concepts, such as *truth* and *reality*. Publicising the views of the individual characters in his plays repeatedly allows Friel to debunk the idea of an overruling, public point of view that coincides with the personal point of view of the individual characters as an illusion. Moreover, illustrating in his plays how the dominant public view regularly undermines and falsifies the private truth and reality of his characters, Friel, at various stages in his oeuvre, manages to evoke a feeling of unease in the audience who is made aware of alternative perspectives by other characters whose viewpoints are withheld in order to produce suspense and to stress the significance of uncertainty and of the private truth over the absolute.

2. The Power of Public Pressure or Opinion

My reading of Anglo-Irish texts in which space and the representation of the Irish population play a pivotal role repeatedly reveals a strong tendency to willingly shift the borderline between the public and the private sphere. The repression or denial of private knowledge by those in power has frequently been shown to have caused Anglo-Irish writers to explore and disclose their characters’ private realm in order to oppose dominant (colonial) discourse and to unveil the hidden or silenced. Comparing these findings to Habermas’ diagram in which he distinguishes the sphere of public authority from the two different shades of the private realm in the eighteenth century, one finds a gradual movement towards publicising the most private or even intimate.26 At first, the Anglo-Irish writers disclosed knowledge about the inner circle of their community and their family. Then, parallel to the growing interest in psychology, their inner lives became the focal point of their studies. Finally, in James Joyce’s novel *Ulysses*, no taboos remain; whatever matters to the characters in Joyce’s text is made public at least on a textual level. The same is true for Friel’s plays. Epitomising the tensions between the public and the private domain in his writing, Friel invariably lays open his characters’ private or intimate realm. Not only does this act of unveiling the private sphere allow the audience to study the characters’ concepts of *home* and *family*, but it also draws attention to their sorrows or individual points of view. As Pine highlights, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is, therefore, by no means Friel’s only play in which a character’s private world and thoughts are uncovered:

26 Habermas’ diagram was discussed in Chapter II (p. 15).
As indicated in the previous chapter, including both the public and the private sphere in a play, on the one hand, makes it possible to offer more than one version of truth; on the other hand, it also allows the dramatist to filter “the world’s demands” and to reveal to what extent the public realm (such as the power of public authority or public opinion) regulates a character’s private domain by means of pressure.

Defining power as those aspects which are “concerned with the bringing about of consequences,” Philip holds that social sciences distinguish between “different bases of power (for example, wealth, status, knowledge, charisma, force and authority); different forms of power (such as influence, coercion and control); and different uses of power (such as individual or community ends, political ends and economic ends)” (657). Indicating that “[d]efinitional problems seem to be endemic” when discussing power issues, Philip claims that, according to one basic view of power, a character can exercise power over another “when A affects B in a manner contrary to B’s preferences, interest, needs and so on” regardless of the fact whether the effects are deliberate or foreseeable (658). As “the focus is on A’s power over B,” this approach tends to “[identify] the victims of power” and is therefore particularly fruitful in a postcolonial context such as Friel’s (659, original emphasis). The following subchapter on manifestations of power will centre round why and how characters in Friel’s plays try to gain control over others and how they exercise their power. In this section, however, those figures will be examined who feel that control and authority is used at their expense and who particularly suffer from public opinion. Public pressure, or the use of negative influence, will thus be understood in this part of my study as power used, with or without intention, against someone else’s will.

*The Enemy Within* explores the different forms of pressure and constraints Columba, the founder of the monastery of Iona, is subjected to before he finally appears to free himself from outer secular influences or temptations and from his personal longings which are – at times – diametrically opposed to the rules of the monastery. In the preface to the play, Friel insisted that the play “is neither a history nor a biography but an imaginative account” in which he has “concentrated instead on the private man” (7). The play is typical for Friel’s oeuvre insofar as the playwright shifted the main conflict to his protagonist’s inner life (Niel, “Brian Friel” 39). For most of the play, a strong tension exists between his former life in an Irish community and the religious world he has chosen for himself. Moreover, as abbot and founder of several monasteries,
Columba is trapped by his public duties and his private desires. Murray is right when he emphasises that

Columba is community-minded; his struggle is to give up politics, so to speak, for the family. He needs to learn how to stay at home and build a strong spiritual base: except that, paradoxically, ‘home’ here means ‘exile’. He must learn, then, to make of exile a home. (Introduction xiii)

Successfully decoding what Iona used to symbolise for him so that it comes to represent his new home, Columba, first of all, needs to accept the monks as his new community and family. Secondly, it means that he has to learn how to submit his personal wishes to those of the Catholic Church.

Columba’s dilemma to uphold a clear distinction between his former private and his current religious lives is first foreshadowed when he returns from “giving [the young monks] a hand with the corn” and begins to study the verse which Caornan, his closest friend and the most talented scribe in Iona, has copied that day (Enemy 11):

‘Do not think that I come to send peace upon earth; I come not to send peace but the sword. For I come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s enemies shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me –.’ (19–20)

Struck by this passage from the Gospel according to Matthew, which so aptly summarises his personal situation, Columba confesses that Iona has always remained a place of exile for him and he then goes on to beg Caornan to pray for his salvation.27 Columba has, in fact, never abandoned his loyalty to Ireland and to his family (O’Brien, Friel 44). Regardless of his fame and in spite of being publicly revered “[a]s a builder of churches […] a builder of schools […] an organiser,” Columba admits that “the inner man – the soul – [is] chained

