

**The Split Identity in Brian Friel's Play
PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!)**

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Abstract

Colonized people suffer due to cultural struggle and identity loss. Brian Friel (1929–2015) dealt with the consequences of British colonisation of Ireland. This paper explores the fragmented identity in Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*. It depicts the contradicting feelings of a young man who decides to leave his country. Still, he is unable to overcome his emotional loyalty to his past. Friel divides the protagonist into two characters played by two actors on the stage. The memories in the play form an integral part of identity being live images that satisfy inner needs. The characters' inner conflicts and personal dilemma reflect general social problems.

Keywords: identity, home, memory, emigration.

(الهوية المنقسمة في مسرحية بريان فرييل فيلادلفيا، أنا قادم!)

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المخلص :

يعاني الشعب المحتل بسبب الصراع الثقافي وضياع الهوية. تناول لكاتب المسرحي بريان فرييل (١٩٢٩-٢٠١٥) عواقب الاحتلال البريطاني لإيرلندا. يستطلع هذا البحث الهوية المتشظية في مسرحية فيلادلفيا، أنا قادم! . يصور البحث أسلوب فرييل في تصوير المشاعر المتصارعة لشباب يقرر مغادرة الوطن الا انه غير قادر على التغلب على ولاءه العاطفي للماضي و يقوم بتقسيم بطل المسرحية الى شخصيتين يؤديها قبل ممثلان على المنصة. تشكل الذكريات في المسرحية جزءا متكاملًا مع الهوية لأنها صور حية تُشبع الاحتياجات الداخلية. تظهر الصراعات الداخلية والمعضلات الفردية للشخصيات مشكلات اجتماعية عامة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هوية، وطن، ذاكرة، هجرة

Brian Friel (1929–2015)

Brian Friel was born in County Tyrone, North Ireland for a Catholic, nationalist family. During the 1980s he was actively involved with the Derry-based Field Day Theatre Company. Friel's plays were marked by geographical and personal factions and boundaries (Richards, 2004: 177-8).

Friel depicts the life of the Catholic people in north-western Ireland. Constrained by poverty and limited opportunities, his characters seek consolation by indulging in disappointing illusions (Gonzalez, 1997: 86). Friel's themes vary between the workings of memory, and the complications of family relationships, where identity is aligned with the concept of home (Andrews, 1995: 95). His plays are concerned with the interior world of the characters, and how nostalgia facilitates their self-deception. (Richards, 2004: 185).

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

In 28 September 1964 *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, premiered at the Gaiety Theatre by Gate Theatre Productions during the Dublin Theatre Festival. In 1966 the play received American premiere at the Helen Hayes Theatre and ran for nine months on Broadway (Roche, 2006: 16).

The main character, Gareth O'Donnell (Gar), keeps singing "Philadelphia, Here I Come" intentionally changing the original title of a popular American song, "California, Here I Come". He plans to emigrate from Ballybeg to Philadelphia as he does not want to work in his father's shop. His hopes of a future with his love, Kate Doogan, vanish. Gar is offered an escape route: to live with his aunt Lizzie in Philadelphia (Hogan, 1967: 196).

The Split Identity

Gar is a representation of self-exile, estrangement and alienation. He is a young lonely Irishman who is nostalgic and homesick right before he emigrates to the United States. He is stuck in the past. He lives with a ghost and he feels angry as he cannot connect himself with his surroundings.

Friel's represents the divided feelings of his protagonist Gar. He divides the young man into two characters, played by two different actors (Roche, 2011: 39-40) by employing the two Gars: Public and Private, Friel reveals the complexities concerning decision to leave Ballybeg. Gar's escapist fantasies fuel his desire to emigrate to the modernity of the United

States. Public Gar is seen and heard by the audience. He is the mask. For Friel, the mask is both metaphoric and defensive (Murray, 2014: 17).

Friel personifies both the Public Gar and the Private Gar as if they are complementary characters who exchange their contradictory opinions :

PRIVATE. You are fully conscious of all the consequences of your decision?

PUBLIC. Yes sir.

PRIVATE. Of leaving the country of your birth, the land of the curlew and snipe, the Aran sweater and the Irish Sweepstakes?

PUBLIC.

I have considered all these, Sir.

PRIVATE. Of going to a profane, irreligious pagan country of gross materialism.

PUBLIC. I am fully sensitive to this, Sir.

PRIVATE. Where the devil himself holds sway, and lust-
abhorrent lust- is everywhere indulged in shamelessly?

PUBLIC. Who are you tellin'? Shamelessly, Sir, shamelessly.

