3. Manifestations of Power and Control

Having analysed how public pressure affects a character’s behaviour, I will now turn to characters in Friel’s plays who either have or seek power and control. Using their authority, these figures influence or rule other characters’ lives according to their ideas and norms. The most typical examples of dominance or oppression in Friel are found within families; whether deliberately or not, one member of the family (usually the father or the mother) superimposes his or her power on the other characters and thereby considerably reduces their quality of life. For the oppressed, such as Casimir or Judith in Aristocrats, Gar in Philadelphia, Here I Come! and Hanna or Andy in “Losers,” home is no longer a private space associated with protection, security and cosiness but a hostile place identified with the powerful figure.

In “Losers” (the second short play in Lovers), Mrs Wilson, nursed by her daughter Hanna, governs the household from her bed on the second floor of the house. Despite her physical handicap, she is in full command of her family’s life. Her opponent, Hanna’s husband Andy Tracey, functions as a homodiegetic narrator. Apart from being able to structure the narrative and disclose his private truth, he is deprived of any power. At the beginning of the play, Andy, “replicating a habit of the deceased Mr. Wilson,” is sitting in the back yard of the house (O’Brien, Friel 63):

> He is staring fixedly through a pair of binoculars at the grey stone wall, which is only a few yards from where he is sitting. It becomes obvious that he is watching nothing; there is nothing to watch, and when he becomes aware of the audience, he lowers the glasses slowly, looks at the audience, glances cautiously over his shoulder at the kitchen to make sure that no one in the house overhears him, and then speaks directly and confidentially down to the auditorium. (“Losers” 51)

Andy’s demeanour of glancing “cautiously over his shoulder” to ensure he is not caught red-handed when informing the audience of his personal insights and opinions underlines that he is always on guard in the Wilson household. Andy feels intimidated because he is, as Dantanus argues, “outnumbered and outwitted by the women,” namely by his mother-in-law, his wife and their neighbour Cissy (113). In fact, as in The Loves of Cass McGuire, for instance, the audience serves as Andy’s only confidant. Describing his removal to the back yard as a “gesture” which Hanna “respects” by leaving him alone, Andy tells the audience how Mrs Wilson found her husband “dead [...] just three years ago, slumped in a chair” in the same back yard where he himself now prefers to spend his time (“Losers” 52). Discovering her dead husband, Hanna’s mother, according to Andy, “got such a bloody fright that she collapsed and took to the bed for good and hasn’t risen since” (53). The narrator tells the audience that
Mr Wilson’s death greatly altered his relationship with Hanna, whom he had only started courting shortly before her father passed away:

[W]ith the aul’ fella [i.e. Hanna’s father] dying and the aul’ woman [i.e. Hanna’s mother] taking to the bed, like we couldn’t go out to the pictures nor dances nor nothing like any other couple; so I started coming here every evening. And this is where we done [sic] our courting, in there, on the couch. (53)

Despite the fact that at the beginning of their relationship Hanna and Andy are already in their late forties or early fifties, Mrs Wilson, a fervent follower to the tenets of the Catholic Church, begins to control and terrorise the two lovers soon after her husband’s death.

Sensing that the power structure and her position in the family are endangered by her husband’s death and, most importantly, by her daughter’s relationship with Andy, Mrs Wilson intrudes on their private lives. In fact, she goes to great lengths to prevent the couple from establishing a feeling of intimacy with each other. As the lovers’ intimacy could undermine her influence in the house, the old lady seems determined to keep Hanna and Andy from forming a bond, which could potentially harm her in that it would shift the power balance in the family and overturn the order and values she represents. In his study of family conflicts in literature, von Matt claims that ‘reprobate sons’ [verkommene Söhne] and ‘unruly daughters’ [missratene Töchter] are defined by representing “a piece of fundamental dis-order or counter-order” within the parents’ existing order, and are, therefore, associated with the other (23, my translation). Moreover, he stresses that if the younger generation in a family questions the patriarchal system within their home, parents tend to rule the household with iron will, striving to preserve the old order and power structure. In “Losers,” Mrs Wilson, indeed, defends her power and her system of beliefs vigorously: she repeatedly disturbs the lovers’ twosomeness by ringing a bell – “not a tinkling little bell, but a huge brass bell with a long wooden handle” – to call for her daughter Hanna (55). Referring to her frequent usage of this bell, Andy claims that

nine times out of ten, you know, she didn’t want a damn thing […]. You see, every sound down here carries straight up to her room; and we discovered that it was the long silences made her suspicious. That’s the way with a lot of pious aul’ women – they have wild dirty imaginations. (55)

Hence, having an ordinary conversation is impossible for Hanna and Andy. After all, normal dialogues contain moments of silence, a characteristic which is revealed to be incompatible with the circumstances given in this family. Afraid of