27 In the Gospel according to Matthew (10:34–37), Jesus tells his disciples that his arrival has brought disagreement and division to families rather than peace because different members of a family often disagree on their interpretation of his teachings. Then he suggests that, although the younger generation in a family should be loyal to the elder, a Christian’s first loyalty should be to God, not to his family. In The Enemy Within Columba’s family fail to respect the monk’s decision to serve God whenever they beg him to back them up or fight in their private feuds or battles. Moreover, Columba himself knows that, according to this passage in the Scriptures, he is unworthy of God because he keeps answering his family’s frequent calls and, therefore, regularly proves that for him the family is more important than his faith. Although Columba has earned other people’s admiration for founding monasteries and for his religious deeds, he, personally, despises himself because he does not succeed in overcoming his deep love for his family and Ireland to finally serve the Lord and abandon his old loyalties.
irrevocably to the earth, to the green wooded earth of Ireland” (*Enemy* 21). However, knowing that his love and longing for Ireland are stronger than his Christian belief ails Columba. Revealing this secret piece of truth underlines how unworthy he feels of God and of other people’s admiration.

Having acknowledged that he is strongly divided between the two forces – family and faith – in his life, it is not surprising that Columba readily breaks his own vow and the rules of the monastery whenever his relatives plead to him to represent and lead them in a private feud. The audience witnesses how Columba even gives in to their requests in situations in which he later concludes that the dispute was, in fact, little more than “a shabby squabble between neighbours” (50). His relations, however, know that whenever he joins them in their fights, the status, charisma and religious authority he exudes – comparable to Habermas’ notion of rulers in the Middle Ages and the representative power of their insignia – considerably strengthens their position in public. Therefore, they repeatedly urge the famous abbot to disregard his doubts for the good of his people.

In the example depicted in the play, Grillaan, second monk in Iona, reminds Columba – as he has apparently done many times before – of his private and public duties in Iona; he even accuses him of giving in to public pressure and reproaches him for behaving as if he were “a rallying cry” (32) or “a private chaplain” to his family rather than “a priest in voluntary exile for God” (34). Columba, however, falls back into his former life calling out to his relatives: “Royal blood that answers to the call of its people! […] Get into your travelling clothes! We are going home! Now!” (33–34, my emphasis) Reacting to public pressure from his own family because he still considers Ireland his true home, Columba (ab)uses the power which he has gained in the public realm as a representative of clerical authority to pursue his family’s personal interests. When he finally returns, Columba – as always – regrets his decision and also expresses his remorse for having neglected his religious duties. This time, he learns that Caornan, who had asked for a private conversation with Columba before his departure, has died during his absence. Distressed that the last wish of his friend in the monastery was not fulfilled because he failed his duties as abbot of Iona, Columba asks for “the most severe penances” Grillaan “can think of” and is told to practise “moderation” and “to live the Rule of Iona to the letter” (48 and 49). However, literally within minutes of having solemnly vowed to do so, his public reputation causes him to fall victim to his private demands again. Oswald, the youngest novice in Iona, confronts Columba with his public reputation by adoring him as “a saint” and a “man of heroic virtue”

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28 A more detailed description of the ‘representative’ public sphere and its function in the Middle Ages occurs in Chapter II (p. 13–14).
Although Columba rejects Oswald’s characterisation, the novice expresses his conviction that Columba is simply too modest to acknowledge the truth. Oswald never questions public opinion and accepts it as reality. Finally, Columba loses his temper over Oswald’s persistence and “slaps him across the face with his open hand” (54). Completely taken aback by the course of action, the young man flees. While Columba, driven by his personal impulse, desperately seeks the young man in order to apologise for his behaviour and to assuage his conscience, he again neglects his public duties in Iona. Once more, Grillan has to represent the monastery, and the monks are obliged to lie in order to hide the truth about Columba’s absence. Returning from his unsuccessful search in the final act of the play, Columba is met by his own brother and nephew who beseech him to assist them in a fight of the Picts. Recalling his vow not to fight for his family again and reminded of Caornan’s death, Columba, for the first time, refuses to answer one of his clan’s calls. When Columba finally succeeds in rejecting his family’s public pressure, he breaks the vicious circle of being at his family’s mercy. Although he dismisses and condemns the family who curse him as a “coward” and a “traitor” before leaving the island, Columba’s love for Ireland is indefeasible (75). In fact, when he compares the struggle between his homeland and Iona to the fight between his body and soul, he suffers an emotional breakdown:

Get out of my monastery! Get out of my island! Get out of my life! Go back to those damned mountains and seductive hills that have robbed me of my Christ! You soaked my sweat! You sucked my blood! You stole my manhood, my best years! What more do you demand of me, damned Ireland? My soul? My immortal soul? Damned, damned, damned Ireland!—(His voice breaks) Soft, green Ireland—beautiful, green Ireland—my lovely green Ireland. O my Ireland—. (75)

Columba’s connection to Ireland has rightly been described as a femme fatale relationship (Pine, Ireland’s Drama 77). Although Columba’s love for Ireland (as femme fatale) does not harm his own family and tribe, it is, however,

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29 Defining the term femme fatale, Stott describes this type of woman as a “powerful and threatening figure” who is characterised by the effect which she prototypically has on the male protagonist: “a femme cannot be fatale without a male being present, even where her fatalism is directed towards herself” (viii, original emphasis). Dämmrich supports this view and points out that encountering this woman who is thought to possess both seductive and threatening features often turns out to be a stern test for the hero which he cannot resolve easily. The events brought about by meeting this female figure then illustrate how steadfast the male character is and allow the reader to draw conclusions with regard to the hero’s frame of mind. After all, the enchanting effect which the woman has on the male figure often serves as a catalyst for him to abandon his “home, family and destiny of life” [Heim, Familie und Bestimmung im Leben] that is to enjoy unimagined pleasures with her (150, my translation).
incompatible with his duties as abbot of Iona and affects his substitute family, the monks. Nonetheless, I reject those interpretations that see the ending as yet another unsuccessful beginning in Columba’s life (O’Brien, Friel 45, Pine, Ireland’s Drama 86, Andrews, Art 84). Instead, I support Dantanus’ reading that Columba’s “exile has been completed, but at a high cost” (82). From a verbal point of view, the abbot has finally managed to free himself from public power and from the spell that his own family and country have had over him so far. Together with Oswald, who has returned to the monastery, and the mentally confused monk Dochonna, Columba is “ready to begin” the religious journey of saving his soul from his family’s influence:

COLUMBA. Welcome – welcome home – welcome home, Oswald.
OSWALD. There was nothing to eat but barnacles and dulse –
COLUMBA. Oh, Oswald! Oswald! Oswald! Oswald!
DOCHONNA. You said he [i.e. Caornan; Dochonna mistakes Oswald for Caornan] was asleep, Columba, but I knew he wasn’t. I knew he wasn’t!
COLUMBA. We were both asleep, Dochonna of Lough Conn! But we are awake now and ready to begin again – to begin again – to begin again!
(Enemy 77, my emphasis)

In spite of repeating most phrases as if he wanted to convince himself of their meaning, Columba’s use of the words “home” and “awake” implies that a new era has begun; Iona has taken the place of Ireland. Symbolically, the novice’s and the abbot’s homecoming fuse and Columba’s nightmare of falling back into the same pattern is finally over. This crucial moment in Columba’s life takes the form of a personal revelation. The protagonist feels that for a long time he was “asleep” and unable to balance the pressure between the public and the private realm; feeling obliged to his family, he willingly accepted that his family wanted him to represent them by (ab)using his authority or power in public. In the course of the play, Columba undergoes a personal development. After a long process, he succeeds in creating a new identity for himself. He reaches a stage where his usage of the collective personal pronoun “we” underlines his transformation in the play: he has achieved a unity with the other monks which compensates for the loss of his family. Moreover, he seems “ready” to subordinate his private concerns to the public interests of Iona.

Public pressure, as found in The Enemy Within, and the power of public opinion can considerably influence or shape a character’s actions. While Corbett detects a general interest “in the gaps between word and deed” in Friel’s writing (108), McGrath argues that “The Freedom of the City is the first play in which Friel displays an awareness of how discourse shapes the institutional realities that we inhabit” (119). After all, McGrath argues that in The Freedom of the City
[the scenes within the Guildhall are framed by the public discourses outside. [...] In a sense the real protagonists of the play are the discourses of power that frame the activities of the hapless trio in the mayor’s parlour, limit their possibilities, determine the course of their lives, appropriate the meaning of their existence, and collaborate to snuff out that existence to suit the purposes of the respective discourses. (103–104)

One of the powerful voices referred to by McGrath belongs to Liam O’Kelly, a television newsman for the Republic of Ireland. In his live coverage of the demonstration, he notifies the public of the latest developments. The journalist’s statement sheds light on how powerful the role of the mass media in modern times can be. In fact, O’Kelly’s speech worsens the situation between the police forces and people marching for their human rights. His summary of what he understands is currently happening is an excellent example of how reality is distorted and fiction produced by the media. Moreover, the journalist’s report “also contributes to the dynamics of the tragedy by unwittingly confirming the official view” (McGrath 109):

I am standing on the walls overlooking Guildhall Square in Derry where only a short time ago a civil rights meeting, estimated at about three thousand strong, was broken up by a large contingent of police and troops. There are no reports of serious casualties but unconfirmed reports are coming in that a group of about fifty armed gunmen have taken possession of the Guildhall here below me and have barricaded themselves in. If the reports are accurate, and if the Guildhall, regarded by the minority as a symbol of Unionist domination, has fallen into the hands of the terrorists, both the security forces and the Stormont government will be acutely embarrassed. Brigadier Johnson-Hansbury who was in charge of today’s elaborate security operation has, so far, refused to confirm or deny the report. No comment either from the Chief Superintendent of Derry’s Royal Ulster Constabulary. But usually reliable spokesmen from the Bogside insist that the story is accurate, and already small groups are gathering at street corners within the ghetto area to celebrate, as one of them put it to me, ‘the fall of the Bastille.’ (Freedom 117–118, my emphasis)

O’Kelly’s account occurs at a relatively early stage of The Freedom of the City, but from what the audience has already seen or heard, the journalist’s version is without any foundation and, to a large extent, fiction. However, Corbett is right when he argues that the perspective chosen by Friel in this play results in evoking the idea in the audience that “one is a witness to the truth of the situation happening inside the Mayor’s parlour, a truth to which the other commentators in the play have no access” (143). Instead of concentrating on the plot, the audience shifts its interest towards how this misleading description of the events is set up; by mentioning that he is “overlooking” Guildhall Square, O’Kelly claims to be in an ideal position to assess the scene. Despite the careful expression “unconfirmed reports” and the use of conditional clauses, he does not only inform the public of the potential danger but he also
proceeds to interpret the incident as an embarrassment for those in power. Indirectly, he exerts pressure on the police and the army to take measures against the demonstrators, whom he begins to refer to as “terrorists” in the course of his own report. His accusation is, then, addressed to specific people, suggesting that the public expect the Brigadier and the Chief Superintendent to fully control the situation. In a next step, he seeks to strengthen his argument by revealing his source and underlining the trustworthiness of his informers. Furthermore, he draws the spectators’ attention to the reaction of the Catholic population who “celebrate” this moment as the onset of a revolution and the seizure of power as the fall of Protestant power and the beginning of Catholic reign. O’Kelly’s statements thus incite the Catholic side and indirectly call for political turmoil and the demonstrators’ take-over of power. Regardless of whether a television spectator is in favour or against the demonstrators’ requests, public opinion is largely shaped by O’Kelly’s misinformation because no other source of the public’s or the police’s information is indicated in the play. When an army officer issues the following statement, unease is evoked in the audience since part of the information appears to be based on O’Kelly’s report:

**OFFICER.** At approximately 15.20 hours today a band of terrorists took possession of a portion of the Guildhall. They gained access during a civil disturbance by forcing a side-door in Guildhall Street. It is estimated that up to forty persons are involved. […]

**PRESSMAN 2.** Are they armed?

**OFFICER.** Our information is that they have access to arms. […]

**PRESSMAN 1.** Have you been in touch with them?

**OFFICER.** No. (Freedom 126, my emphasis)

This conversation reveals that mere assumptions guide the army. When the officer admits that they have had no contact with the demonstrators inside the Guildhall, his statements sound even more indebted to O’Kelly’s information. The theatre audience has at this stage already witnessed how the three civilians stumbled into the Guildhall and locked themselves into the mayor’s parlour to save their own lives. Against this background, the measures taken by the police and the army are shown to be both entirely unnecessary. Unaware of the truth, the security forces seem to react to the pressure by the mass media and their influence on public opinion. According to Winkler,

Friel shows us exactly how such factors as rumor and counter-rumor, fear and nervousness, mutual suspicion, sectarian assumptions and political punitive thinking combine to create a situation in which shootings are at least comprehensible, if not inevitable or justifiable. (as quoted by McGrath 111)
Obviously, the police and the army cannot risk losing face; after all, O’Kelly has unequivocally made clear what significance the demonstrators’ occupation of the Guildhall has for national politics. O’Kelly’s statement indirectly and – as indicated by McGrath’s interpretation of the scene – “unwittingly” calls for determined action (109). Personal concerns and political implications appear to mingle and to dictate military actions. After O’Kelly’s utterance, there is no place for the truth of the peaceful demonstrators among those groups of society who are in control of public authority and power. Trying not to lose face in public, they sacrifice Michael, Lily and Skinner’s truths. To ensure that the (Protestant/pro-British) public believe in their official representatives, the power and knowledge of the army or the police must by no means be questioned or undermined. However, juxtaposing the scenes which the three victims experience with the interpretations offered by the official forces and the judge in *The Freedom of the City*, Friel not only calls the official public version into question but also examines the processes and forces which help produce it.

In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* there is a short passage which presents a slight variation to the mechanisms just described in *The Freedom of the City*. This scene also illustrates how social expectations, or what is perceived as such, can shape a character’s actions. In fact, the audience watches Gar sitting in his bedroom, contemplating why he is going to leave Ballybeg for good the next morning. He casts his mind back to the night when he intended to ask Senator Doogan permission to marry his daughter Kate, who will eventually represent “Gar’s lost future” in this play as a result of this encounter (Higgins 11). The young man has forgotten no word of his conversation with the Senator; he remembers how pessimistic Kate was for financial reasons when he first asked her to marry him. Later then, she encouraged him to talk to her father and even suggested that he should lie about his true income (*Philadelphia* 29–31). As soon as they return home and are met by Senator Doogan, “Kate gives Public a last significant look” and leaves for the kitchen (32). Before Gar has a chance to speak his mind, Kate’s father crushes his hopes by mentioning that Kate is, in all likelihood, going to marry Francis King, who will “get the new dispensary job” and whose father is both a medical doctor and an old acquaintance of his from university (32). Instead of sharing Kate and his plans with the Senator, Public Gar becomes as intimidated as in the conversations with his father. Made to feel inferior, Public Gar loses his initial courage and self-confidence. He decides to leave, confirmed by his *alter ego* Private Gar, who concludes that Kate was only fooling him when she encouraged him to talk to her father.

At this stage, Senator Doogan suddenly reveals to Gar that he does not want to take the responsibility for destroying the two young people’s future:
DOOGAN. Oh, Gareth—*(Public pauses).* *(Awkwardly, with sincerity)* Kate is our only child, Gareth, and her happiness is all that is important to us—

PRIVATE. *(sings)* ‘Give the woman in the bed more porter—’

DOOGAN. What I’m trying to say is that any decision she makes will be her own—

PRIVATE. ‘—Give the man beside her water, Give the woman in the bed more porter,—’

DOOGAN. Just in case you should think that her mother or I were… in case you might have the idea…. *(33–34)*

The Senator’s comment no longer has an impact on the young man. Convinced that Kate’s social background and her parents’ expectations do not match the life he can offer her, Private Gar tries to distract himself by singing the folksong *Give the Woman in the Bed More Porter*. Indeed, he shows no reaction when the Senator claims to respect his daughter’s wishes. He submits himself to social expectations and public opinion. The Senator’s motive for offering Gar the opportunity to ask his consent to marry Kate remains in the dark. Having no access to Doogan’s private thoughts, the audience is left to wonder whether the Senator really feels sorry for what he has just said and believes that the two young people deserve a chance after all. As soon as Gar has left Kate’s home, the young woman re-enters to inquire whether her boyfriend’s proposal has been successful:

**KATE.** *(Enters down right of Doogan and sees that Gar is no longer there)* Where’s Gar?

**DOOGAN.** He didn’t seem anxious to stay.

**KATE.** But didn’t he—did he—?

**DOOGAN.** No, he didn’t. *(34)*

Although Kate does not finish her sentence, her father knows what she is referring to. This short father-daughter exchange illustrates that the Senator appears to have been fully aware of what was about to happen when Kate first left for the kitchen. The suggestion that he and his wife would not deny Kate her wishes could also have been a back-handed move: sensing that Public Gar would never dare express his own and Kate’s hopes if Francis King’s name was mentioned, the Senator, from this perspective, uses the power of public opinion to fulfil his private dreams and ambitions. At any right, the prediction that his daughter will soon marry Francis King comes true the day Gar’s aunt visits her nephew and invites him to move to Philadelphia with her.

As I have already pointed out, *Dancing at Lughnasa* is another play which discusses the consequences social norms and expectations can have on individuals whose behaviour or circumstances deviate from the norm of the village. Contemplating the principles of criminal justice since the eighteenth century, Foucault, in his study *Discipline and Punish*, asserts that “[t]he
power of the norm appears through the disciplines” and concludes that “[l]ike surveillance and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age” (184). In fact, in Friel’s plays, those who fail to fulfil the community’s expectations, face disapproval and are exposed to public pressure or believe themselves to be exposed to it. Although the Ballybeg community, which is described by Lojek as “a patriarchal, claustrophobic society,” does not directly feature in Dancing at Lughnasa, public opinion is mirrored through Aunt Kate (“Unfinished Revolution” 79). Her decisions and actions betray her fears of public disapproval and indicate how much she suffers from public pressure. Kate, whom Murray refers to as “too much the product of the system which denies her support,” knows that in as remote a society as the one in Ballybeg privateness is a treasure and gossip omnipresent (“Recovering Tremors” 36). Being asked by their brother how information could possibly spread in this environment, Kate’s sister Maggie simply replies: “I wouldn’t worry about that. Words get about very quickly” (Dancing 72). The truth of this statement proves to be at the core of Kate’s insecurity. In fact, Kate resembles the prototypical inmate of Jeremy Bentham’s prison, which is examined in Foucault’s essay “Panopticism.” Trapped in a cell, the inmate is seen by the supervisor and is “the object of information, never a subject in communication” (Discipline and Punish 200). In Dancing at Lughnasa, Ballybeg becomes similar to the central tower in the Panoptic building, where “the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon” (201). Thus, Kate suffers from society’s constant surveillance. In fact, the only moment when she seems to be at ease with herself and her situation is when she starts to dance around the table with her sisters in the middle of the play. Emphasising the significance the act of dancing has in this play, Niel claims that “[d]ancing […] always offers an opportunity to break loose from the restricting rules of convention and, if only for a short period of time, provides the individual with freedom” (“Brian Friel” 45, my translation). However, except for this rare moment, identified by Higgins as “a silent form of defiance,” Kate never succeeds in forgetting the presence of Ballybeg and the constraints of the community which the village represents to her (87). Kate feels haunted like an inmate of the Panopticon who “must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so” (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 201). Having internalised the power relations in Ballybeg, Kate can be seen as a figure who “becomes the principle of [her] own

10 Original: Tanzen […] bietet immer eine Möglichkeit, aus den beengenden Regeln der Konvention auszubrechen und der eigenen Person zumindest für kurze Zeit einen Freiraum zu geben (45).
subjection” in that the public pressure which she feels exposed to rules her entire behaviour (203).

Aware of how powerful public pressure can be, Kate is anxious that the family do not deviate from normal Ballybeg behaviour. When the five Mundy sisters acquire their first wireless set and are, as Michael says, “obsessed” with it, his aunt Maggie suggests calling it “Lugh after the old Celtic God of the Harvest” (Dancing 7). Kate strongly disapproves of this idea and declares that “it would be sinful to christen an inanimate object with any kind of name, not to talk of a pagan god” (7). Moreover, aiming at conformity with the other members of the Ballybeg community, she scolds her sisters for using too many batteries for their new wireless set: “The man in the shop says we go through these things quicker than anyone in Ballybeg” (28). Public pressure thus encroaches on her private life. Hence, Dancing at Lughnasa demonstrates that, for Kate, privateness is no longer associated with shelter and security within her own home. She cannot bear the idea of her family’s lifestyle and behaviour being subjected to close scrutiny by the community. Michael, the narrator, indeed admits that, since their manners and activities differed from the majority of the community, the family were, indeed, publicly denounced. He explains that most importantly the aunts came in for criticism because of his illegitimacy; the aunts had “to bear the shame Mother [i.e. Michael’s mother] brought on the household by having me – as it was called then – out of wedlock” (17). This comment again recalls Foucault’s notion that “[i]n a disciplinary régime […] individualization is ‘descending’” insofar as “the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man, the madman and the delinquent more than the normal and the non-delinquent” (Discipline and Punish 193). In fact, the “constant division between the normal and the abnormal” is powerfully manifested with respect to the Mundy family (199). By giving birth to Michael, Chris has broken the unwritten rules of Ballybeg. Due to her conduct, the five sisters are turned into social outsiders whose moves and behaviour are carefully studied by the other members of the community.

When Michael’s father visits his son a few times that summer, Kate’s frustration and her dudgeon over the family’s situation are vented on Gerry. In fact, she even refuses to call Gerry by name, repeatedly calling him a “bastard” and “creature” who is not worth anything: “Seems to me the beasts of the field have more concern for their young than that creature has” (Dancing 55). One of her sisters finally loses her patience with Kate’s self-righteous conduct: “Do you ever listen to yourself, Kate? You are such a damned righteous bitch! And his name is Gerry! – Gerry! – Gerry!” (55) Exercising her linguistic power by denying Gerry the right to his own name and, in a wider sense, to an identity and existence allows Kate to take revenge on Michael’s father for depriving
them of their place within the community. Referring to Gerry as a “creature” and comparing him to “beasts in the field,” underlines that, from Kate’s standpoint, he is more like an animal than a human being because he has fathered an illegitimate child.

A similar attitude defines Kate’s relationship to Dan Bradley, a married man, with whom Aunt Rose ‘disappears’ one afternoon. Kate insists that Maggie, who is dreadfully worried about their mentally retarded sister’s whereabouts, must not inform the police. Trying to prevent her family from being further humiliated by negative publicity, Kate panics and comes across as quite unsympathetic. Dehumanising Dan Bradley and dismissing her sister’s behaviour, she decides: “You’re going to no police, Maggie. If she’s mixed up with that Bradley creature, I’m not going to have it broadcast all over –” (86). Thus, Kate’s fear of the possible public reaction to Rose’s conduct outweighs the concerns for her sister and, once more, proves that for her Ballybeg is a place where “thousands of eyes [are] posted everywhere” exposing her family to “permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 214).

Afraid the family’s reputation could be damaged, Kate also decides they had indeed better not enjoy themselves at the harvest dance:

Do you want the whole countryside to be laughing at us? – women of our years? – mature women, dancing? What’s come over you all? And this is Father Jack’s home – we must never forget that – ever. No, no, we’re going to no harvest dance. (25, original emphasis)

Fearing that their attendance could provoke public disapproval or further sneering within the community, Kate rebukes her sister for even thinking of partaking in such an event:

And what pagan practices they have are no concern of ours – none whatever! It’s a sorry day to hear talk like that in a Christian home, a Catholic home! All I can say is that I’m shocked and disappointed to hear you repeating rubbish like that, Rose. (29)

Kate believes they cannot afford to offer any opportunity for gossip and attract any additional attention. She feels so insecure in this community that she is convinced their participation in a pagan dance festival would be inappropriate, despite the fact that she personally informs the rest of the family that everyone else in Ballybeg actually plans to attend the festival (20). However, in her opinion, Father Jack should hail from a respected and serious household. Michael agrees that, for many years, his profession had indeed been a source of joy and the family’s status always rose in the eyes of the community whenever Uncle Jack’s name was mentioned:
And every so often when a story would appear in the *Donegal Enquirer* about ‘our own leper priest’, as they called him – because Ballybeg was proud of him, the whole of Donegal was proud of him – it was only natural that our family would enjoy a small share of that fame – it gave us that little bit of status in the eyes of the parish. (17)

Nonetheless, the excitement over Father Jack’s return to Ballybeg – similar to Cass McGuire’s homecoming – is transformed into an embarrassment for the family. The inhabitants of the remote village who initially planned “to have a great public welcome” for Jack with “flags, bands, speeches, everything” soon change their minds when they realise that Jack is strangely altered, having adopted pagan rituals and ceremonies in Ryanga (31). Michael admits that “[i]n fact he never said Mass again. And the neighbours stopped enquiring about him. And his name never again appeared in the *Donegal Enquirer*. And of course there was never a civic reception with bands and flags and speeches” (92). Rather than boosting his sisters’ reputation, Jack disgraces the family. By no longer mentioning his name in public, the Ballybeg community once again underlines the fact that Kate’s fears and premonition must not be downplayed in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Indeed, I fully agree with Harris’ interpretation of Kate’s character as the “undisputed champion of Christianity and the forces of repression” whose “excessive concern with ‘propriety’ […], […] opposition to dancing, and […] virulent anti-paganism are part of her plan to ‘keep the home together’” (32).

Despite the fact that thoughts and behaviour that deviate from the norm are judged negatively in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, this is not a rule which applies per se to Friel’s plays. *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* examines the moral standards of Ballybeg society, the mechanisms which are at work in developing public opinion and finally the public’s fascination with the private, the unusual or the scandalous. At the outset, Tom, the main protagonist, has been unable to finish his latest novel for five years. Due to his writer’s block, he and his wife risk losing the financial means to support their daughter in her mental institution. To resolve their financial situation, Tom is thinking of selling his manuscripts to a company in Texas. Estimating the value of Tom’s archive on behalf of the Texan company, David Knight has spent a week with Tom and Daisy. Although David has offered Tom’s friend Garret – a “popular but questionable artist” – a princely sum for his manuscripts, he appears reluctant to buy in Tom’s case (Bertha and Morse 24). Tom’s consternation grows. The presence of David, whom he has regarded as an intruder from the beginning, makes Tom feel nervous and awkward. Moreover, by allowing David access to his most private as well as intimate world and life, Tom believes that he has provided David with the power to evaluate his ‘naked’ truth: “But the really galling thing is that I gave him absolute freedom to examine every private detail of my entire career:
every stumbling first draft, every final proof copy, every letter, every invitation, every rejection” (Give 23). A conversation between Daisy and Tom further illustrates that David’s opinion and the price he might offer for the archive surpass the couple’s financial concerns. Daisy knows that they are directly related to Tom’s self-confidence:

So my hope would be that he makes you a worthy offer – just for your sake, only for your sake. Because that acknowledgement, that affirmation might give you – whatever it is – the courage? – the equilibrium? – the necessary self-esteem? – just to hold on. Isn’t that what everybody needs? So for that reason alone I really hope he does buy the stuff. (24)

Daisy then confronts Tom with David’s statement that “a complete archive [is] always more valuable” and urges him to allow David see the two secret manuscripts written in the period after the onset of Bridget’s illness (24, my emphasis). Tom hesitates, but Daisy suggests that to protect himself he could still consider granting the readers restricted access only: “You’ve shown them to nobody; I know that. But they are part of the archive. And you could insist that nobody would have access to them for so many years” (25). Tom finally succumbs, explaining to David and his closest friends that he feels ashamed of the two manuscripts which only Daisy has read so far because of their “pornographic” nature (58). Despite Tom’s unease, David, who at some stage reveals that, just like Tom’s daughter, he had “a little bit of a setback” with regard to his mental health a few years before, is thrilled with the novels and offers the writer an astronomical price for his archive (40). This phenomenon underlines how fascinating access to a character’s most private or intimate sphere is for the public. Give Me Your Answer, Do! suggests that for David (and the public) the most valuable text is one where individuals exploit their unconscious and bare their souls exploring every facet of their most intimate and painful sensations. David does, in fact, not care about Tom’s insecurities and anxiety over publicising his entire archive. However, it is worth mentioning that David, who represents the public taste in this play, must have experienced his own emotional turmoil when he had his mental breakdown. He tells Daisy’s mother, a medical doctor, that at a time when he was both professionally and financially rather successful “a funny thing happened. My legs suddenly melted. And I found myself sitting on the pavement. And I couldn’t remember my name. (Laughs) Three weeks before I knew who I was! Ridiculous, isn’t it?” (41) Praising Tom’s entire work, David argues that, after reading the two unpublished novels, both of which might actually verbalise some of the emotions and feelings he himself experienced during his breakdown, “[e]verything has suddenly fallen into place […] Everything is of a piece – I can see that now. A complete archive – a wonderful archive” (63). Knowing
that texts which strip the individual of his privacy will sell, David makes it impossible for a human being to keep private his personal grief and sorrows.

From Daisy and Tom’s point of view, David not only judges the quality of Tom’s writing, but indirectly also evaluates how well Daisy and Tom have managed since their daughter fell ill. To be able to stay close to Bridget, they chose homes that became “more and more isolated and more decayed and of course cheaper” (28). This description of the fourteen places they have inhabited since Bridget’s birth indicates how their position in society has diminished as a result of Bridget’s illness and how by yielding to public pressure they were gradually turned into social outcasts. Moreover, talking to her mother, Daisy admits that she hardly ever goes to visit her daughter because she cannot bear seeing Bridget in such bad condition. By adding the expression “[c]owardly, I know,” Daisy implies that – judged by moral standards – she feels incapable of meeting the public’s expectations as a mother (32). Apart from having to cope with her own conscience in this context, it hurts Daisy that her actions, her passivity, in fact her entire personality are assessed from the outside. Having promised David to persuade Tom to sell his archive, Daisy suddenly changes her mind:

Oh, no, he mustn’t sell. Of course he mustn’t sell. There are reasons why he wants to sell and those reasons are valid reasons and understandable and very persuasive. A better place for Bridget. […] But we were both deluded. Indeed we were. A better place for Bridget? But Bridget is beyond knowing, isn’t she? And somehow, somehow bills will always be met. And what does a little physical discomfort matter? Really not a lot. But to sell for an affirmation, for an answer, to be free of that grinding uncertainty, that would be so wrong for him and so wrong for his work. (79)

The statement underlines that, at this moment, Daisy decides that she will no longer allow public pressure or opinion to rule their lives. She is convinced that the public should not have the right to judge Tom’s work. Instead, she finds what seems the ideal solution for Tom and herself. She earns the money for Bridget’s institution by offering intensive piano lessons to the most talented young pianists all over the world (83). This turns out to be an indirect way of fulfilling her maternal duties. As a side effect, this commitment of hers for the good of her daughter gains her the public respect she was denied before, helps her to reduce her self-accusation and frees the couple of public influence and pressure. Consequently, Tom does not have to sell his archive and, in contrast to his friend Garret, remains independent. Garret, who has sold his archive, dreams of writing a book about Wittgenstein despite being aware that his audience would not appreciate his career turning in this direction: “[M]y convenant with the great warm public – that’s the problem. We’re woven into each other. I created the taste by which they now assess
The public success controls Garret; he is made the readers’ slave. Unlike Garret, Tom ends up preserving his artistic and creative independence to follow his private interests. He is not compelled to write what the public expects of him, what they should, in all likelihood, appreciate or what they will consider complements his oeuvre.

As in Dancing at Lughnasa, the public plays an indirect role in Aristocrats in that public expectations and pressure are mirrored by the main protagonists’ actions and their behaviour. Tom Hoffnung, an American academic, who intends to record the knowledge of several upper class families, is currently staying with the O’Donnell family. Conducting some research for his forthcoming publication on the “[r]ecurring cultural, political and social modes in the upper strata of Roman Catholic society in rural Ireland since the act of Catholic Emancipation,” Tom traces the family’s famous acquaintances to categorise or label their relations and finally to make his findings publicly accessible (Aristocrats 265). For financial reasons, Judith O’Donnell, on behalf of her generation of the O’Donnell family, has invited Tom to “record the truth” (313). However, the truth, as always in Friel’s work, cannot be reached: the public and private perspectives of the family history are too divergent. In fact, as Emmert highlights, in Aristocrats, an approach to history aiming at objectivity is contrasted with the collective memories based on family myths (115). Moreover, Tom’s presence is disturbing and irritating for the young people as the history of the O’Donnell family is one of rapid descent: “Great Grandfather – Lord Chief Justice; Grandfather – Circuit Court Judge; Father – simple District Justice; Casimir – failed solicitor” (295). Pondering this development and the heavy burden imposed on Casimir by his ancestors, Eamon, Casimir’s brother-in-law, concludes: “D’you know, Professor, I’ve often wondered: if we had had children and they wanted to be part of the family legal tradition, the only option open to them would have been as criminals” (295). As they have both suffered from public opinion in the past, Eamon and Casimir are particularly suspicious of Tom’s project; therefore, the atmosphere among the male characters in the play is not without tension. While Casimir has been described in public as “peculiar,” Eamon is repeatedly shown to yield to public opinion and consider himself inferior to the O’Donnell family (310).

Reminiscing his childhood experiences, Casimir reveals that his father shattered his sense of identity at an early stage in his life when he told him: “Had you been born down there, you’d have become the village idiot. Fortunately for you, you were born here and we can absorb you” (310). Normally Casimir manages to hide his insecurity behind a nonchalant behaviour. However, because Tom is primarily interested in power and success, both of which Casimir lacks, their personalities do not match at all. When Tom, whose academic conduct Eamon mocks because he displays a
great tendency to “[c]heck, ‘recheck’, ‘double-check’, ‘cross-check’” every piece of information he is given, mentions that occasionally Casimir’s memory seems to fuse with his imagination, the young man is at a complete loss as to how to react (312). In fact, in one of his conversations with Tom, Casimir claims that he “vividly” remembers Yeats’ visits (267 and 308). Although Tom tries not to turn his statement into a face-threatening act for Casimir when confronting him with his objectified truth, Tom’s effort to remedy the situation is in vain:

TOM. Well, you were born on 1st April, 1939.
CASIMIR. Good heavens – don’t I know! All Fools day! Yes?
TOM. And Yeats died the same year. Two months earlier. I’ve double checked it. (He looks up from his notes. Casimir is staring at him. Pause.) I make little mistakes like that all the time myself. […] I mean a man like Yeats is a visitor to your home, a friend of the family, you hear a lot of talk about him, and naturally after a time, naturally you come to think you actually… I’ve some correspondence to catch up with. Forgive me. (309)

Eamon, who shares Casimir’s dislike of the American academic, regards Tom as a prying intruder whose detailed and direct questions are inappropriate and insensitive. Moreover, he believes that “[t]here are certain things, certain truths, […] that are beyond Tom’s kind of scrutiny” (309–310). Tom’s visit to the Big Hall, indeed, draws attention to conflicting interests; while the O’Donnells are eager to keep their privacy, Tom believes that there is a public interest in this family’s private lives. The facts or knowledge that Tom is looking for are unfortunately of a quality that the family members cannot offer. Their experiences and memories are selective, highly personal and in some cases even fictional. In this sense, Aristocrats, according to Kimmer, sheds light on “how an individual responds when the past overshadows the present, reducing accepted facts into personal myths” (195). The critic further explains that, for the individual members of the O’Donnell family, “creating these stories is the only way that the current generation can claim Ballybeg Hall as their own and, due to economic realities, take an active role in maintaining the family history” (206). The knowledge or truth Tom wants the public to have access to, however, will only touch the family’s personal memories or experiences superficially, but will not really manage to capture their version of truth. The family’s personal sentiments will remain hidden in Tom’s book since much of the intimate information given to Tom is of little value for outsiders.

At the same time, the play ironically shows that Tom considers those characters inferior who possess what he would label ‘valid’ information.
Eamon, for example, is a “local [...] from [Ballybeg] village,” whose promising future as a diplomat came to an abrupt end when he joined the civil rights movement (*Aristocrats* 271). Although he grew up with the O’Donnell children because his grandmother “[w]orked all her life as a maid here in the Hall,” Eamon still feels intimidated by this house (276). McGrath argues that “Eamon has steeped himself in the tradition to the point that he knows more about it than the O’Donnells” because he “absorbed both his knowledge and infatuation with Ballybeg Hall from his grandmother” (153). For this reason, he recommends that Tom draw on his grandmother’s fund of stories and information. [...] Carriages, balls, receptions, weddings, christenings, feasts, deaths, trips to Rome, musical evenings, tennis – that’s the mythology I was nurtured on all my life, day after day, year after year – the life of the ‘quality’ – that’s how she pronounces it, with a flat ‘a’. A strange and marvellous education for a wee country boy, wasn’t it? (*Aristocrats* 276)

Tom shows no reaction to Eamon’s suggestion indicating that, in his opinion, history is not written by a housemaid. This attitude, which renews Eamon’s feeling of inferiority and his hostility towards Tom, implies that the voice of Eamon’s grandmother does not have the same impact as an aristocrat’s memories. Tom’s unwillingness to interview the young man’s grandmother illustrates Foucault’s notion that power produces knowledge or truth; in this play, the thoughts of individuals who lack the social position of the O’Donnell family are regarded as irrelevant (Foucault, “Truth and Power” 131). The play, therefore, underlines that it is not the most knowledgeable people who produce facts and truth; these aspects remain an instrument of the powerful. Ridiculing Tom’s work as well as the type of receptions from which he used to be excluded as a child, Eamon cynically mentions that, from a public point of view, some of the O’Donnell visitors were of a doubtful honour or are a myth: “Begging your pardon, your eminence, your worship, your holiness – sorry, Shakespeare, Lenin, Mickey Mouse, Marilyn Monroe – [...] Like walking through Madame Tussaud’s, isn’t it, Professor? Or a bloody mine-field?” (*Aristocrats* 274) Eamon’s cynicism underlines that, in his opinion, Tom is mainly interested in name-dropping and does not care about the actual experiences the family had. In Eamon’s opinion, not only does Tom disregard the “bloody mine-field” the O’Donnell family and their visitors have left behind because he is blinded by their fame and celebrity, but refusing to talk to the powerless representatives of Ballybeg, the academic also fails to grasp the enormous impact the family’s myths and narratives have had in establishing these characters’ identity and sense of history.