PRIVATE. And yet you persist in exposing yourself to these frightful dangers?

PUBLIC. I would submit, Sir, that these stories are slightly exaggerated. (Friel, 2016: *Collected Plays* 96-7)

The notion of identity operating is a premodernist unitary personality split into two voices (McGrath, 1999: 69). Through the exchanges between Public Gar and Private Gar, past experiences, present feelings and future fantasies are revealed. Physical action is subordinate to his inner conflict. This struggle is centred on Gar's loyalty to his past and his wish to create an identity for himself :

PRIVATE. Now, even though you refuse to acknowledge the fact, Screwballs, I'm leaving you forever. I'm going to Philadelphia, to work in an hotel. And you know why I'm going, Screwballs, don't you? ' Because I'm twenty-five, and you' treat me as if I were five -I can't order even a dozen loaves without getting your permission. Because you pay me less than you pay Madge. But worse, far worse than that, Screwballs, because we embarrass one another. If one of us were to say, 'You're looking tired' or 'That's a bad cough you have', the other would fall over backwards with embarrassment. (*Collected Plays* 117)

In the play the father is not just a shopkeeper. He is the embodiment of Law. Being County Councillor who represents both local influence and institutionalized one (Roche, 2011: 65). The isolation of Gar's self stems from the fact that there is no communication with those who might release him: his father, his parish priest and his friends. His decision to leave his rural village for Philadelphia leads to spiritual exile (Murray, 2014: 18).

The division ensures a tension of lack of integrity in a person. Seamus Deane describes Gar's split condition as he says that:

The language of the real, in all its rigour, is Irish – and that emerges as silence; and the language of the possible is English – and that emerges in eloquence. . . . The condition of dumbness, aphasia, or silence is the repressed condition of non-modernity. (qtd. in Roche, 2006: 158)

The memory of Gar's mother stands for vitality. She represents the missing link between two material cultures of the play, the Ireland of Ballybeg and the new world of the United States (Roche, 2006: 159).

The protagonist is concerned with the conventional idea of an inner and an outer self. Friel says:

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. PRIVATE GAR, the spirit, is invisible to everybody, always nobody except PUBLIC GAR hears him talk. But even PUBLIC GAR, although he talks to PRIVATE GAR occasionally, never sees him and never looks at him. One cannot look at one's alter ego. (qtd. in McGrath, 1999: 68)

According to Friel, memory is a creative faculty. Gar knows the tricks the mind can play with facts. Memories of his home and acquaintances torture him. Master Boyle is a failure who dreams of escaping to the United States. His speech of the job offered in a Boston university is a childish as fantasy (Andrews, 1995: 87-8).

The past is idealized through flashbacks. Gar's reviews the significant events which influenced his decision to leave Ballybeg. He remembers his interview with Senator Doogan and the visit of Aunt Lizzie. Without any secured identity, Gar is vulnerable to hostile social forces. Senator Doogan reduces him to idiocy:

DOOGAN. Didn't she tell you? No, I can see she didn't. Of course there's nothing official yet; not even what you might call an understanding. But if this post does fall into his lap, well, her mother and I . . . let's say we're living in hope. A fine boy, Francis; and we've known the Kings, oh, since away back. As a matter of fact his father and I were class-fellows at school ... (*Collected Plays* 109)

Gar becomes a non-entity when he loses his language. The only way to compensate humiliation is through Private language and an elaborate revenge fantasy:

PRIVATE. Did your investigators not discover that Senator Doogan is the grandfather of fourteen unborn illegitimate children? That he sold his daughter to the king of the fairies for a crock of gold? (*Collected Plays* 127).

When Gar tries to remember his dead mother, to confirm personal identity he concentrates on reconstructing his mother's erased history. He is determined to expose what has been hidden. He feels guilty as his mother died when he was born. In this pursuit, Gar is particularly reliant on Madge's, the housekeeper, oral testimony: "She was small, Madge says, and wild, and young, Madge says, from a place called Bailtefree beyond the mountains" (*Collected Plays* 102)

The past Public Gar's recitation of the prayers for the dead is juxtaposed with Private Gar's intense poetic improvisation of the warm, unspoiled young girl who is the mother. She becomes an enchanting symbol of youth, beauty, vitality and freedom. Significantly, Private Gar's rhapsody on his dead mother is accompanied by the tones of Violin Concerto (Roche, 2011: 66).