31 Original: ein Stück elementarer Un-Ordnung oder Gegen-Ordnung (23).
Mrs Wilson’s constant intrusion, the two lovers are forced to produce endless chains of sounds instead of conversing together; consequently, Andy and Hanna’s dialogue ends up having no meaning. In fact, one night, to mislead his mother-in-law, Andy begins reciting Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* over and over again. However, the lovers are in a desperate situation, as this elegy is the only poem Andy knows by heart. As long as Andy keeps rattling the same poem off with Hanna throwing in the odd word every now and then “to make it sound natural,” the two lovers are safe (56), but as soon as Andy lapses into silence or the couple start kissing, Mrs Wilson interrupts this intimate moment by ringing her bell “to keep Hanna on the hop” (55). In an attempt to tie her daughter closer to her by constantly calling for her with the ringing of her bell, Mrs Wilson superimposes her needs, symbolised by jingling, on Hanna and Andy (44). As a result of Mrs Wilson’s frequent usage of the bell, the two lovers in this play are deprived of their freedom to spend their spare time as they like. Nevertheless, looking back, Andy claims that these times of courting “were good times” (56). After all, eluding Mrs Wilson’s surveillance, the lovers are able to share some secret intimacy. It thrills and unites them to deceive Hanna’s mother, who thinks that they are involved in a discussion whenever she hears their voices. Therefore, quite against her intention, Hanna’s mother increases the degree of intimacy and confidentiality between Hanna and Andy with her frequent jingling and tinkling.

After the wedding, which legally acknowledges Hanna’s bond with Andy and thus appears to intensify Mrs Wilson’s unease and fears with regard to her powerful position in the family, Mrs Wilson changes her strategy. Trying hard to regain control and remain in power as head of the family, Mrs Wilson seeks to undo the development which has taken place between Andy and her daughter. Thus, over the next four years of their married life, she begins to ring her bell whenever she can hear Andy and Hanna exchanging some words. In order to enjoy some peace and quiet, the couple soon have to sit together in deafening silence. Finally, however, Mrs Wilson succeeds in estranging Hanna from her husband and in binding her daughter closer to herself. Following the credo “[a] girl’s best friend is her mother,” the atmosphere in the house gets bleak and dreary (59). As the lovers lack the fantasy they displayed during their time of courting, Andy’s optimism diminishes to the point where Mrs Wilson’s dominant behaviour ironically triggers the kind of reaction from her son-in-law she has tried to prevent since her husband’s death by ruling the family with her iron will.

One night, openly attempting to usurp the old order symbolised by his mother-in-law, Andy opts for the prototypical reprobate behaviour described by von Matt. Opposing Mrs Wilson and her daughter, who have adopted the local priest’s conviction that “the family that prays together stays together,”
Andy decides to put an end to the customary “Rosary caper” in the evenings (66 and 69). Referring to a newspaper article that claims that “even the Pope can make a mistake” and that the Vatican, therefore, urges all Roman Catholics to discontinue “the devotion […] to Saint Philomena […] at once because there is little or no evidence that such a person ever existed,” Andy informs the women that he will no longer adhere to the belief in Saint Philomena (70). However, Andy’s revolution fails to destroy their praying together or the entire system of beliefs and morals in the family. Instead of supporting her husband, Hanna further withdraws from Andy and bonds with her mother and their neighbour Cissy, who measures her religiosity against Mrs Wilson’s example. Andy thus loses his position and the little influence he had on the relationship with his wife. In fact, after this incidence, Andy ends up killing most of his time observing birds in the back yard through late Mr Wilson’s binoculars, while Hanna adopts her mother’s fanatic religiousness and spends her spare time in her mother’s bedroom. Despite the crucial role religion plays in the house, no love or cosiness is left in the family. The home becomes a cool and impersonal place. Pursuing her own aims, Mrs Wilson abuses her powerful position; keeping her daughter and her son-in-law under permanent surveillance, she deprives them of any privacy and thereby destroys their love for each other.

Lying upstairs, Mrs Wilson cannot use sight to control her daughter and Andy, but she relies entirely on sounds. These sounds can be misleading, as the permanent reciting of Thomas Gray’s poem proves. Nevertheless, the power Hanna’s mother possesses is uncanny: Hanna and Andy constantly feel observed and are rather irritated by Mrs Wilson, who listens to the sounds they make. Their relationship cannot develop. Like Kate in Dancing at Lughnasa, they resemble the inmates of the Panopticon who never know whether they are observed or supervised at the moment, and generally behave as if they might always be so (Foucault, Discipline and Punish 201). Before their marriage, they have to speak without interruption; afterwards they are forced to let their communication deteriorate altogether. As “victims of a narrowly pietistic religious observance and a society which promotes it,” the lovers’ dream of sharing privateness is lost within a few years; they cannot share intimacy and the audience never sees them involved in confidential intercourse (Dantanus 113). Thus, in the two short plays in Lovers, Friel “[counterpoints] the optimism of the young Mag and Joe in ‘Winners’ (the first half) with the frustration and disillusionment of the older Andy and Hanna in ‘Losers’” (Grant 17). Unlike the two winners, Mag and Joe, whose untimely deaths prevent their love from being affected by everyday life, Andy and Hanna are losers because they “live to regret their passions” and allow their love as well as
their alternative conceptions of life and values to be sacrificed for the sake of the old order represented by Mrs Wilson’s norms and values (Harris 55).

A remarkable variation of the theme of surveillance as a means of manifesting power is explored in Aristocrats, where the family’s former aura of authority and significance is personified by the mostly “unseen figure of the Father” (Corbett 83). Again, there is a marked contrast between District Justice O’Donnell’s physical powerlessness and his conduct. Like Mrs Wilson, the once powerful and now somewhat mentally disturbed pater familias is bound to his bed due to his poor health. For most of the play, the former judge’s voice is transmitted by a technical device, a “yoke,” which several characters refer to as a “baby-alarm” (Aristocrats 278). Thus, his speech seems to have become part of “the fabric of the building” (Corbett 83). Metonymically, it could be argued that O’Donnell’s rapidly decreasing state of health is linked with the decay of his house. Moreover, the installation of the baby-alarm exemplifies how the power structure within the family is reversed, as “the surveillance system which degrades him [i.e. the judge] to a child” allows the children to use this technical tool to monitor – or to spy on – their father (Emmert 119, my translation). Meditating the term “baby-alarm” and its “aptness in the circumstances” where both the house and the family are past their prime, Eamon, O’Donnell’s son-in-law and a representative of the peasant community in Ballybeg, even mentions the former judge’s regression to a stage of his childhood on the level of the plot:

I suppose baby-alarm has an aptness in the circumstances. But there’s another word – what’s the name I’m looking for? – what do you call the peep-hole in a prison door? Judas hole! That’s it. Would that be more appropriate? But then we’d have to decide who’s spying on whom, wouldn’t we? No; let’s keep baby-alarm. (Aristocrats 279)

The terms peep-hole or Judas hole both call to mind the power of surveillance as described by Foucault and make clear that the question of authority in this play is an ambivalent one (Discipline and Punish 201). However, as the children’s supervision and the remaining authority of the father are based on sound rather than sight, I would argue that peep-hole and Judas hole have misleading connotations. Emphasising O’Donnell’s powerlessness as the device deprives him of privacy, Eamon, in my opinion, rightly concludes that baby-alarm is the most accurate expression in this context. Since the tool enables everyone to listen to his mumbling and to the disclosure of his most secret thoughts, not only is the judge supervised, but his formerly uncontested authority is simultaneously also undermined.

32 Original: [d]ie Überwachungsanlage, die ihn zum Kind degradiert (119).
Regardless of O’Donnell’s state of mind and regardless of the younger generation’s comments on supervising their father by means of a baby-alarm, the authority of the head of the family is not lost entirely. Whereas O’Donnell’s speaking is occasionally described as “incoherent mumbling,” it still comes across as “suddenly very loud and very authoritative” at other times (Aristocrats 256 and 258). In these situations, the pater familias, unwittingly, still controls the house: his voice regularly startles his children and momentarily silences their private conversations downstairs. Casimir’s attitude towards his father, for instance, has not changed: the judge’s piercing voice still makes him panic and causes him to feel uneasy at home. Two short scenes illustrate that Casimir has never stopped acting like a small boy in this house and that he is always anxious to obey and please his domineering father. Both examples exploit the comicality of the situation because the father no longer means what he says. In the first case, Casimir, intending to reach his wife in Germany, is fiddling with the handle on the phone when his father bawls and ends up highly disconcerting his son:

FATHER. Don’t touch that!

(Casimir drops the phone in panic and terror.)

CASIMIR. Christ! Ha-ha. O my God! That – that – that’s –

TOM. It’s only the baby-alarm.

CASIMIR. I thought for a moment Father was – was – was –

TOM. Maybe I should turn it down a bit.

CASIMIR. God, it’s eerie – that’s what it is – eerie – eerie – (263)

Casimir’s reaction reveals that being addressed by his father has never stopped being an intimidating and frightening experience for him. In fact, he begins to stammer and is obviously embarrassed about his father’s enormous influence over him. Not even the years abroad have helped to free him from the trauma of failing in the eyes of his powerful father:

(Casimir enters the study, carrying a large tray [...] his chant is interrupted by Father’s clear and commanding voice.)

FATHER. Casimir!

(Casimir jumps to attention; rigid, terrified.)

CASIMIR. Yes sir!

FATHER. Come to the library at once. I wish to speak to you.

(Casimir now realizes that the voice has come from the speaker.)

CASIMIR. Christ … oh-oh-oh my God … Ha-ha. Isn’t that a very comical joke – I almost stood to attention – I almost stood –

(He looks round at the others who are staring at him. He tries to smile. He is totally lost. He looks at the tray; then sinks to the ground with it, ending in a kneeling position.)

CASIMIR. That’s the second time I was caught – the second time – (282)
Incapable of relaxing in the powerful presence of his father, Casimir literally crouches under the weight. His behaviour further implies that the father’s education methods must have been strict and fierce and that, in Casimir’s eyes, the term home bears the same negative connotations as it does for Gar in Philadelphia, Here I Come! Rather than shelter and homeliness, home, for Casimir, means determination and terror and is associated with a sense of being useless, although, in contrast to Mrs Wilson’s situation in “Losers,” District Justice O’Donnell’s power is a fake at this stage in his life. Eamon, O’Donnell’s son-in-law, also admits that the house, embodied by O’Donnell’s powerful presence and his strict and “unspoken” principles, has always had a daunting effect on him:

I’m talking too much, amn’t I (Pause.) I always talk too much in this house, don’t I? Is it because I’m still intimidated by it? (Pause.) And this was always a house of reticence, of things unspoken, wasn’t it? (Aristocrats 279)

The use of the word “intimidated,” on the one hand, hints at some sort of nervousness as well as at the awe which – with respect to the history of the house and the superior social position of its inhabitants – used to be evoked in Eamon whenever he visited the house. On the other hand, however, mentioning the lack of communication among its inhabitants, the “reticence” and “things unspoken” in District Justice O’Donnell’s home and family, Eamon’s choice of word also points toward his memories of frightening and eerie experiences in the house. In this sense, the play indeed “dramatises their [i.e. the younger generation’s] struggle to come to terms with an oppressive, patriarchal authority which has controlled their personal and collective histories” (Andrews, Art 149).

As in Mrs Wilson’s case in “Losers,” District Justice O’Donnell’s power is linked with sound. Contrary to Mrs Wilson, who has reached a position of nearly unrestricted power in her household towards the end of the play, sound in Aristocrats allows O’Donnell and his children to control each other. Moreover, due to his state of mind, the former judge has, in fact, lost the ability to handle the authority granted to him. As “a voice without a body,” he can no longer pursue his interests and exercise his powerful position (Corbett 75). Unlike her brother Casimir and her husband Eamon, Alice has actually entered her father’s bedroom and seen him with her own eyes. Shocked by this encounter, she immediately denies her father the air of authority which he managed to wield by means of sound: “[H]e was always such a big strong man with such power, such authority; and then to see him lying there, so flat under the clothes, with his mouth open –” (Aristocrats 289). Alice thus recognises that her father’s former power and impact is definitely crumbling.
District Justice O’Donnell’s life appears to have started falling into disarray when his eldest daughter, Judith O’Donnell, “took part in the Battle of the Bogside” and he suffered his first stroke (272). Abandoning the family, then consisting of her father, her uncle and her youngest sister Claire, Judith “joined the people in the streets fighting the police” (272). Just as Andy’s refusal to pray to Saint Philomena in “Losers” may be regarded as a revolutionary act, O’Donnell’s eldest daughter is likewise understood to have called the old order into question by bonding with “the civil rights movement” (272). Seven months after participating in the civil rights campaign, Judith – in her father’s opinion and presumably in the eyes of other public authorities – brought even more shame on the family as the mother of an illegitimate child. Indirectly, the birth of her baby appears to have been interpreted as another act of violating the values and norms her respected father represented. As von Matt highlights, in family conflicts, it is often the younger generation’s resistance to power or their failure to conform to the parents’ norms which are interpreted as unruly. In order to pass as reprobate or unruly, it is a necessary pre-condition that the characteristic deviant moral behaviour is ascribed, both implicitly or explicitly, to a character, whether by the character himself or by others (von Matt 39). After all,

[r]eprobate sons and unruly daughters can only exist where an actual character delivers this judgement reverting to an applicable law and drawing conclusions from doing so. The phenomenon of the reprobate child is necessarily linked to the act of judging and, thus, to an actual trial. The family is transformed into a tribunal. (39, my translation)\(^{33}\)

At the time of the play, District Justice O’Donnell, no longer of sound mind or disposing memory, lives in a world of his own, a world of the past and of the court. Confusing his home with the courtroom, the former judge is aptly referred to by Roche as “a symbol of the Law” (Theatre 80). Repeatedly engaged in fictitious conversations with former defendants and “still delivering judgments from the bench, some of them on individual members of his own family,” District Justice O’Donnell no longer recognises Judith, who now nurses him and who appears to have subjected herself entirely to the power manifestations and expectations of her father (Roche, Theatre 77). Putting the boy in an orphanage after birth, she returned to her father’s house to fulfil her familial duties as O’Donnell’s eldest daughter. Having, metaphorically speaking, been found guilty of treason in her father’s tribunal and unable to appeal

\(^{33}\) Original: [v]erkommene Söhne und missratene Töchter kann es nur geben, wo eine lebendige Person im Rückgriff auf ein geltendes Gesetz dieses Urteil fällt und daraus Konsequenzen zieht. Das Phänomen des missratenen Kindes ist zwingend gekoppelt an das Ereignis des Urteils und damit an ein Gerichtsgeschehen. Die Familie wird zum Tribunal. (39)
to any court as the father rules the family with absolute power; Judith submits herself to the judge’s strict and, with regard to her child, inhumane principles. Possibly feeling responsible for the stroke her father suffered when she neglected her duties and for the disgrace he must have endured by the birth of her illegitimate child, Judith, freezing her own set of beliefs, her needs as well as those of her own child, fights a losing battle to keep her somewhat dysfunctional family and the dilapidating house together. After her father’s death, she informs the rest of the family how she failed to “get an overdraft from the bank” after a storm “lifted the whole roof off the back” (Aristocrats 317). Furthermore, apart from nursing her demented father, she has spent the last seven years caring for her mute uncle, who drank himself “half-crazy” as a “young fella” and then suddenly “stopped speaking” (254), and minding her youngest sister Claire, who is, according to her siblings, inflicted with “depression” and “over-anxiety” (268 and 269). Despite Judith’s courageous fight, her father has not forgotten the public disgrace he was exposed to because of his eldest child. Thus, although Judith’s motherhood does not appear to be discussed openly in the family, the District Justice has never forgiven his daughter for causing this crisis. Mentally disturbed and no longer able to repress his private thoughts, he “confidentially” divulges the family secret to his nurse, Judith, and – unaware of the intercom that has been installed in the house – to anyone present in Ballybeg Hall:

FATHER. Let me tell you something in confidence: Judith betrayed the family.
JUDITH. Did she?
FATHER. I don’t wish to make an issue of it. But I can tell you confidentially – Judith betrayed us. […] Great betrayal; enormous betrayal. (257)

In his eyes, his eldest daughter is guilty of violating the (unwritten) laws of the family. The family tribunal and the aspect of moral judgement, which von Matt discusses in his study, are hinted at in Aristocrats when O’Donnell mentions Judith’s sister: “Anna’s praying for Judith. Did you know that? […] Anna has the whole convent praying for her” (Aristocrats 257). O’Donnell’s comment, addressed to Judith as his nurse rather than his daughter, illustrates that, contrary to Judith, who has brought shame on the family, Anna, who works as a nun in Zambia, has seemingly become her father’s sole pride and comfort.

In his reading of Aristocrats, Andrews characterises Judith as the member of the family for whom “the old order is simply not worth preserving” (Art 155). As my interpretation of the play has shown, I agree with this view – but only with reservations. Bonding with the civil rights movement, Judith might have defied the system of her father, but after giving birth to her child, Judith abandoned the baby. In fact, she spent seven years nursing three members of
the family, ensuring that the old order was kept alive. In addition, it was she who invited the American academic Tom Hoffnung to chronicle the family history, which shows that Judith – regardless of her own attitude or ideas – respects her father’s pride in tradition and acts accordingly. Nevertheless, and this is why I still agree with Andrews’ claim, after her father’s death she allows the old system to dissolve. District Justice O’Donnell’s death thus marks, as Eamon suggests, “the end of an epoch,” the end of the family’s entanglement with Ballybeg and the legal profession (Aristocrats 312). Along the line of von Matt’s argument that unruly children are frequently representatives of a new age (69), O’Donnell’s demise also symbolises the beginning of a new era in which Judith will live according to her own convictions and at the beginning of which she announces that “[t]he first thing I am going to do is take the baby out of the orphanage” to undo the mistakes which her father’s manifestations of power resulted in (Aristocrats 318). As McMullan stresses, not only does the death of the pater familias enable Judith to sell the house and reunite with her child, but it also has a liberating effect on other characters such as Uncle George, who “rediscovers his voice and decides to move to London with Alice and Eamon” (150). The fact that Uncle George regains his voice after District Justice O’Donnell has passed away indicates that the family succeeds in overcoming the state of inertia which they lapsed into as a result of his power and control.

Whereas in “Losers” and Aristocrats the manifestations of power and control are closely related to sound, in Molly Sweeney, the two male protagonists superimpose the power of sight on the blind female character. Vision or “the hegemony of the eye” are therefore the keywords for an understanding of Molly Sweeney (Jay 384). In the play, Molly is urged by her husband, Frank Sweeney, and the celebrated ophthalmologist, Doctor Rice, to undergo an operation to restore her eyesight. Referring to Mr Rice’s motive as “venal and mundane,” Higgins goes on to explain that just as “Grace [in Faith Healer] is one of Frank Hardy’s fictions, Molly is one of Frank Sweeney’s causes” (97). The two male protagonists, Frank Sweeney and Mr Rice, indeed, “[n]either recognizing nor valuing Molly’s experience of the world, […] interpret her difference as disadvantage. But more than that, they attempt to turn her supposed disadvantage to their own advantage” (Harris 64). After importing Iranian goats and trying to make a living in the cheese business, Frank’s latest project is Molly’s operation. Frank keeps a considerable folder, entitled “Researched and Compiled by Frank C. Sweeney,” which contains some of Molly’s test results, pictures of their honeymoon and an article on “miraculous ophthalmological techniques once practised in Tibet […] or Mongolia” (Molly 17, original emphasis). Publicly considered less successful than his wife, Frank dreams of a new beginning for both of them and of sensational
newspaper headlines, such as “Miracle of Molly Sweeney. Gift of sight restored to middle-aged woman. ‘I’ve been given a new world,’ says Mrs Sweeney. Unemployed husband cries openly” (26, original emphasis). Yearning for public recognition, Frank, who was originally attracted by Molly’s otherness, is captivated by the idea of gaining a powerful position in his wife’s new life. Whereas Molly senses that her former life and knowledge will be partly worthless after the operation as she will have to learn how to translate her “tactile engrams” into “the world of sight,” he relishes the idea of her depending on him (20 and 21). He would be in a position similar to when he started courting her and went dancing with Molly, telling her to trust him: “I am your eyes, your ears, your location, your sense of space” (36)\(^{34}\). Hence, from Frank’s point of view, the experiment of restoring Molly’s eyesight cannot possibly fail, for he can only gain and “[s]he has nothing to lose, has she? What has she to lose? – Nothing! Nothing!” (17) Doctor Rice, on the other hand, is aware of Frank’s egoistic considerations and his false conclusion. The doctor even admits that Molly, whose “calm” and “independence” he liked, does not really need the operation and that – strictly speaking – it is Frank and he himself who can benefit from the situation (16). Nevertheless, inasmuch as his career is concerned, he is tempted to perform the operation: “[P]erhaps up here in remote Ballybeg was I about to be given – what is the vulgar parlance? – the chance of a lifetime, the one-in-a-thousand opportunity that can rescue a career” (18). Repressing his severe personal doubts, Doctor Rice’s reasons are no more honourable than Frank’s. He tries to convince himself that, although Molly does not need the operation, there is indeed nothing Molly can lose (28). Selfishly, Frank and Rice come to agree that sight is a blessing. They force their decision on Molly. The fact that the others appear to adhere to Berkeley’s esse est percipi underlines once more that they do not treasure Molly’s experience since – as Benn and Gaus argue in their sociological study – they have no access to her world (7). Unaware of what it is like to be blind, Frank and Doctor Rice think that Molly can only gain, which implies their arrogant conviction that the view of the majority is also the best view and that whoever deviates from the norm is at a disadvantage. Molly’s

\(^{34}\) Molly Sweeney serves as a good example of a play which undermines the normative view of the powerful. The play suggests that as long as Molly is blind, she is able to pursue an independent life. However, after the operation, when she is no longer regarded as handicapped, she has to rely on other people to orient herself. In the daily lessons during which Frank puts different objects in front of her, he asks her to “build up a repertory of visual engrams” without touching anything (Molly 49). This can be interpreted as a cruel way of manifesting his power and knowledge over her. In her monologue, Molly describes how Frank used to test her on “knives and forks, or shoes and slippers, or all the bits and pieces on the mantelpiece for maybe another hour or more. Every night. Seven nights a week” (49). It appears to be a sign of kindness and an extreme form of naivety or repression when the female protagonist concludes that “Oh, yes, Frank couldn’t have been kinder to me” at the time (49).
personal feelings or her point of view are not considered as the others are completely fail to perceive her perspective; as a result of her disability, her judgement is simply thought to be limited.

Looking back, Molly, who has been blind since childhood, confesses that before the operation she never actually thought of her world as “deprived” (Molly 24). Used to compensating her missing eyesight with imagination and fantasy, she felt unique and blessed, as “[t]he others kept asking me what the idea of colour meant to me, or the idea of space, or the notion of distance” (23). Molly is, therefore, content with her private world and her life as a successful physiotherapist; in addition to having learnt to swim and to cycle, she also knows how to distinguish between the different flowers in the garden by touch and smell. Convinced that she should be envied by everyone else, she cannot understand how people think she ought to be unhappy (24). Terrified of the future, Molly criticises the condescending attitude of those around her. Although Molly suddenly realises that the operation does not reflect her needs and wishes, “she submits, and cannot survive the ensuing dislocation. Initially presented as self-possessed, independent and highly resourceful, her integrity is destroyed by instrumental masculine authority” (McMullan 145). When Molly understands to what extent she is being abused and exploited it is too late:

Why am I going for this operation? None of this is my choosing. Then why is this happening to me? I am being used. Of course I trust Frank. Of course I trust Mr Rice. But how can they know what they are taking away from me? How do they know what they are offering me? They don’t. They can’t. And have I anything to gain? Anything? Anything?
And then I knew, suddenly I knew why I was so desolate. It was the dread of exile, of being sent away. It was the desolation of homesickness. (Molly 31)

Throughout her life, Molly’s blindness has provided her with a private space that was hers exclusively and that offered her security and shelter. The impending operation is frightening for her. She suddenly becomes conscious of the operation signifying a loss for her. She knows that she will have to let go the private and familiar space she has loved. Even before the bandages are removed after the operation, Molly is exposed to a new standard of public expectations and obligations. Bewildered, Molly discovers the superficial interests of the public world. The nurse, for instance, spends half an hour preparing her for Doctor Rice’s visit and suggests that “[y]ou’ll find that from now on – if everything goes well of course – you’ll find that you’ll become very aware of your appearance” (Molly 40). Despite feeling like a schoolgirl who is “dressed up for the annual excursion,” she does not want to disappoint Frank and Doctor Rice (41). Indeed, the ophthalmologist is delighted with the
outcome of the operation. From a medical point of view, Molly’s eyesight is restored. Most importantly, however, after seven years of darkness in his own life, Doctor Rice feels newly equipped with godlike qualities as a famous eye-surgeon and somewhat rehabilitated as his formerly shattered self-concept has temporarily been healed and made whole again:

 [...] suddenly, miraculously all the gifts, all the gifts were mine again, abundantly mine, joyously mine; and on that blustery October morning I had such a feeling of mastery and – how can I put it? – such a sense of playfulness for God’s sake that I knew I was restored. [...] Yes, I’ll remember Ballybeg. [...] The place where I restored her sight to Molly Sweeney. Where the terrible darkness lifted. Where the shaft of light glanced off me again. (48)

Initially, Molly shares Mr Rice’s excitement, but the new world is also “foreign,” “disquieting” and “alarming” (50). Overwhelmed by all the sensual stimuli, she does not know how to cope with the new situation. Her enthusiasm soon fades; she ends up “living on a borderline between fantasy and reality” (58). At this stage, neither the public nor her former private world are available to her: she has lost everything. She slowly drifts into a mental realm where other people can no longer reach her, while Frank and Mr Rice “having failed, [...] both move on to other enthusiasms and other posts” (Harris 64). Molly’s new mental realm is thus a place of loneliness and isolation, insecurity and exile constituting a sharp contrast to the private world she inhabited before, which offered her a strong sense of security, homeliness and belonging.

As Molly Sweeney questions the significance that vision has in modern society, the play recalls Foucault and Debord, who discussed “the ocularcentrism of those who praised the ‘nobility of sight’” (Jay 384). Deviating forms of sensual perception (such as smell or sound) are not fully accepted; the power of the norm, in this case the power of sight, is seen to question or even destroy the otherness of the minority who do not share this norm. After all, alternative points of view threaten the majority who are in a position of power. Harris correctly points out that “[t]rusting the men in her life [...] Molly relinquishes her pleasure, her independence, her unique mastery of her surroundings. She trusts and ceases to exist” (64). Frank and Doctor Rice, “looking for a miracle and [...] blind to the potential shortcomings of how the cure might negatively affect her,” abuse Molly’s confidence (Roche, Theatre 195). In pursuit of their interests to regain control and authority, the two male figures do not care about Molly’s personal experience. As Frank and Mr Rice are convinced that life of sighted people is more valuable than that of blind people because it represents the norm, they are shown to manifest their power and control when they decide what is desirable and good for Molly, quite regardless of her
circumstances and perspective of the matter. In effect, the loss of independence and control over her life is the price Molly pays for her restored eyesight, which she did not want and enjoys only for a short time.

Whereas the power distribution in Molly Sweeney is shifted towards Frank and Mr Rice after Molly’s operation and whereas this change indicates that Molly’s private truth and experience is considered less valuable than the one of the two male characters who represent the norm in society, Friel’s play The Home Place illustrates what impact the radical transformation of a long established power balance has on different members or groups of a society. Set in Ballybeg in the summer of 1878, “the inaugurating year of the Land War,” just before Parnell’s rise and his fight for Home Rule, Friel’s only play which deals with the Protestant Big House in Irish history is characterised by an atmosphere of civil unrest, anxiety, violence, change and betrayal (O’Brien, “The Late Plays” 100).

At the heart of the action, there are two families, each represented by three characters on stage, namely the father, his son or daughter and a cousin. The Gores represent the British landlords in Ireland, referred to by the locals as “the Lodgers” indicating that, even centuries after first moving to this part of the country, the family have not assimilated into the local community and are therefore not fully integrated in Ballybeg (Home 26). In the play, Christopher Gore, the widowed head of the family, and his son David are visited by Christopher’s cousin Richard, “a bachelor in his sixties” and “[a] man of resolute habits and Victorian confidence” (28). On their way to the Aran Islands, Richard, a passionate ethnologist, anthropologist and anthropometrist from the family’s home place in Kent, and his personal assistant Perkins are spending a few days in Ballybeg. In the west of Ireland, they intend to further research Richard’s theory that behind a tribe’s physical portrait, for instance, “beneath that exquisite Celtic appearance, there is a psychological portrait” to be drawn of ethnic groups such as the Aran people (20–21). Searching for a means of knowing a tribe’s intelligence, stupidity, cunning, ambition and faithfulness by the look and the genetics of its members, Richard tells David that he dreams of

35 The term Home Rule is used to refer to “[t]he aspiration to self-government that characterized constitutional Nationalists from 1870 to 1918” (“Home Rule” 374). The “countywide campaign against landlordism” (Comerford, “Land League” 310) aimed at gaining local control over internal affairs, while according to the architects of the movement “foreign affairs, armed forces, currency and majority taxation were to remain with the Westminster Parliament” (“Home Rule” 374). After the foundation of the Land League in 1879, “agrarian disturbance and conflict” (“Land War” 452) arose among the different parties, namely the landlords, the authorities and tenants, culminating in “the social ostracization to which Captain Boycott and numerous others were subjected” and in “violent actions not officially approved by the Land League” and its president Charles Stewart Parnell (Comerford, “Land War” 314).
codifying “the ‘primeval’ natives” (Higgins 109). He proudly announces that decoding the local tribes would provide the British colonisers with absolute power: “[I]magine how different our history would be if treason like that [i.e. the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland] could be anticipated” (Home 35).36

The second set of characters in The Home Place represent the locals in Ballybeg and those rebellious Irish forces Richard aims at codifying and categorising: the O’Donnell/Doherty family. However, contrary to Richard’s generalising categorisation of the Irish “breed,” the three representatives’ aspirations and beliefs at the outset of the Irish Land Wars are shown to greatly differ (35). Exploring the three native Irish characters’ attitudes towards and their involvement in the outbreak of the socio-political conflict between the locals and the planters in The Home Place, the play lays open what the three local representatives think of the power distribution between the Protestant and the Catholic inhabitants in colonial Ballybeg. Clement O’Donnell, for instance, is a teacher who has always approached the Gore family with awe and respect, indicating that he has always accepted their status and their crucial role within Ballybeg community. Although the audience is informed at an early stage that Clement is an alcoholic whom Richard Gore calls a “grotesque” and a “buffoon,” he is at the same time admired by a number of characters in the play for successfully conducting the school choir in Ballybeg (42). His daughter Margaret, who has been employed as a housemaid by the Gore family since she was fourteen, has, according to her father, “cut herself off from her home and her people” (40). The notion of Margaret’s estrangement from the locals is further intensified when the audience learns that both Christopher and David wish to marry her. While Richard, therefore, ironically describes Margaret as the Lodge’s “chatelaine” (21), the locals treat her like a “class traitor” suggesting that having adopted the Gore family’s socio-political views she “exemplifies [a] facet of peasant subalternity, that which denies its own identity” (Boltwood 211). Margaret’s cousin Con Doherty, one of the leaders of the civil unrest and one of the reasons for the settlers’ anxiety, complements the trio of the local family. For Margaret, Con is simply a “wastrel” who spends his time “going around whispering defiance into the ears of stupid young

36 The “insurrection of 1798” is used to describe “the culmination of the revolutionary activities of the United Irishmen” (Coakley 260). The Society of United Irishmen was founded in Belfast and Dublin in 1791. “The society’s ideology combined the new radicalism inspired by the American and French Revolutions with the older traditions of British advanced Whig or commonwealth doctrine, and Irish patriotism” (Connolly, “United Irishmen” 567). These rebels’ “main aims were parliamentary reform and the removal of English control of Irish affairs” (567). The different attempts at rising and the outbreaks of violence, which lasted for several months, were, however, defeated and as a result “some 1,500 persons were executed, transported or flogged. […] Overall the rebellion, involving an estimated 30,000 deaths, represents the most violent episode in Irish history since the 17th century” (Coakley 261).
fools” (*Home* 16). Claiming that “it would fit him better to do a decent day’s work,” she adds that “[w]hatever ugly activity he’s involved in, we want none of it here [i.e. in the Lodge]” (16). Despising people like Con who embody “a confident proto-nationalism capable of calmly defying Victorian landlords who assume their innate superiority” (Boltwood 210), Margaret “forcefully dissociates herself” from her cousin, his ideologies or the “socio-political structure” which he “believes himself to represent” (O’Brien, “The Late Plays” 99). Related to Clement and Margaret, but adhering to much more radical ideologies and convictions, Con obtains a position similar to Richard Gore’s in the planters’ household. In fact, in the course of the action, the manifestations of power and the confrontations of these two characters reveal that they not only function as the main antagonists in the play but also represent two mutually exclusive world views.

As indicated above, Richard Gore, deeply intrigued by Social Darwinism, is convinced that if the British managed to “break into [the] vault” of deciphering a tribe or a racial community’s ethnic code, they “wouldn’t control just an empire” but “the entire universe” (*Home* 36). Exhibiting this type of hegemonial power, which O’Brien defines as an authority derived from “the unrestrained energies of imperial desire” and which expresses itself “in bullying and humiliation” as it denies a tribe its private truth, Richard decides to test his scientific research on volunteers from the local community in Ballybeg (“The Late Plays” 99). In his “imperial condescension and brutish assumption of racial superiority,” he begins to take the local characters’ measurements in order to explore their Irish mind and establish a link between the locals’ ethnography and their ethno-psychology (Higgins 109). