scholarship.

²⁶⁴ Irish Theatre Insitute, http://www.irishtheatreinstitute.com/page.aspx?t=what_we_do&contentid=50 last accessed April 23, 2013. Formerly called Ireland's "Theatre Shop."

Further, Irish Theatre Magazine was founded in 1998 in order to chronicle the rapidly expanding theatre scene, and its mission soon expanded to include peer-reviewed theatre reviews for all professional theatre productions staged in Ireland. Thus, the Celtic Tiger helped to usher in a new phase for Irish theatre history, both in terms of its production and its critical engagement.

Written at the height of the Celtic Tiger in 2000, Fintan O'Toole's seminal article "Irish Theatre: The State of the Art" makes the claim that there "is no dramatic conflict between tradition and modernity in Ireland any more" suggesting instead that modernity has already won the battle in Celtic Tiger Ireland.

*If we take Daniel Corkery's famous definition of traditional Irishness as being constituted by three things – land, nationality, and religion – then it is clear that each of the parts is under immense stress. In relation to land, even rural Ireland now is either more or less industrialized or more or less marginalized. [...] Nationality has become more a question than an answer, more a quest than a point of departure. Religion, far from being a serene guarantor of traditional values, it itself the site of a bitter battlefield. Insofar as it still exists, traditional Ireland is alienated, angular, and embattled...*²⁶⁵

O'Toole finishes his division of Ireland's distinct theatrical periods by suggesting that the final major shift in Irish theatre took place alongside the Celtic Tiger economy:

*In the plays of the emerging third phase [of Irish Theatre,] there are isolated worlds, closed entities [...] Ireland is not one story anymore, and we cannot expect single theatrical metaphors for it. Instead of one story and many theatrical images of it, we are moving towards a dramatisation of the fragments rather than the whole thing, the whole society.*²⁶⁶

He continues his assessment by pointing out that this third phase of Irish theatre is readily identifiable by looking at how foreign characters are depicted. "You can mark the shift I'm talking about simply by noting that when outsiders intrude on the worlds of these plays, they are

²⁶⁵ O'Toole, "State of the Art," 54.

²⁶⁶ O'Toole, "State of the Art," 54.

immediately obvious as outsiders, just as they would be in Synge and O'Casey."²⁶⁷ In other words, as Irish theatre shifts from one period to the next, foreign characters again play an integral role.

This study began by considering the significance of the "second phase" of Irish theatre history, roughly spanning from 1960 through the 1980s. This final chapter will now focus on the third, and current, phase of Irish theatre production; the explosion of new theatre work in Ireland brought on by the Celtic Tiger which is at once fragmented and diverse, where foreigner characters – Americans in particular – have played a pivotal role in recontextualizing the theatrical and cultural landscape of a changing nation.

As O'Toole has emphasized, the final era of Irish Theatre is characterized in part by its fragmentation, and this chapter will deal with three such fragments of Celtic Tiger Ireland and the corresponding American characters that are used to dramatize changes occurring within Ireland. First, Hollywood takes center stage as contemporary Irish playwrights Marie Jones and Martin McDonagh create theatrical portrayals of Ireland's love/hate relationship with American popular culture. Next, Brian Friel returns to the Abbey's mainstage with a inside look at how American institutions seek to appropriate Irish creative work, and how Irish artists are, in turn, forced to reevaluate how "value" might be ascertained. Finally, Tom Murphy continues his unyielding look in to Ireland's history with emigration, and how it suddenly changes when the Celtic Tiger begins to lure emigrants back "home" again.

As the framework surrounding America has shifted from a place of refuge to a place of influence, so too have the characters that embody America in Irish drama. Earlier American characters were typically defined in terms of their hybridity; either as hyphenated Irish-

²⁶⁷ O'Toole, "State of the Art," 56.

Americans (e.g. Aunt Lizzy, Cass Maguire) or as qualified professionals (e.g. Friel's Dr. Dodds, Behan's Dr. Foster.) This later wave of Celtic Tiger Americans has become more generically American, as they represent the significant cultural influence that the United States has exerted on Ireland during its economic expansion. While a few still cling to their hyphenated identity, such as Tom Murphy's returned-emigrants, they too quickly realize that they have become simply American, rather than Irish-American, because they no longer fit in the Ireland that they have been calling "home."

In my earlier work dealing with this phenomena I have labeled these outsider characters as "American-American" suggesting that their "primary function is to embody a sense of America, whether as a cultural, political, or philosophical other."²⁶⁸ Their otherness is a central point in Fintan O'Toole's defining of the third phase of Irish theatre, and this chapter reiterates and continues both of these ideas, demonstrating that Ireland's recent use of American characters in the theatre is indicative of America's cultural influence throughout the Celtic Tiger era.

²⁶⁸ Thomas B. Costello, "The American Hyphen in Modern Irish Theatre: Irish-, Academic-, and American-Americans in the Plays of Brian Friel and Beyond" in ed. Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. *Portrayals of Americans on the World Stage* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), 98-118.

4.2 THE AMERICAN LENS: HOLLYWOOD IN IRELAND

Alongside the American business investment in Ireland came American culture. As technology companies were establishing headquarters in Ireland, they also helped to lay the foundation for a technological infrastructure to support and expand their businesses. This would lead to widespread adoption of the internet, and Ireland's newfound tech prowess was showcased as a national source of pride. This is evidenced in towns such as Ennis in County Clare, which received a grant to become Ireland's official "Information Age Town" in 1997. The small town was thus thrust into the information age, with over 4000 computers installed for its 18,000 residents, along with a dedicated high-speed ISDN line, and numerous other technological advancements that were aimed at making Ennis the "Largest Community Technology Project in the World."²⁶⁹

The widespread adoption of the Internet meant that access to diverse, and increasingly American, media became commonplace, continuing the trend of American cultural influence that had begun with television and film.²⁷⁰ Television had entered the Irish market in the 1960s, and by the mid 1990s the cable television infrastructure reached most of the island, allowing Irish viewers around-the-clock access to American television in syndication.²⁷¹ Film had also been a mainstay of Irish popular entertainment, and the Celtic Tiger brought with it the American idea of megaplexes, massive high-tech movie houses with 20+ screens. The programming on those

²⁶⁹ Helen McQuillan, "Ennis Information Age Town: Virtuality Rooted in Reality" in ed. G. S. Bisnovaty-Kogan *Digital Cities II: Computational and Sociological Approaches* (Berlin: Springer, 2002), 139.

²⁷⁰ Note that the changes in media and technology that Ireland experienced during the Celtic Tiger are part of the larger framework of globalization. Many other nations, the US included, experienced similar shifts, although I would argue that Ireland's was more precipitous, amplified by the Celtic Tiger economy.

²⁷¹ John Horgan, *Irish Media: A Critical History Since 1922* (London: Routledge, 2001), 88.

screens came predominantly from Hollywood, as Ireland's film industry only truly began to emerge alongside the Celtic Tiger in the 1990s.

Throughout this period it must also be considered that Ireland was in the midst of a process of secularization that had begun with the mid-century shift examined earlier in this study. While the Catholic Church had once dominated Ireland's cultural and political spheres, the Celtic Tiger would essentially end Rome's influence over Dublin. According to one report:

*At the time of independence in 1922, some 60 percent of the population was engaged in agriculture, [...with] 95 per cent practicing and believing Catholic at that time. In 2006, eighty-four years later, only about 7 per cent worked on the land. [...] Ireland went from being a peasant society to being a suburban information technology country with no intervening stage of smokestack industry. Perhaps 50 per cent of the population go rarely or never to religious services.*²⁷²

A particularly significant example of the collusion between Rome and Irish media, and the decline thereof, is the Irish Film Institute (IFI). Initially called the National Film Institute, the organization was founded in 1943 under the auspices of being the “moral guardian of the cinema-going public” aiming to stop “what Pope Pius XI described in his 1936 Papal Encyclical, *Vigilanti Cura*, as ‘the school of corruption’ in the motion picture industry.”²⁷³

The IFI broke its link with the Catholic Church in 1982 and shifted its focus to “bringing a broader and deeper experience of cinema to audiences of all ages and abilities.” Since then, it has opened the Irish Film Centre in Temple Bar, and has become the primary organization responsible for enabling Ireland's burgeoning film industry.

²⁷² Tom Garvin, “Turmoil in the Sea of Faith: The Secularization of Irish Social Culture” in ed. Thomas E. Hackey *Turning Points in Twentieth-Century Irish History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 165.

²⁷³ Irish Film Institute website: <http://www.ifi.ie/about/history/>

With the Celtic Tiger gaining momentum in the mid-1990s, film becomes a focal point at the crossroads between Ireland and America. This examination begins in 1996, as the delicate balance of American cultural persuasion gets weighed against traditional Irish values in the highly complementary, Hollywood-centric, docudramas by Martin McDonagh and Marie Jones. *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *Stones in His Pockets* are two early Celtic Tiger plays that stage American stereotypes borne out of Hollywood while wrestling with Ireland's changing cultural landscape.

Both plays rest largely on Hollywood iconography and make use of actual milestones in Irish-American filmmaking history: Robbie Flaherty's *The Man of Aran* (1934) and John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952). In constructing their plays around American film companies shooting on location in Ireland, McDonagh and Jones capture the extent to which Irish communities are affected by and obsessed with the American filmmakers. McDonagh's title character vies for an Irish role in an American film, while Jones features a Hollywood cast and crew who have come to capture Ireland on film. In both instances the hyper-American film industry is portrayed as at odds with the reality of Ireland and its people, and the plays weigh authenticity against capitalism during a period when Ireland is doing much of the same. Consequently, the plays found resounding popular success in their satire, helping to make the playwrights household names in Celtic Tiger Ireland.

4.2.1 Martin McDonagh: *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996)

JOHNNYPATEENMIKE: From Hollywood, California, in America they're coming, led be a Yank be the name of Robert Flaherty, one of the most famous and richest Yanks there is. Coming there to Inishmore they're coming and why are they coming? I'll tell you why they're coming. To go making a moving picture film will cost o'er a million dollars, will be show throughout the world, will show

*life how it's lived on the islands, will make film stars of whosoever should choose to take part in it and will take them back to Hollywood then and be giving them a life free of work [...] The Man of Aran they're going calling the film and Ireland musn't be such a bad place so if the Yanks want to come to Ireland to do their filming.*²⁷⁴

The Cripple of Inishmaan is a purely fictional play that revolves around a major milestone in real “Irish” filmmaking history. The action is set in 1934, using the filming of Robbie Flaherty's *The Man of Aran* as a backdrop for the story.²⁷⁵ When the small community on Inishmaan hears about the filming, everybody wants to be involved in one way or another. Billy, the title character, is crippled and he is endlessly ridiculed for his disability throughout the play. However, one of the American film producers soon invites Billy to Hollywood for a screen test because they have an upcoming movie that is set to feature a young crippled Irishman, a description Billy fits perfectly. Knowing that he is a shoe-in for the role, Billy has no reservations about severing all ties with his family and abandoning Ireland in favor of an American future. Unlike the theatrical emigrants before him, there is no American-wake for Billy; he simply disappears to Hollywood to seek his fame and fortune.

A recurring theme throughout the play is that “Ireland mustn't be such a bad place, so, if the Yanks want to come here to do their filming.”²⁷⁶ The sentence is reiterated no fewer than three times in the play, by various characters, and it demonstrates one of the key side-effects of

²⁷⁴ Martin McDonagh, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1999), 10-11.

²⁷⁵ Robbie Flaherty's *The Man of Aran* (1934) is one of Flaherty's “man vs. nature” docudramas. It was filmed on location in the Aran Islands and featured local islanders while focusing on the premodern conditions of rural Ireland. Much acclaimed at the time, it would later come under significant scrutiny for its romanticism and historical inaccuracy. Although Flaherty was American, the film was originally produced by Gainsborough Pictures in the UK, a detail that McDonagh revised in order to depict the film as a purely American appropriation of Irish culture.

²⁷⁶ McDonagh, *Cripple*, 15.

the tremendous amounts of foreign direct investment that fueled the Celtic-Tiger. The play premiered in 1996 and found considerable success playing in Ireland in the years that followed, precisely as the effects of American capital were reinforcing Ireland's pride-of-place. The countless American tech companies that invested in Ireland could've sent the money to anywhere in Europe, but they didn't, they chose Ireland: "It mustn't be such a bad place, so, if the Yanks want to come here..."

McDonagh, on the other hand, employs the phrase as an ironic joke; his Ireland of 1934 is a cruel and bigoted place, and Flaherty chose Ireland for his fictional documentary because of its harshness, not its endearing quality of life. Thus, the characters' logic is backwards. They believe that an American is filming them because they're so great, whereas in reality the American is filming them because their lifestyle is so curiously primitive. The American propensity to appropriate and commercialize Irish culture is evident in the later plays in this chapter as well, and it becomes a significant through-line within Celtic Tiger Theatre.

McDonagh's title cripple, Billy Claven, does succeed in escaping to the United States for his screen test, and the next time he appears on stage is for his death; the audience watches him die from tuberculosis while "shivering alone on a chair in a squalid Hollywood hotel room."²⁷⁷ The audience soon learns that Billy's horrible death was, in fact, his rehearsing for the screen test, and yet despite the moving death scene, the film company decides to cast a healthy American boy to play Billy's part. Billy is left defeated by his American experience:

BILLY: I'd hoped to disappear forever to America. And I would've too, if they'd wanted me there. If they'd wanted me for the filming. But they didn't want me. A blonde lad from Fort Lauderdale they hired instead of me. He wasn't crippled at

²⁷⁷ McDonagh, *Cripple*, 47.

*all, but the Yank said 'Ah, better to get a normal fella who can act crippled than a crippled fella who can't fecking act at all.' Except he said it ruder.*²⁷⁸

He has no choice but to return to Inishmaan, consequently crushed and dismayed. Unable to deal with the rejection Billy fabricates a story about turning down the role after it was offered to him. Despite having been gone for just four months Billy is branded “Irish-American” upon his return, begins telling lies of his success in the States, and his aunts constantly scrutinize his changed vocabulary. He has become a quintessential Irish-American.

Although no entirely American characters per se appear on stage, their actions offstage drive the action of the play. In rejecting Billy for the role of the Irish cripple, it is the anonymous business-minded Americans who crush Billy's one chance at success. In less than half a year *The Cripple of Inishmaan* depicts a complete failed emigration cycle, where Billy not only is forced to retreat to his place in Ireland, but in doing so he brings home the added burden of his newly hyphenated branding. In a 1990s Ireland where American companies were employing a significant percentage of Irish workers, McDonagh uses history to demonstrate that the American interest in Ireland has been longstanding, and not always productive, despite what it might currently seem.

McDonagh's *Cripple of Inishmaan* is unique in this study for a number of reasons. Chief among them is that the play does not feature any true American characters on stage. Further, McDonagh himself is an outlier. Although he is an Irish citizen and travels on his Irish passport, he was born in the UK, and many of his plays, *Cripple* included, have been workshopped in the

²⁷⁸ McDonagh, *Cripple*, 58.

UK before being brought to Ireland.²⁷⁹ McDonagh likes to bend the rules of engagement in his work, and to put it simply, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is too directly related to this project to ignore.

Throughout the play, action is driven by specific American characters who never appear in the flesh. By keeping the foreigners out of the lights, McDonagh ascribes a powerful anonymity onto them. Audiences cannot engage directly with the Americans, so instead scrutiny falls upon the Irish characters who do appear on the stage. The Americans remain in a position of influence, but are intangible, like Godot. This differs radically from the previous plays examined. When Brian Friel introduced the character of Ben Burton as the lone true American in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* over 30 years prior, he was depicted as a quiet man who seemed to be nothing but helpful. It was the Irish-Americans around him, such as Gar's aunt Lizzy, who appeared the most lost through their displacement, and Mr. Burton was notable only for his kindness and willingness to help, as if he, himself, personified America. Indeed, when Lizzy loses control of herself and breaks down, it is Ben who is the first to offer help.

In McDonagh's Ireland of 1996-cum-1934, the situation has reversed. McDonagh's Irish characters are now eager to help the anonymous Americans, while the Yanks are only interested in profits. Flaherty, the Hollywood director, is eager to employ Irish peasants as "actors" but only when their Irishness promises a financial reward. For example, McDonagh's inhabitants of Inishmaan are so flattered by the appearance of a production company that they fail to notice the

²⁷⁹ McDonagh's nationality is an enduring point of conversation and conflict. For more on this, see three articles collected in eds. Lillian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories* (Dublin, Carysfort Press: 2006): Aidan Arrowsmith "Genuinely Inauthentic: McDonagh's Postdiasporic Irishness" 236-45; Sara Keating "Is Martin McDonagh an Irish Playwright?" 281-294; and Karen Vandeveld "Martin McDonagh's Irishness: Icing on the Cake?" 349-362.

imbalance of the budget: Their neighbor Colman King will receive \$100/wk to “star” in the film, yet its budget far exceeds a million dollars. Billy eventually learns this the hard way, as he travels to Hollywood only to learn that the producers would rather cast a healthy boy from Florida to play the part of an Irish cripple. To put it into Celtic Tiger terms, American businesses were happy to invest in Ireland, but only because of a unique combination of low costs (taxes, wages, and development) and high convenience (security, location, education, etc.). Billy’s lesson would ultimately become anachronistically appropriate; when the Celtic Tiger economy collapsed, many foreign companies shuttered their Irish operations and moved on to their next project.

McDonagh also questions the representation of Irishness in popular American media. Billy’s hotel-room death scene is at once a collage of Irish-American clichés and theatrical trick intended to fool audiences into believing that Billy has met his demise in Hollywood. However, in the next scene, Billy shows up alive and well behind the movie screen during the Inishmaan premiere of *The Man of Aran*. Both literally and figuratively he emerges from the grasps of Hollywood, and the audience has been trapped by McDonagh’s lesson on representation:

His use of Flaherty’s Man of Aran in The Cripple of Inishmaan provides audiences with an extended tutorial in how to interpret Irish culture. [...] Those audiences will then be embarrassed by the discovery that what they had taken to be reality was a screen test for a Hollywood movie, and that Billy was not only unsuccessful in his attempts to gain the part for which he had been auditioning, but also contemptuous of the ‘arse-faces lines they had me reading for them.’ McDonagh thus draws audiences’ attention to the need to avoid accepting mediated images of Ireland uncritically.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Patrick Lonergan, “Nevermind the Shamrocks: Globalizing Martin McDonagh” in ed. Richard Rankin Russell *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook* (London: Routledge, 2007), 165.

Not only did Billy fail in Hollywood, but his entire American experience there is based around falsehood. Billy, the authentic Irishman who is actually crippled, could not secure a role playing an Irish cripple in an American film. McDonagh uses this to highlight the problems endemic in American representations of Ireland, as further evidenced by his integration of the landmark film *The Man of Aran*. It becomes a prime example of American filmmaking in Ireland; the quest to create an authentic fiction. The now infamous shark-hunting scene²⁸¹ from the film is brought to back to life in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* so the townspeople can scoff and throw eggs at it. With a bit of tongue-in-cheek humor, McDonagh is able to frame the influential film within and against another rendition of those same Aran islanders, highlighting the wild discrepancy between the real and the fictional, all within the world of his own fictional play.

Finally, there is an enduring irony inherent in McDonagh's collusion of *Cripple* with *Man of Aran*. As the inhabitants of Inishmaan gather to view the film, one cannot but help to notice that these are the subjects of Flaherty's documentary, now jovially gathered to watch a film... about themselves. As critic J. F. Dean correctly states:

*McDonagh retains the insularity of the West, but rejects its association with purity or authenticity. The West may still be a lonesome place and a closed world, but it is also saturated by globalized media that characters embrace and, in fact, take as their moral compass.*²⁸²

²⁸¹ As previously mentioned, Flaherty's *Man of Aran* met with significant criticism regarding its factual inaccuracy. The greatest fabrication was its climatic scene featuring primitive Irish islanders hunting a basking shark for its fat. According to most sources, the practice hadn't taken place in Ireland in generations, perhaps centuries, and Flaherty's film suggested that it was a contemporary practice. The topic of Flaherty's creative license would become the subject for a 1978 investigative documentary: *How the Myth was Made: A Study of Robert Flaherty's Man of Aran* produced and directed by George Stoney.

²⁸² Joan Fitzpatrick Dean, "Martin McDonagh's Stagecraft" in ed. Richard Rankin Russell *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook* (London: Routledge, 2007), 28.

Thus, McDonagh's theatrical journey back to 1934 in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* could be viewed as a docudrama much like *The Man of Aran*. Both chronicle a conflicted, and at times false, rendition of Irish history. However, in his fictional snapshot of the beginning of Hollywood's influence on Ireland, McDonagh might be telling the more authentic story.

4.2.2 Marie Jones: *Stones in His Pockets* (1996/1999)

*Marie Jones has great fun with the greedy, immoral world of American film making, creating, with wit and relish, a scenario with which Ireland has become very familiar.*²⁸³

Stones in His Pockets is often critically regarded as something of a companion piece to *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, and for good reason. The two plays emerged within months of one another, both offer satirical perspectives on significant Irish-American films, and both catapulted their respective playwrights into popular success. Marie Jones's *Stones* actually predated McDonagh's work by three months, premièring at the Lyric Theatre in August of 1996 as part of the West Belfast Festival. However, Jones's DoubleJoint Theatre Company continued to tour and workshop the play in small venues throughout Northern Ireland – much as her earlier Charabanc company had done – and the finished piece finally found its stride in 1999 with runs in Dublin

²⁸³ Jane Coyle, "Juggernaut Rolls Into Town: *Stones in His Pockets*, West Belfast Festival," review of *Stones in His Pockets* by Marie Jones, in *The Irish Times*, August 8, 1996, 6.

and the Edinburgh Fringe before being picked up for production in the West End and on Broadway.²⁸⁴

By any popular measure *Stones* is far and away Jones's most successful work, and the play's extended runs in the West End and on Broadway, each followed by a modicum of awards, are testament to its broad appeal; it is simply "fascinating, moving, and hilarious" according to the *London Independent's* cover quote on the published edition of the script.²⁸⁵ Because the work benefitted from extensive workshopping and revision between 1996 and 1999 in the hands of Jones, director Ian McElhinney, and actors Seán Campion and Conleth Hill, this study will consider *Stones* as a later Celtic Tiger play than *Cripple*. The distinction is minor, but significant; whereas McDonagh's work is concurrent with the first wave of Celtic Tiger expansion, Jones's is more clearly reacting against what had, by 1999, become a well-understood cultural and economic paradigm.²⁸⁶

Stones in His Pockets owes some of its success to the play's unconventional form. Although the play features 14 distinct characters, Jones charges two actors with the responsibility of playing all of the roles. The actors never leave the stage, and aside from shoes, never change costumes, so the actors must make rapid adjustments in voice and physicality to shift from character to character. This happens alarmingly often in the play, often many times per minute, with the actors playing all sides of conversations. Undoubtedly this theatrical trickery played a

²⁸⁴ The play is often cited as a 1999 work, despite it playing to audiences first in 1996. The script, published by Applause, listing the original production date as 1999, presumably in reference to the revised text as published.

²⁸⁵ Marie Jones, *Stones in His Pockets* (New York: Applause Books, 2001), front cover.

²⁸⁶ However, due to its inception in 1996, I consider the play something of a temporal hybrid, hence the 1996/1999 reference in the title, and it's location before Brian Friel's 1997 *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*

large role in the production's success; it is demanding on the actors, but if successfully executed, well deserving of praise.

Marie Jones' *Stones in His Pockets* also relies upon many of the same thematic tactics as McDonagh's *Cripple*, this time recalling another milestone in Irish-American filmmaking: John Ford's 1952 *The Quiet Man*. The primary setting of *Stones* has to do with the filming of a new American feature-film that is called *The Quiet Valley*. Although Jones does not call it a sequel, the film is being shot on location in County Kerry, and the American producers are obviously looking to bank on the success of *The Quiet Man*. This repetition in title and location demonstrate the stagnant framework of Hollywood's Irish-making, implying that not only are producers looking to make those stereotypical films, but that audiences want to see them. Jones drives this point home further by allowing the audience a glimpse into dialect training and market share; what follows is the conversation between two of the play's American characters, the leading-lady Caroline Giovanni, and her dialect coach John:

CAROLINE: *I will speak to my faaather, no . . . I will speak to my fetherr . . . shit.*

JOHN: *No Caroline put your tongue behind your teeth.*

CAROLINE: *Thaaather.*

JOHN: *No . . . No, your bottom teeth.*

CAROLINE: *Faaather . . . fettthe . . . fatttther . . . shit . . . these people will think it sounds ridiculous.*

JOHN: *Don't worry . . . Caroline . . . Ireland is only one per cent of the market.*²⁸⁷

Jones demonstrates the irony of an American film company shooting on location in Ireland for authenticity, yet featuring American stars playing the leading roles, and with relatively little attention paid to making the Americans believable in their roles. As critic Mel Gussow points out in the introduction to *Stones in His Pockets*:

²⁸⁷ Jones, *Stones*, 21.

*Subtly the playwright offers commentary on the Hollywood invasion, the susceptibility (and the shrewdness) of the natives and the universal craving for a chance to stroll in the spotlight. Hollywood may be a corruptive influence, but there are those who are eager to be exploited. The subtext of the play is, in the author's words, "the whole disintegration of rural Ireland."*²⁸⁸

The main action of the play centers around Jake and Charlie, two local lads who have been hired as extras for the filming of *The Quiet Valley*, a Hollywood motion picture sentimentally looking back at Ireland's pastoral past. The American production company also hired several other locals, including Mickey, whose claim to fame is having been an extra in *The Quiet Man* with John Wayne. Jones highlights class inequality within Ireland by featuring two aspirational Dubliners who have been selected as assistant directors on the film. The focal point in the play, literally, is an American character, the movie star Caroline Giovanni, who is lusted after by the locals and always under a close security escort. A final local Irishman, Sean, was turned down for extra work due to a fondness for drugs, and it is his bitter run-in with Caroline in the local pub that propels the play into action.

As the drama unfolds, Sean is looking for a fix and becomes increasingly envious of the American film crew, who he knows have copious amounts of cocaine. An attempt to introduce himself to the untouchable Caroline has Sean thrown out of his local pub, devastating him and eventually leading him to commit suicide. A local farmer sees Sean from a distance the next morning, as he fills his pockets with stones and wades out into the ocean. The resultant wake and funeral in the small town clash with the film's tight shooting schedule; the American producers and Irish ADs fear the Irish weather and insist upon pushing forward with filming, refusing to grant the local extras a day off to mourn. This infuriates the locals, leading to the main conflict of

²⁸⁸ Mel Gussow, introduction to *Stones in His Pockets* by Marie Jones (New York: Applause Books, 2001), 7.

the play, a standoff that pits the local extras against the Irish assistant directors, who resolutely support the American producers' best interests.

Throughout the play, Charlie and Jake bear witness to all of the above while filling various and sundry roles as extras working on the film. Jake is simply there to make the £40/day, as his previous emigration to the States has failed miserably, while Charlie makes the rookie mistake of believing that his participation as an extra in *The Quiet Valley* might help him pave the way to success in Hollywood. All along, he has a movie script in his back pocket that he shows to anyone and everyone, only to be turned down again and again.

Jake and Charlie eventually find an outlet for their frustrations with the American producers. Fed up with the situation and woefully aware that Hollywood will only ever allow the Irish to play insignificant extra roles in "Irish" films, Jake and Charlie decide to write their own new screenplay: the true story of a lad who killed himself because of a film being shot in Ireland. They're calling it *Stones in His Pockets*.

Jones uses this clever reversal to end the play with a look at Hollywood film titles specifically. The similarity of the fictional film's title, *The Quiet Valley*, to its historical precedent, *The Quiet Man*, echoes that of McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan*'s indebtedness to *The Man of Aran*. Both draw attention to Hollywood's desire to market an authentic Irish cultural fiction, regardless of how authentic that fiction may or may not be. Jones follows this idea through one step further than McDonagh, by weaving a discussion of film titles into the conclusion of her play. As Jake and Charlie present their idea to the film director, Clem, their sales pitch is brought to an end with:

CLEM: [...] oh by the way do you have a title for it?

JAKE: Yeah... Stones in His Pockets.

CLEM: What do you think of that Aisling, as a title for a movie.
AISLING: Doesn't say much . . . not very catchy . . . a bit nondescript.
*CLEM: This girl is learning well... right Aisling lets move.*²⁸⁹

Most notably, the final blow is delivered not by Clem, the director, but by Aisling, the Irish assistant director who Jones labels as “young, pretty, anxious to impress those above her, no interest in those beneath.”²⁹⁰ Aisling and her compatriot Simon, “an ambitious Dublin 4 type” are both Irish, but have decidedly American aspirations. This is significant; every other character in the play is provided a discreet description, but Aisling and Simon are defined by their type: Dublin 4. “Dublin 4” or simply “D4” is a broadly pejorative term applied to affluent, typically young, adults from Dublin whose style, speech patterns, and lifestyle is characterized by entitlement and profound American influence. The term has its roots in an affluent suburban area in south Dublin – the postcode “Dublin 4” – however in popular usage during the Celtic Tiger “D4” has come to represent a type, or subculture, regardless of the actual address.

For instance, a brief survey of UrbanDictionary.com lists numerous colloquial definitions of D4, all citing similar American attributes as the defining characteristics of a “D4 type.” Examples include:

- *an upper middle class area in Dublin, Ireland where a contrived [sic] posh accent is often used [...] it borrows from middle American [...] which is put on to make them feel more important.*
- *Abercrombie and Fitch hoodies, or other American branded hoodies...*
- *Posh and extremely upmarket area of south Dublin [...] filled with pretentious capitalist wankers who speak with a shit proxy D4 accent that has its origins in that annoying American teenage Californian accent, 'like whatever.'*
- *They have cultivated an accent similar to posh Americans...*

²⁸⁹ Jones, *Stones*, 91-2.

²⁹⁰ Jones, *Stones*, 14.

- *They also like a lot of [American] t.v. shows, which they will talk about endlessly the next day as if these people are real. These shows include: Dawson's Creek, Friends, OC, and Lost.*²⁹¹

Thus, the cultural reference that Jones relies upon in her introductory stage directions is a very specific Celtic Tiger stereotype, used to show the corrupting influence of American media on Irish culture. Aisling and Simon seek exclusively to please the American production company, at the expense of the Irish extras whom they command throughout the play.

Earlier in the play Jake and Charlie overhear Simon making a backhanded slight against “the Irish” while trying to cajole the somber locals into dancing in the streets for a crowd scene shortly after Sean’s death:

SIMON: Cut . . . beautiful . . . the Irish know one thing, it's how to dance.

CHARLIE: You would think he wasn't Irish.

JAKE: He just wishes he wasn't.

*SIMON: Yeah mate you're right, because every time you fuck up I get it in the ear from these people . . . ever hear the phrase . . . Irish what do you expect . . . well unfortunately for me they tend to include the whole nation.*²⁹²

Simon’s burning desire to “not be Irish” cuts to the core of Jones’s concerns regarding Celtic Tiger Ireland. While the economic boost brought on by foreign investment was welcome, the cultural dilution has been more problematic. Jones’s harsh critique of the D4 “type” and its latent desire to become American is one of the Celtic Tiger taboos that Jones says are central to

²⁹¹ <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=d4> last accessed April 28, 2013.

²⁹² Jones, *Stones*, 78-9.

her work: “The sort of things we are not supposed to talk about, things that are awful but funny and serious and true.”²⁹³

Her counterpoint to the D4 duo looking to polish away their Irishness is in the one character seeking to embrace Ireland: Caroline, the American movie star. After Caroline is frustrated with her dialect progress, she decides to forgo the advice of her coach and instead visits the local pub to “go native.” There she befriends Jake and invites him back to her room, much to the other characters’ chagrin. Once at the hotel, Jake claims he’s an unpublished Irish poet, and attempts to woo Caroline by reciting a Seamus Heaney poem as his own. Caroline calls him on it, not only does she recognize the verse as belonging to Heaney, but she goes one step further and points out that Jake was reciting it incorrectly:

CAROLINE: You underestimate me, Jake . . . I’m not just here to exploit the beauty of the land, I love it . . . I know the history and the poets.

JAKE: It always works on Irish girls.

*CAROLINE: Maybe you should try a more obscure poet.*²⁹⁴

While Caroline is by no means a laudable character in *Stones*, Jones demonstrates that this cliché of an American movie star actually has a better grasp on Irish poetry than most Irish people do – certainly better than Jake and all his previous “Irish girls.” This echoes Friel’s implementation of a similar scene in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, when Cass delivers a toast *as Gaeilge*²⁹⁵ upon her return to Ireland and her sister-in-law mistakes it for German. Both playwrights suggest that as the Irish have been clamoring to become more American, they are leaving critical pieces of their culture behind, while at the same time Americans (or Irish-

²⁹³ Marie Jones, “Voice of the Ordinary People: Belfast Playwright Marie Jones Talks to Eileen Battersby about where she and her characters are from” in *The Irish Times*, June 24, 1999, p 15.

²⁹⁴ Jones, *Stones*, 42

²⁹⁵ In her native Irish language.

Americans) with initiative have been able to embrace and develop those same fragments of Irish culture abroad. Neither playwright offers an easy fix to this dilemma, but both make a significant point of presenting this taboo aspect of globalization to their Irish audiences.

Ultimately, both Jones and McDonagh use the framework of Hollywood and American characters to question the representation of Ireland in American media, and to examine the effect of American influence on Ireland itself. Instead of the glitz and glamour normally associated with major motion pictures, these plays depict angst and desolation surrounding the filming. In both *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *Stones in His Pockets* the Irish characters adamantly disagree with the content of the films, citing gross errors in the supposedly Irish actions and attitudes represented. Yet despite their disdain for the films, the locals still yearn to be amidst the American producers and actors. The allure is both economic and cultural, the same forces that fuelled the Celtic Tiger and paved the way for these plays to be written.

The final significance of these plays to the early Celtic Tiger period can be found in their endings, after the American characters and influence have left the stage. In both the *Cripple of Inishmaan* and *Stones in his Pockets* the Irish artists decide to turn their backs on America: Billy has left Hollywood, and will spend his last days in Ireland, where he has even secured himself a promising date with an Irish girl. Charlie and Jake are confidently moving forward with their film script without the American production company's backing. These final tableau of Ireland standing strong independently is exemplary of the early Celtic Tiger pride that was evident when these plays were written. With the need to emigrate firmly in the past, and indeed many Irish emigrants beginning to return home – as Billy and Jake do – Ireland's economic fortitude provided a fertile ground for these representations of America as a distinctly “other” to develop.

This early phase of Celtic Tiger theatre at once recognizes that Ireland is becoming increasingly fragmented, and at the same time embraces the nation's potential. This apparent disconnect is one of O'Toole's features of "third phase" Irish theatre, and as Friel and Murphy demonstrate in their later Celtic Tiger plays, Americans remain a dominant other in Ireland's theatrical examination of its concurrent globalization and fragmentation.

4.3 BRIAN FRIEL: *GIVE ME YOUR ANSWER, DO!* (1997)

While Hollywood was an easy target for Jones and McDonagh's criticism of American cultural imperialism, Brian Friel set his sights on the American Ivory Tower with his 1997 play *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* The play was never a commercial success, but its thematic material provides excellent fodder for study in two ways: First, the play is about values, both monetary and ethical, and it begs audiences to question how artistic endeavors should be valued. Second, the play is among Brian Friel's most autobiographical pieces of theatre, featuring an aging writer who is faced with deciding where his life's work should go. These two themes intermingle against the background of the Celtic Tiger, where American money is in abundant supply, but at what price?

Friel describes his Irish writer character, Tom Connolly, as "middle-to-late fifties" and dressed "casual-to-shabby."²⁹⁶ The location is once again the fictional town of Ballybeg, County Donegal, and the setting for *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* consists largely of the garden behind "an old and graceless nineteenth-century house, now badly decayed."²⁹⁷ Tom is not a direct analogue for Friel, if only because Friel's success, financial and otherwise, was already a given; as the Celtic Tiger began in the 1990s Friel was in his mid-60s and coming off the tremendous success of *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990). Thus, the playwright's economic situation differs considerably from that of his fictional character, Tom, who stands to significantly improve his financial wellbeing if he decides to sell his work outright to an American university. The Connolly house is in shambles, and Tom desperately needs the money, which is very unlike Friel, who notes the

²⁹⁶ Brian Friel, *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 11.

²⁹⁷ Friel, *Answer*, 16.

scale of his Donegal estate in his diary during the early stages of working on *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*, and between flights back and forth to New York :

*16 May 1996 – Tree men from Ballybofey are here to cut down 160 sitka spruce. 1,300 were planted behind the cottage in 1983. Last month one-third of the alder behind the house were cut down. The alder are stacked up opposite the courtyard.*²⁹⁸

Needless to say Friel's estate is in considerably better shape than Tom Connolly's. However, in ethical and artistic terms, it would be impossible to not see Friel reflected in Tom, a self-conscious Irish writer who is contemplating the assignment of a monetary value on his life's work for the purpose of selling it to an American university.

The pivotal character in *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* is an American academic called David Knight, who has come to Ireland in order to assess the value of the Irish writer's collection. Friel again shies away from specificity with his American character, only offering that David represents "that university in Texas."²⁹⁹ What Friel does tell the audience is that David, and by proxy his institution in Texas, are actively invested in broadening their archives of Irish work, and a recent such acquisition has been the collection of one of Tom Connelly's colleagues.

Friel doesn't name the university explicitly, but it is well understood that Friel was implicitly referring to the University of Texas at Austin, and specifically to Austin's chief curator Thomas F. Staley. Staley took over as director of the university's special collections in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in 1988, and he placed a new and focused emphasis on acquiring the work of playwrights from the British Isles shortly thereafter. In 1991

²⁹⁸ Brian Friel, "Extracts from a sporadic diary: 1995-1996" in ed. Christopher Murray *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 170.

²⁹⁹ Friel, *Answer*, 14-15.

Staley acquired Tom Stoppard's life work for UT Austin, and in 1993 he purchased David Hare's. In 1996, just one month after Friel sent his draft of *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* to the typist, Staley was featured in a newspaper article confirming that the Ransom Center was "actively pursuing material" from other contemporary Anglophone playwrights, and touting that his institution had amassed "one of the strongest Beckett collections in the world" in addition to considerable archives on James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw, and numerous others.³⁰⁰ Although neither Friel nor Staley have publicly discussed the conversations that did or did not take place between them, if Staley was doing his job, he was doing it in Friel's garden in Co. Donegal.

We cannot yet ascertain exactly how much of *Answer* is fiction and how much is autobiography – at least not until Friel's diaries are released in 2034. However, given the similarities between the characters and their life choices, we can fairly infer that there must be a meaningful overlap between Friel's experience with Staley and Tom Connolly's week spent with David Knight, as the American assessed the Irish writer's work, life, and garden on the Abbey's stage.

If the basic setting and characters for *Answer* sound familiar, it is because visiting professional Americans have created their own niche in Friel's dramatic wheelhouse. While many of his works employ Americans, his earlier 1980 history play *Aristocrats* featured a similar run-down Ballybeg house peopled by aspirational Donegal characters set against an American academic who is studying them and their history for his work in the US. This earlier iteration of Friel's American academic appropriator is Tom Hoffnung, who offers the Irish family a glimmer of hope that their story might live on, despite the family having reached its natural conclusion in

the crumbling Big House. In German, Hoffnung means “hope”, which is all that the American academic can offer Friel’s *Aristocrats* in 1980. If he writes their history, it will live on indefinitely, if he doesn’t, their family lore will be lost with the Big House that is literally decaying around them during the play.

Friel often uses names loaded with meaning, and this holds true in *Answer* as well. It could be argued that Tom Connolly hopes that David Knight, the visiting American academic, will turn out to be his “Knight” in shining armor, by recognizing and rewarding both the artistic and financial value of his oeuvre. On the other hand, Tom’s colleague who has just sold his collection to “that university in Texas” is named Garret Fitzmaurice, bearing a surname that roughly translates via Irish as “an illegitimate son of a seafarer.”³⁰¹ Garret’s *raison d’être* in the play is that he has made what Tom considers an illegitimate deal with an American academic who regularly crosses the sea in order to procure Irish collections. Hence, Fitzmaurice is a particularly apt surname for the character that Tom regards as his primary competitor.

Throughout the play, the Irish characters frequently refer to David jokingly as “Mister God” and the dramatic tension rests upon whether or not the American deity will make an offer to purchase Tom’s work, suggesting both artistic and monetary value. There is also the aspect of competition; is Tom’s writing more or less valuable than the more mainstream work of his colleague and competitor Garret Fitzmaurice? As a struggling artist, Tom is torn between being true to his ideals and the potential financial windfall that could pay his family’s bills, improve their living situation, and possibly help find a more suitable home for their mentally impaired and institutionalized daughter.

³⁰¹ Traditionally the prefix “Fitz” means illegitimate offspring of “_____”, while the Irish for Maurice is Muirgheas, which is variously translated as “seafarer”, “one who travels via the sea”, “sea choice” or “sea taboo.”

David's continual references to Texas indicate that there are American overlords offstage who possess even more power than he does, much like those in Jones and McDonagh's work. When David learns of Tom's secret and unpublished pornographic novels, his interest heightens, and he prepares to make a lucrative offer. Without confirmation from Texas, he cannot mention specific numbers, but David goes out of his way to informally explain to Tom that his institution is heavily invested in the acquisition of Irish material, Tom's included, and that David is under a mandate to "Deliver Ireland":

DAVID: I am expected to provide all the Irish material. It's an order. 'Deliver Ireland, David.' Of course they have no doubt that I can, that I will – they think I'm brilliant at the job. But if I can't deliver every single goddamn name on their goddamn Irish list, Tom, then – in their parlance – you'd never believe the word they use – then I'm 'sterile'! (Laughs) Yes! (Pause)

*I can't afford to lose this job, Tom. I don't mean for money reasons – of course, of course, that too. But what I really mean is – you know – emotionally, the self-esteem [...] (Pause) I'm depending on you, Tom.*³⁰²

In the end, Tom learns that David needs to secure the sale just as much as Tom wants to receive the offer. Thus, acquisition becomes David's art form. Where Ireland's strength is in the generation of creative material, America's forte is on the business side: the pursuit, negotiation, and purchase of material crafted by others. Tom and David stand in for their respective nations, and the resolution of the play then comes when these two worlds collide. David offers Tom "at very least as much as we gave Garret" for his collected work, and with that Tom is artistically sated.³⁰³ It turns out that Tom's struggle regarding the value of his work was not about finances after all, but about worth in a broader sense. With a strong offer from David, Tom has bested his

³⁰² Friel, *Answer*, 75.

³⁰³ Friel, *Answer*, 75.

lone competitor Garret, regained confidence in the quality and integrity of his work, and can thus refuse the offer.

In doing so, Tom has effectively turned the tables on the American materialism fuelling the Celtic Tiger. He gets exactly what he wanted, a lucrative offer validating the considerable worth of his life's work, and he turns it down, refusing to become a willing participant in the export of Ireland's cultural capital. Thus, he has foiled the American system and come out ahead. Similar to the American-centric plays of Jones and McDonagh before him, Friel has given voice to an emergent paradigm of Celtic Tiger theatre, where Irish characters seek, recognize, and then refuse the American acquisition of their own creative ventures.

Give Me Your Answer, Do! remains an important play within Celtic Tiger theatre, thanks to its thematic content and perhaps more importantly its canonical playwright. However, the play has failed to find popular success in production for numerous reasons. Chief among them is that, according to critics, it simply isn't a great play, and that rather than inspiring Celtic Tiger audiences, the obtuse references to a fictional writer's work made it difficult for audiences to truly care about who will control a nonexistent collection of fictional work. Finally, for the premiere of what might be Friel's most autobiographical piece of theatre, he chose to direct *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* himself, a decision that would be questioned by many critics.

Indirect proof of the play's lack of popular success can be found on the cover of the mass-market Plume edition of the script, published in 2000. The editors selected the following four press quotes to flank the title and description of the play:

"Brian Friel is one of our finest dramatists" -Ben Brantley, The New York Times
"Brian Friel is one of the world's leading dramatists." -Variety
"Timeless" -New York Daily News

*“Gripping . . . A play of surpassing beauty and complexity, a lyrical and mysterious creation by a great playwright.” –The Wall Street Journal*³⁰⁴

The first two quotes, one located on each cover, simply proclaim identical broad, if well-deserved, praise for Friel as a playwright, wholly unrelated to *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* Only one quote addresses the play itself, and even its accolades are generic, and pulled from a newspaper most known for its relationship to American financial markets. The enduring appeal of the play seems to simply be that it was written by a famous playwright. That’s why Friel’s agents also branded the cover of the book with the obligatory sales-booster: “Author of *Dancing at Lughnasa*.”

This becomes a lingering contextual irony regarding the production and publication of *Answer* at the Abbey. Reverberations from *Lughnasa* were still in the air as *Answer* entered production, incentivizing Friel, the Abbey, and Friel’s publisher, Gallery Press, to maximize profits from the new play. Consequently, they arranged for the published text to go into print before the premiere of the play, so that paperback volumes could be sold in the lobby during the production. This practice isn’t unheard of for a major playwright’s new work, but it strikes a particularly sour note when said work is intensely concerned with placing artistic integrity before financial gain.

Commercially, *Answer* couldn’t be more different from Jones and McDonagh’s earlier plays criticizing American materialism. Each of the Hollywood-centric plays began small and burst into international popularity, in part because of their sardonic jabs at American filmmaking in Ireland, but also because the Celtic Tiger economy helped to create both a space and an

³⁰⁴ Friel, *Answer*, front and back covers.

audience for such new work. Friel's play, on the other hand, was produced via traditional production channels at the Abbey, incidentally at the same time that the theatre's literary department was rejecting McDonagh's plays. This is a chance coincidence, but demonstrates the importance of the emergent Celtic Tiger theatre scene in Ireland that was developing outside the traditional venues of the Abbey, Gate, and Gaiety, and beyond the reach of their requisite gatekeepers.

I suggest that *Answer* failed to find success in Ireland because the Celtic Tiger economy had reinvented the nation as a new and exciting place, yet everything about Friel's latest work was old. It was a play by a late-career playwright, about a late-career writer who is trying to decide if he should sell out. Friel was responding to the American stronghold on Celtic Tiger Ireland, but not in as dynamic a way as Jones and McDonagh were able to execute. As Fintan O'Toole pointed out with the first line of his *Irish Times* review:

*When writers write about writers, it is often a sign that they need to get out more, that their world has shrunk to the dimensions of their desks. Brian Friel has tended to be the exception. [...] Yet what Faith Healer does, and his new play Give Me Your Answer, Do! at the Abbey, does not, is to embed those concerns in wider, less claustrophobic contexts.*³⁰⁵

The claustrophobia evidenced in the production was in part due to the creative team tasked with mounting the play. Over the years Friel had developed a deep-seeded distrust of theatre directors, calling them, among other things, "interloper(s) with no demonstrable skills" and proclaiming that his work would be far better off without them altogether.³⁰⁶ Consequently, he decided to serve as director for *Answer* and the play suffered much as a restaurant might if its

³⁰⁵ Fintan O'Toole, "Striving to Get a Grip on Myth and Reality" in *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, March 18, 1997, 12.

³⁰⁶ Brian Friel, "Seven Notes for a Festival Program" in ed. Christopher Murray *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 177-178.

head chef were tasked with waiting tables. Although the play was cast with veteran A-list Abbey actors, including Tom Hickey as Tom Connolly and Darragh Kelly as the American David Knight, Friel's vast experience as a playwright could not make up for his ineptitude as a director. Reviews almost unanimously suggest, in the most polite way possible – they are, after all, addressing Ireland's most beloved playwright – that while the play mightn't be Friel's finest, the direction, or lack thereof, played a significant role in sealing the production's popular fate.

*It has to be said that Brian Friel's own direction does little to make up in performance what the play lacks as a text. Most of the energy of the actors seems to go into a reverential concern for the nuances of the words, leaving little behind for the kind of interaction that can convince an audience that these people are reacting, on the spot, to each other.*³⁰⁷

*Last night the performances and text came across with less than the necessary theatrical sense of narrative imperative. A director other than the author might have invested the production with more overt theatricality to carry the action along when, under Brian Friel's direction, it seemed to bog down from time to time.*³⁰⁸

Thus, while Friel was addressing the American acquisition of Irish culture, a paradigmatic problem of the Celtic Tiger, he did so in a way that failed to resonate with contemporary audiences. Jones and McDonagh had grappled with a similar theme – the American *representation* of Irish culture – and their plays found popular success due to their formal attributes: fast-paced, irreverent humor, fragmented and episodic chronology, and generally more radical form. Thus the marriage of content and form helped to secure success for Jones and McDonagh, even if that form, which is heavily influenced by television and film, rests

³⁰⁷ Fintan O'Toole, "Striving to Get a Grip on Myth and Reality" in *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, March 18, 1997, page 12.

³⁰⁸ David Nowlan, "The Ear Atuned but Eye Diverted" in *The Irish Times* Thursday, March 13, 1997, page 14.

somewhat at odds with the content. For better or worse, Celtic Tiger theatre audiences are participants in Ireland's now globalized media exchange, and Friel's languid treatise on literature archives, produced without clear direction, left those same audiences with little reason to engage.

O'Toole concludes his review by addressing the primary failure of the play, not just the production, in term of the popular value of media. The success of Jones and McDonagh could also be ascribed to their plays' featuring Hollywood film tropes that are ingrained in popular culture: *The Man of Aran* and the *Quiet Man* are the bastions of Irish-American filmmaking, readily accessible to all and unabashedly guilty of perpetuating the myth of rural Ireland as an idyllic and pre-modern civilization. *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* on the other hand, says O'Toole,

*hinges on an issue that is hard to get excited about. Since we have no idea what his writing is like, we have too few reasons to care one way or the other whether David is going to buy Tom's papers.*³⁰⁹

Like the Celtic Tiger plays that came before it, Friel's story is about an Irish artist standing up to the American arbiters of meaning. In fact, *Answer* is likely the most triumphant of the three plays discussed thus far, because Tom Connolly reaps the rewards of American academic valuation, without selling out to a foreign archive. However, Irish audiences couldn't be sure exactly what had been saved from America. In *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, audiences are relieved to see that Billy has returned home and won the girl. In *Stones in His Pockets*, audiences know the exact story of Jake and Charlie's forthcoming film script – they've just seen it play out, and on a meta-theatrical level they have also witnessed the success of the story without American intervention. Thus, they recognize the victory when the lads decide to continue the

³⁰⁹ Fintan O'Toole, "Striving to Get a Grip on Myth and Reality," review of *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* by Brian Friel, in *The Irish Times*, Tuesday, March 18, 1997, page 12.

development of their film without the American production company. Friel's *Answer* offers no such tangible evidence for Irish audiences.

Where Friel's Celtic Tiger play does align with its predecessors from McDonagh and Jones, is in its use of a title directly linked to American popular media. While Jones and McDonagh use renditions of film titles to headline their plays, Friel uses the chorus from a popular nineteenth-century American song, "Daisy Bell" by Harry Dacre.³¹⁰ He had done the same with his earlier play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, borrowing the title from the song "California, Here I Come" written by Buddy DeSylva and Joseph Meyer, and popularized by Al Jolson in the musical *Bombo*. In *Philadelphia*, Friel integrated the song so that Gar could sing it in anticipation of his departure. In *Answer*, Friel takes this one step further, and also names Tom's wife after the title character from the namesake song: Daisy. The question that the line "give me your answer, do" begs an answer to is about making a lifelong commitment; in the play it is who will possess Tom's work, in the song it is a marriage proposal:

*Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do,
I'm half crazy all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage,
I can't afford a carriage,
But you'd look sweet upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.*

The song as written by Dacre does not include a response, although numerous later "answer songs" suggest that Daisy's reply might be negative, as Tom's is in the play. In terms of cultural appropriation, it bears mentioning that "Daisy Bell" occupies a special place in the history of music. It was the first song ever to be generated and "sung" by a computer, a feat engineered by Bell Labs developer John L. Kelly in 1962, and immortalized in both the book and

³¹⁰ The song is often incorrectly identified by its catchy final phrase "bicycle built for two."

film renditions of Arthur C. Clark's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.³¹¹ Whether or not Friel intended to suggest a parallel between computers taking over musical production and American universities appropriating Irish writers' work I cannot say. However, Friel does make it abundantly clear that by the end of the play Tom Connolly has no interest in sharing "a bicycle built for two" with any university in Texas; he would much prefer to steer his own path into the future.

In retrospect, the play's lasting impression is simply that of an insecure artist deeply conflicted about the lasting value of his work. As the dramatic action suggests, and Friel's subsequent personal decisions confirm, the correct answer is for an Irish artist to refuse American offers from Texas, and instead bequeath their oeuvre to the National Library of Ireland (NLI). This is the path that Friel chose shortly after *Answer* played to Dublin audiences; he eschewed untold cash offers from American universities and instead bestowed his life's writing to the NLI in exchange for the generous tax benefits offered to him under the Taxes Consolidation Act of 1997.³¹²

The final irony? According to the letter of the law, section 1003.3.a-c, Friel's "heritage collection" had to be assessed as to its current market value. The Irish Revenue Commissioners can perform this appraisal directly, or for more valuable items they can hire an outside expert for proper valuation. Given the undeniable significance of Friel's collected work, it is likely that the Revenue Commissioners chose the latter path, and it is conceivable that they could have reached

³¹¹ "Bell Labs Text-to-Speech Synthesis: Then and Now," last accessed May 8, 2013.
<http://www.bell-labs.com/news/1997/march/5/2.html>

³¹² Helen Hewson, *Collection List No. 73: Brian Friel Papers* (Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 2003), 1.

out to Thomas Staley, the director of the Ransom Center at UT Austin. He was, after all, the world's foremost expert on the acquisition of comparable playwrights' work in the 1990s. Or perhaps the more likely scenario is that Friel already had an offer from Staley among his collected materials, enabling the NLI to ascertain exactly what a University in Texas might pay for an Irish writer's complete body of work.

In 2000, *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* would come full circle and land at the institution that had inspired it. Less than a year after its American premiere in 1999, the play was staged by The University of Texas at Austin's Ransom Center as part of its *Infinite Library* symposium. The production was organized by none other than Thomas F. Staley himself, the living inspiration for Friel's American academic purchaser David Knight. Attendees at the event included numerous notable writers, such as James Salter, Jim Fallows, and British playwright Arnold Wesker among others.³¹³ There is no evidence that Friel was invited to the curious production, but the very next month, in December of 2000, he donated his entire life's work to the National Library of Ireland.

³¹³ Stephen Smith, "Success Upon Success: The Fleur Cowles Flair Symposium 2000" in *Harry Ransom Center Newsletter*, Spring 2001.
<http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/ransomedition/2001/spring/flair.html>

4.4 TOM MURPHY: *THE WAKE* (1998)

This study began with an examination of the profound role that emigration has played in Ireland, as evidenced by the recurrent Irish-American characters that permeate Irish theatre. The study will conclude by revisiting the theme of emigration once again, this time in light of the Celtic Tiger, when Ireland changed so rapidly that many of its emigrants return “home” to a very different country than they had left.

As discussed previously, Tom Murphy has a history of both living as an emigrant and often featuring emigrants in his work, and his 1998 play *The Wake* (1998) provides a perfect bookend to this study. *The Wake* focuses on an Irish-American who returns home to an Ireland that is adrift amidst Celtic Tiger growing pains. Murphy uses the American character as an outsider to explore two ostensibly disparate, yet significant, changes in Ireland. First is the rapid rise in real estate values and the resultant scramble for property, depicted through bitter familial in-fighting over the inheritance and possible sale of a defunct hotel. The other paradigm on Murphy’s plate is the declining cultural and political power of the Catholic Church, as evidenced via a priest in the play who is powerless to intervene in the dramatic action.

The significant amount of foreign capital flowing into Ireland during the Celtic Tiger had a direct influence on real estate values, ultimately changing the market significantly. In fact, the rapid increase in property values had an exponential effect; as prices went up, so did demand for new construction, which led to banks lending more money to developers, etc. During the first half of the Celtic Tiger, there was enough money flowing into Ireland to support the rapid growth. After 2001 however, the situation snowballed due to greed, corruption, and unchecked banking, leading to the massive crash of 2008.

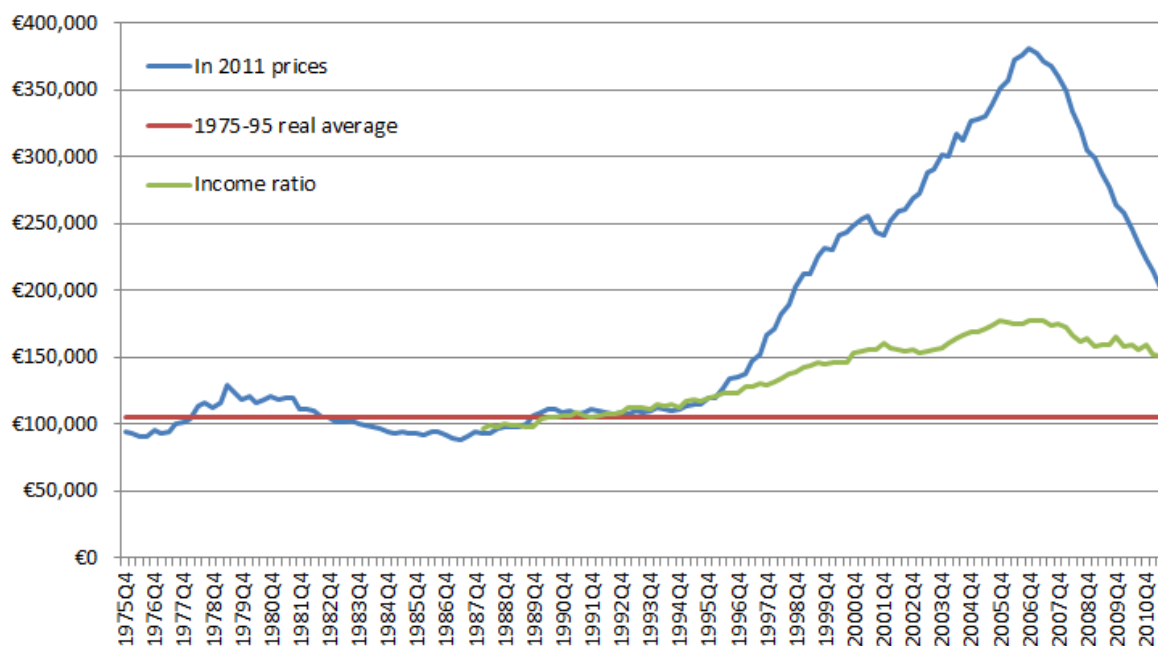


Figure 4.1 Average House Prices In Ireland vs Income, Adjusted for Inflation, 1975-2011³¹⁴

The above graph, courtesy of Irish Economist Ronan Lyons, at Oxford University, demonstrates the sharp rise in house prices in Ireland, which considerably outpaced what was otherwise an impressive rise in income levels during the Celtic Tiger. Consequently, the inheritance of an old hotel was no small matter, particularly as Murphy was crafting *The Wake* in 1998; a hotel would've more than doubled in value in just the previous two years, seemingly out of the blue, and with no end in sight.

Thus, Tom Murphy's characters are fighting over the spoils of the Celtic Tiger. The basic story in the play is simple: The Irish-American character is Vera, a thirty-something who emigrated to New York many years prior, and just received notice that her grandmother has passed away, leaving her the old family hotel, which has been long shut down. Her siblings,

³¹⁴ Ronan Lyons, *Are We Nearly There Yet? Finding The New Floor For Property Prices*, www.ronanlyons.com, July 5, 2011. <http://www.ronanlyons.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/eqm-property-prices-2.png>

Mary Jane and Tom, want the hotel, and are willing to do whatever they have to do to get it. Amongst the siblings, Vera has long been the outcast, but she considers Ireland her home and longs for a successful reunion with her family.

Murphy sets the play in the country, in the present, and the Celtic Tiger provides its backdrop. There are also undertones of class antagonism, accentuated by the magnified income disparity of the boom years. Upon arriving in Ireland, Vera stays with an old boyfriend, a tinker called Finbar, whom the family has tried to steer Vera away from, due to his marginalized lower-class status. He is quick to point out what he sees as a changing Irish cultural landscape:

*FINBAR: [...] The tinkers? The rich are worse! – Pick up the papers! And there's only a few of them caught! And they get off! They're given presents of Mercs to get off in! And fuckin' quarter-million pound handshakes! I think things have become so bad there's no one any more that knows how bad they are.*³¹⁵

Vera's family, on the other hand, comes from a higher class. Her brother-in law Harry is introduced as a middle-aged lawyer who doesn't practice, "disillusioned, an alcoholic, an urbane one. The culture has eroded him. He does not know who he is."³¹⁶ Her older brother Tom is identified by his BMW and his type-A personality. Nobody understands why Vera has been left the hotel, and Tom has arranged a rigged auction so that he can buy it from Vera for a pittance, acquire government grants to fix it up, and then flip it for a huge profit.

Vera eventually catches wind of her brother's plan and is horrified that her family – whom she had been eager to be reunited with – have been working so diligently against her while she has been abroad. Harry attempts to ease her pain by explaining that this treatment is happening throughout the country now:

³¹⁵ Tom Murphy, *The Wake* (London: Methuen, 1998), 16.

³¹⁶ Murphy, *Wake*, 22.

VERA: Why are they [her siblings Tom and Mary Jane] doing this together?
*HARRY: Team spirit. Are you really not one of them? It is a clanship between night runners, a collaboration. And one, I am sure, containing the usual, concessional understanding: That, whereas, when he tumbles the sheep she will get the hindquarters . . . I should not take it too personally to heart. **These marauding family expeditions happen on a national scale.** A member of course is sacrificed, but it is done for the greater good of the pack.*³¹⁷

Much like Friel's Cass Maguire, who preceded her by 30 years, Vera is wildly out of touch with her family and is confounded by the changes Ireland has experienced in the interim. Her offhand remark "I used to think I was real because I came from here"³¹⁸ shows that her connection to Ireland was a meaningful yardstick in her life. This is particularly important as audiences slowly learn about the specifics of Vera's life in New York: she's terrified of loneliness and works as a high-priced call girl.

The play reaches its peak when Vera invites the entire family over to the hotel for an important gathering. The siblings believe that it is their opportunity to charm Vera into selling them the hotel on the cheap, while Vera has a very different idea. She wants to throw one last party in the hotel, a belated wake for her grandmother and a de facto American Wake for herself, as she has decided to return to the States the next day. In Murphy's stage directions introducing the party, he contextualizes Vera's profession by broadening the definition to include her siblings' actions as they attempt to woo the hotel from her: "there is an element of prostitution in what they are doing."³¹⁹

Finally, the play ends with Vera successful in having brought the family together one last time, and she signs over the hotel to them for free. Although she desperately needed the money –

³¹⁷ Murphy, *Wake*, 49. Emphasis added.

³¹⁸ Murphy, *Wake*, 88.

³¹⁹ Murphy, *Wake*, 93.

Harry suggests it's worth £280,000 – she hadn't expected the inheritance, and doesn't want to take part in the backstabbing culture that the Celtic Tiger real estate bubble has created. Murphy leaves audiences with the thought that even a prostitute from New York would be offended by the marked difference in Irish attitudes since her emigration so many years prior. Much like Michael, the Irish-American returned emigrant in Murphy's earlier *Conversations on a Homecoming*, Vera returned to Ireland unsure of what her next step would be, but ultimately decides that she must return "home" to America at the end of the play.

The second Celtic Tiger theme that Murphy weaves through *The Wake* is the decline of the Catholic Church. Interspersed exchanges throughout the play demonstrate that Vera's older brother, Tom, continually attempts to rely upon his parish priest to settle the feud with his sister, until Father Billy concedes that he is now powerless to do so.

TOM: I left word on the way home for Father Billy.

MARY JANE: Why! Are you bringing priests into it, what use are they?

*TOM: It's their flaming business, Mary Jane!*³²⁰

Within the play, Tom desperately wants it to be their business. His methodology for rigging the hotel auction relied upon Father Billy informing the congregation that Tom would be purchasing his family's hotel. This way the priest would actively discourage any other people in the town from placing bids during the auction, allowing Tom to purchase it well below what the market would bear.

However, during the 1990s the Church saw its influence consistently decline throughout Ireland. As Fintan O'Toole explains in his treatise on the Celtic Tiger:

³²⁰ Murphy, *Wake*, 69.

*The institutional Catholic Church had dominated both the public identity and the personal values of a majority of the population from the middle of the nineteenth century until the institution itself began to implode in the 1990s. The gradual rise of urban, secular and Anglo-American cultural norms on the one side, and the revelation of horrific crimes of child abuse on the other broke that dominance.*³²¹

With the Church's stranglehold on Irish politics and culture slipping, characters such as Father Billy become less capable of exerting influence, particularly when an American character like Vera is involved. This proves increasingly frustrating for Vera's siblings, who at one point in the play have been unable to talk to her for almost a week.

MARY JANE: And it's been going on now for six and a half days and people in authority are standing idly by.

FATHER BILLY: But what can we do, Mary Jane? These aren't like the old days.

*MARY JANE: Nothing can be done? Wonderful. [...] I find this extraordinary. Are there no laws – ones of decency perhaps? – statutory, common, moral, to be enacted or observed? What other society, town, civilized country would put up with it?*³²²

Murphy uses Mary Jane's frustration, directed toward her priest, to voice a growing concern in Celtic Tiger Ireland. If the Catholic Church was no longer the arbiter of meaning and decency in the country, who was? Again, O'Toole captures the complex situation succinctly:

*The real effect of the loss of Church authority was that there was no deeply rooted civic morality to take its place. The Irish had been taught for generations to identify morality with religion, and a very narrow kind of religion at that. Morality was about what happened in bedrooms, not boardrooms. It was about the body, not the body politic. Masturbation was a much more serious sin than tax evasion. [...] This nineteenth-century ethic was not pushed aside by the creation of a coherent and deeply rooted civic, democratic and social morality. It mostly collapsed under its own weight of hypocrisy. The familiar code of values, the language in which right and wrong could be discussed, lost its meaning before Irish society had fully learned to speak any other tongue.*³²³

³²¹ O'Toole, *Ship of Fools*, 184.

³²² Murphy, *Wake*, 73-74.

³²³ O'Toole, *Ship of Fools*, 185.

Murphy presents the family stuck in a distinctly Celtic Tiger bind. Their priest is powerless to help them resolve the big problem facing their family, it is well outside the jurisdiction of the law, and there is no existing cultural compass with which to proceed. The interaction reaches its natural conclusion with Father Billy effectively shrugging them off, as his hands are tied, and he knows it.

FATHER BILLY: Oh sure, now sure. It isn't nice to see families fighting. (He looks at his watch.)

MARY JANE (looks at him): And that's it?

FATHER BILLY: Well, now, please God, we'll sort something out, like. I'll go up – (He checks his watch.) – Oh I will, I'll go up there later on, this afternoon maybe, and . . . (He rises.) But you'll have to excuse me now.

MARY JANE: (so much for) People in authority.

TOM: (a reprimand) There is much work remaining to protect the Catholic ethos in this country, Father Billy.

FATHER BILLY: Oh sure, there is. And I know it's upsetting, but what'll I say to her?! D'you see my point? Not like the old days, what! And whatever I say to her, will-she-listen? (And he laughs and claps his hands.) What? ³²⁴

With *The Wake* Tom Murphy took on two defining characteristics of the Celtic Tiger, and used an American character to explore them with Irish audiences. Like many of the aforementioned plays studied in this volume, *The Wake* was first produced by Ireland's national theatre, the Abbey, and its 1998 premiere was very near the height of the first Celtic Tiger wave. The play was also Murphy's first written in response to respond to the Celtic Tiger, having taken him almost eight years to write, which remains the longest gestation period between original plays since Murphy's career began in 1959.³²⁵ When *The Wake* premiered on the national stage,

³²⁴ Murphy, *Wake*, 76.

³²⁵ In the interim, Murphy did work on one adaptation (*She Stoops to Folly*, 1995) and the precursor to *The Wake* was an exploratory novel, *The Seduction of Morality* written in 1994, that introduces similar themes. I view the novel as part of Murphy's gestation process for *The Wake*, as the book was a one-off experiment before the subsequent play was in produced in Murphy's favored format: theatrical production.

it was met with critical praise befitting of its relevance and significance to contemporary Ireland and David Nowlan's review for the *Irish Times* summarizes the play's magnitude perfectly:

*Tom Murphy's vision of Ireland is not a pretty sight, but it is drawn with a disturbing honesty and coloured with a uniquely personal mix of anger and compassion, the latter usually for the marginalized outsider, and the former generally for those people and structures that cause the isolation.*³²⁶

Murphy's "outsider," his American Vera, is indeed colored with compassion. She had led a hard life, is ill-treated by her bigoted siblings, and asks for nothing, not even the hotel that she has rightfully inherited. Yet this American character, like so many before her, is necessarily an outsider, she is the screen onto which Murphy can project Ireland's changing culture. The splendid rise in real estate values is set against the corresponding spike in greed and corruption, and the Catholic Church's precipitous fall from Irish supremacy is highlighted by the subsequent lack of civil and moral fortitude. Murphy, like many of the greatest writers, refrains from foisting answers upon his audiences, and instead imparts upon them the loaded questions and emotions facing their generation.

Because of this, Murphy's plays like *The Wake* tend to be critically successful, but don't cause the popular box office rush that a landmark Friel play such as *Dancing at Lughnasa* might. Nevertheless, major critics such as Michael Billington, Fintan O'Toole, and Ben Brantley are eager to point out that Murphy's dozens of plays are every bit the equal to those of his contemporary and friend, Brian Friel. Shortly after the run of *The Wake* at the Abbey, and in anticipation of its arrival in New York, James Clarity wrote a newspaper biopic on the subject of Murphy's place in Irish theatre for the *Irish Times*. The piece was subsequently picked up by the

³²⁶ David Nowlan, "Compelling Theatrical Mix of Anger and Compassion," review of *The Wake* by Tom Murphy in *The Irish Times*, January 19, 1998, 14.

New York Times, and featured the following quote from Patrick Mason, then Artistic Director of the Abbey, who had directed the first production of *The Wake* with Murphy:

*Tom is one of the most challenging and idiosyncratic of Irish writers. His theater is a theater of the extraordinary, often violent, very disturbed, verging on the operatic. It makes emotional demands on performers and audiences alike. But whatever the demands, the rewards are extraordinary.*³²⁷

Throughout his work Murphy relies upon emigrants, often Irish-Americans, as the catalysts for his poignant unpacking of contemporary Irish affairs. His earlier *Conversations on a Homecoming* provided a belated eulogy for JFK's place as an iconic Irishman, and he would quickly follow *The Wake* with another emigrant-centric play entitled *The House*, which premiered at the Abbey in 2000 and again featured an Irish-American who returns to Ireland after living a life of sin in the US. However, unlike the mid-century plays which had previously focused on emigration, Murphy's Celtic Tiger plays take the focus off of wayward Irish-Americans, and instead turn the microscope inward on Ireland itself.

As both an active participant in, and critic of, Ireland's changing cultural landscape, Tom Murphy uses the American-character paradigm to fully explore what is happening in and around his Irish audiences. While his work doesn't have the marketability of a canonical Friel play, nor the laugh-a-minute pace of Jones or McDonagh's Celtic Tiger blockbusters, Murphy's brutal honesty and penchant for eloquent prose and compassionate characterization have earned him a well-deserved place on the national stage. He is among Ireland's most accurate cultural thermometers, and wholly unafraid to point out when the nation is running a bit hot.

³²⁷ James F. Clarity, "Praise Doesn't Equal Fame, But Playwright Persists" in *The New York Times*, July 29, 1999, Section E, 2.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

Once a protectionist and isolated country on the periphery of Europe, Ireland has quickly risen to emerge as a global technology center and a model for rapid economic expansion. Its former borderline-third-world status has been appropriated as a romanticized backdrop for Hollywood feature films, and its artwork is now a priceless commodity on the academic market. Emigration, which had been a defining feature of Irish life for hundreds of years, has now turned to immigration, with countless emigrants returning “home” to a country they might not even recognize.

In theatrical terms, the Celtic Tiger also paved the way for plays such as Martin McDonagh’s *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and Marie Jones’s *Stones in His Pockets* to flourish in Ireland. Brian Friel’s *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* explores an often overlooked facet of artistic curation; who will look after the work when the artist is gone? Friel chooses the National Library of Ireland for the task, but demonstrated that there are many writers who are happy to sell their work to larger American institutions in order to pay the bills.

Finally, Tom Murphy’s *The Wake* revisits the topic of emigration to demonstrate that the Celtic Tiger has lured back emigrants who unexpectedly struggle to embrace the place that they have long considered home. These unflinching portrayals of Celtic Tiger Ireland demonstrate both the massive benefits of foreign investment and the pitfalls of a fully globalized Irish culture. However, it is the numerous American characters featured in Celtic Tiger Theatre who truly allow playwrights and audiences to reflect upon, unpack, and come to terms with Ireland’s emergent contemporary identity.

5.0 STAGING IRELAND'S YANKS: CONCLUSIONS

*The dramatic events of the last thirty years in the country have forced a social change so profound that Ireland's citizenry has had no choice but to see things as they are. Ireland has mostly shed the "we don't talk about that" culture – the blinders are coming off, and many walls have already come down. Watch the television, listen to the radio, sit and chat with people in the pubs or in their homes, and you will quickly find that little remains taboo. This is, in a sense, the best thing to come from the "Americanization" of Ireland*³²⁸

-Sean Kay in *Celtic Revival?*, 2011

If we are to accept "Americanization" as a meaningful construct, than we might use contemporary Ireland as its defining example. The term Americanization dates to the eighteenth-century, and the concept of the "Americanization of Ireland" has been a concern at least as far back as 1902, when it was the title of a chapter in William Thomas Stead's *The Americanization of the World*.³²⁹ However, Stead's work is not exceptionally concerned with the influence of American media or culture per se, rather he warns of Americanization in terms of the willful spirit of revolution and resistance to the British crown. He approaches Americanization in terms of independence. In Ireland's case, Stead's fear was that this spirit was liable to spread to

³²⁸ Sean Kay, *Celtic Revival?: The Rise, Fall, and Renewal of Global Ireland* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 217.

³²⁹ William Thomas Stead, *The Americanization of the World: Or, The Trend of the Twentieth Century* (London: Horace Markley, 1902), 27-50.

Ireland, in part due to the massive numbers of Irish-Americans on both sides of the Atlantic. He goes on to suggest that the Americanization of Ireland will lead to Irish sovereignty, closer ties with the US than with the UK, and the continued decline of the British Empire. He was right on all counts.

Today the term Americanization conjures up a very different set of ideas. Contemporary scholars typically use the term in reference to cultural dilution or American cultural imperialism, as Fintan O'Toole does:

*At the start of the twenty-first century, the big issue for people around the world is the process of globalisation. In cultural terms, globalisation is really a fancy name for Americanisation. When the marketing arms of great corporations dream of a world in which the same products and the same advertisements can carry the same freight of meaning and emotion across the globe, what they imagine is a universal America.*³³⁰

While capitalism is undoubtedly the driver of globalization/Americanization, Sean Kay's perspective on the Americanization of Ireland, quoted at the beginning of this conclusion, demonstrates that Ireland has also stood to reap some rewards from the process. This study began with Ireland's mid-century shift away from protectionist policies, effectively opening the door to foreign investment and the global, if America-centric, exchange of information. As a result, Ireland's infrastructure was improved, it gained stature as a sovereign nation, became a participant in the European Community, and ultimately found a solution to its enduring emigration problem.

When the North descended into violence in the late 1960s, it was a combination of Ireland's modernization and the seeds of globalization that helped to chart a long path from what

³³⁰ Fintan O'Toole, *White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), ix.

was once systematic oppression, toward a meaningful peacemaking and reconciliation process. While the intervening years featured sustained sectarian violence, the United States played a major role in facilitating understanding between Ireland and the United Kingdom, ultimately orchestrating the peace talks that would lead to the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998.

More recently, as a direct result of Ireland's mid-century cultural and political transformation, the nation had primed itself for success in the 1990s. A wide combination of factors brought Ireland newfound wealth and employment, which in turn led to the most rapid period of "Americanization" yet. The role of the Catholic Church, once the sole arbiter of values in Ireland, has diminished, waylaid in part by its own internal struggles, and Ireland has become increasingly secular. As the gap between Irish and American culture began to close, questions emerged as to what, if anything, made Irishness distinct. Irish artists, in particular, became increasingly interested in how Ireland was being portrayed and appropriated by American institutions, and then looked inward to ask: In a modern Ireland, what can and should define Irish identity?

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This study has charted these developments in detail alongside how Irish playwrights and theatres have attempted to document, question, and criticize the unprecedented cultural changes that Ireland has experienced in the past 50 years. At the same time, Irish Theatre has undergone its own transformation to become a more diverse forum for civic engagement, as evidenced by the numerous smaller performance venues available and less gatekeeping between playwrights and production. One constant throughout this period of "Americanization" has been that Irish

playwrights regularly use American characters when crafting work that addresses urgent concerns in contemporary Ireland, such as emigration, the Troubles, and the Celtic Tiger.

In conclusion, this project forwards the existence and development of American characters as a major paradigm in contemporary Irish Theatre. They closely track the evolution of Ireland's relationship with America, and help playwrights focus attention on the salient questions surrounding Irish identity and culture. Ultimately, theatre artists employ American characters good and bad to help recalibrate Ireland's moral compass; as Irish culture is constantly changing, American characters hold the mirror up for Irish audiences to see themselves reflected in their nearest allies.

APPENDIX A: Definition of Terms

A.1.1 Ireland

First and foremost, I am defining “Ireland” as the entire geographical island and its subsidiaries immediately west of England, Scotland, and Wales. I am well versed in what might be considered the inherent nationalism of such an assertion. Truth be told, this is a conscious decision based primarily on the fact that the American characters with which I am dealing are equally prevalent in the work of writers from both the Republic and the North. Further, in popular usage, the term “Irish Theatre” is often typically used as a blanket term for plays set on or around the island of Ireland – even in cases where the playwright is not Irish. Where specific Northern Irish plays or playwrights are dealt with, I will note them as such, particularly in the cases where the playwright or production company has a vested interest in the North, as is the case with Charabanc Theatre Company.

A.1.2 Irish Theatre

This study defines Irish Theatre as theatre that is largely concerned with its inherent Irishness. These works typically: 1) are set primarily in Ireland; 2) assume that their characters are Irish as a given; 3) are written by Irish playwrights (by birth or extraction); and 4) are produced in Ireland.

The troublesome question of the “Irishness” of writers extends through Irish history; Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, are among the famous “Irish” writers who spent a considerable portion of their life away from Ireland. Often it seems that a writer’s success determines which nations will claim, ignore, or vilify him or her. For example, certain critics like to debate whether or not Martin McDonagh can rightly be considered an “Irish” playwright. As I see it, he is popularly embraced as such, his plays have clear Irish settings, themes, and characters, and his work receives regular production and critical attention in Ireland. Thus, McDonagh’s plays are significant and of interest to this study. Those who wish to consider him a “plastic paddy” are welcome to do so, but according the aforementioned definition, his work qualifies as “Irish theatre” for the purposes of this study.

It is also well known that many of Irish playwrights write plays that are *not* Irish, at least according to my definition. Thus, when an Irish playwright writes a play wholly set and concerning characters elsewhere, even in the United States, I have not included it here. This is because a primary thrust of my argument is that Irish playwrights use American characters *in contrast to* Irish characters and/or culture in their plays. Thus, if a play has no Irish characters and is set abroad, it has no place in this study.

A.1.3 Contemporary Irish Theatre

In accordance with scholars who have come before me, I will be referring to the time period from the inception of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899 until the restructuring of the Abbey Theatre around 1960 as “Modern Irish Theatre.” The period from 1960 to the present will be referred to as “Contemporary Irish Theatre” and will provide the bulk of my material.

A.1.4 America/American

In describing the specific characters that I am investigating, I will rely upon the same terminology that the playwrights use to describe them. This means that “American” will mean persons from the United States of America throughout the dissertation. Only in certain rare instances are Americans given more specific descriptors in the plays that I am dealing with, and none of the plays in question use the term “American” in its continental context.

A.1.5 The Troubles

I will be following the footsteps of many Troubles scholars and defining the “Troubles” as the period of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland roughly beginning with the Battle of the Bogside in August 1969 and continuing through the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998. There is no doubt that the tensions in the North have reached well outside of that timeline in either direction. However, the “Troubles” is a specific subset of the unrest in the North, namely marked by considerable sectarian and paramilitary activity and the presence of the British Army in Northern Ireland. 1969-1998 is a rough, but functional approximate definition of the era.

A.1.6 Troubles Terminology

All acronyms will be defined in the text, or in corresponding footnotes, as appropriate. When discussing people and political persuasion in the North, the following generally applies: Broadly, the conflict in the North is between Protestants and Catholics, although it is not a

traditional religious struggle, and neither community is interested in converting the other and establishing religious unity. At its core, the conflict is based on ethnicity and identity, not religion. Protestants typically identify as British, and Catholics typically identify as Irish, the communities exist largely independently of one another, and children attend schools where they exclusively learn their own side's history. This has been getting better, and there are an increasing number of integrated schools, but they remain the exception to the rule.

On the Catholic side, the vast majority of Catholics are also Nationalist, which means that they desire a united Ireland and are willing to vote for it. A smaller percentage of Catholics would also identify as Republican, which traditionally denotes the belief that a unified Ireland can/or should be achieved through violence. The same basic structure applies to the Protestant side, in regards to Unionism and Loyalism. Many Protestants are Unionists who believe that Northern Ireland should remain a part of the United Kingdom, and that the connection should be maintained through political means. A much smaller percentage of Protestants would consider themselves Loyalists who are willing to engage in violence or antagonism to achieve their means. Historically, Irish Catholic culture embraces Republican martyrs, whereas mainstream Protestant culture vilifies Loyalist violence such that even Protestants will use the term "Loyalist" pejoratively.

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