There is another flashback about the return of his Aunt Lizzy from the United States. Gar fails to get from her a complete memorial reconstruction of his mother's wedding day. Aunt Lizzy is married to a good Catholic, but she is willing to flirt with Ben Burton. She turns out to be, the fleshy counterpart of Gar's idealized mother. As the stage directions indicate she is 'a toucher' in a play in which there is very little physical contact:

As she talks she moves from one to the other and she has the habit of putting her arm around, or catching the elbow of, the person she is addressing. This constant physical touching is new and disquieting to PUBLIC. (*Collected Plays* 130)

Gar accepts her offer to go to the United States. He is no longer caught between the ideal mother and the too-real father, between the seductions of a Hollywood femmes fatales and the reality of a father removing denture teeth at dinner:

PUBLIC. You were telling us about that morning.

LIZZY. What's he talking about?

PUBLIC. The day my father and mother got married.

LIZZY. That day! Wasn't that something? With the wind howling and the rain slashing about! And Mother, poor Mother, may God be good to her, she thought that just because Maire got this guy with a big store we should all of got guys with big stores. And poor Maine -we were so alike in every way, Maire and me. But he was good to her. I'll say that for S. B. O'Donnell -real good to her. Where the hell is he anyhow? Why will S. B. O'Donnell, my brother-in-law, not meet me?

CON. He (*Public*) told you -he's away at a wedding.

LIZZY. What wedding?

CON. Some local girl and some Dublin doc.

LIZZY. What local girl? You think I'm a stranger here or something?

CON. (*To PUBLIC*) What local girl?

PUBLIC. Senator Doogan's daughter.

PRIVATE. Kathy. (*Collected Plays 132*)

The memories in the play are the transvalued categories of fact and fiction suggested by Friel himself (Roche, 2011:153). He bases the memories in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* on a childhood fishing trip to a lake in Donegal, where there is a beautiful formal equilibrium in father-son separation in a memory of momentary happiness together. Gar's epiphany, which speaks to him through the language of music, takes place on the blue boat on Lough na Cloc Cor:

GAR. Listen! Listen! Listen! D'you hear it? D'you know what that music says? ... It says that once a upon a time a boy and his father sat in a blue boat on a lake on an afternoon in May, and on that afternoon a great beauty happened, a beauty that has haunted the boy ever since, because he wonders now did it really take place or did he imagine it. (*Collected Plays 164*)

Still, when Friel returns there as an adult, he discovers that there is no lake and he realises that the trip did not take place. Friel says:

There is no lake along that muddy road. ... Have I imagined the scene then? Or is it a composite of two or three different episodes? The point is – I don't think it matters. What matters is that ... for some reason this vivid memory is there in the storehouse of the mind. (qtd. in Roche, 2011: 152)

Friel shares with Gar the pain of an important memory which cannot be confirmed. He recalls the entire relationship of past and present, memory and reality. Concluding that his own memory of a fishing trip with his father is unverifiable:

The fact is a fiction ... But I don't think it matters. What matters is that for some reason ... this vivid memory is there in the storehouse of the mind. For some reason the mind has shuffled the pieces of verifiable truth and composed a truth of its own. (qtd. in Richards, 2004: 180)

Gar makes one final effort to bridge with his father through the celebrated 'blue boat' episode. His deliberate use of 'once upon a time' (168) acknowledges this element of wish-fulfilment. In the event, the father has no recollection of the incident. Private Gar responds with mocking laughter declaring that 'it never happened! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha' (171). He suggests that he has no wish for father-son reconciliation. As a reaction to Private Gar's mockery, Public Gar retreats to his bedroom (Roche, 2011: 66).

In the play's most pervasive irony, the father articulates a complementary memory of walking with young Gar as a boy in a 'wee sailor suit' (172). Madge denies this incident: 'A sailor suit? He never had a sailor suit' (172). The father reveals his private side to Madge only. When he is in the kitchen and Gar is not present, the father expresses his own fantasies. He is able, when alone, to physically articulate his suppressed feelings about what is taking place. He walks over and touches the packed suitcase of his departing son. The father and his son do not enjoy such privileged isolated moments. Rather, they exist in their domains, which are psychological rather than physical (Roche, 2011: 68).

Conclusion

In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Gar's loss of family communication, love failure and restricted hope for a change in the future put him in a self-exile and to be unhomed. His aunt's offer to emigrate to the United States puts him in dilemma between two opposite forces. One force pushes him to leave, the other one incites him to stay. Friel depicts the conflict of Gar's

identity by using Public Gar that stands for the mask seen by people and Private Gar standing for inner voice. Gar is a representative of Irish young men in the 1960s. His split identity striving between keeping old traditions or forsaking them to adopt more modern ones.

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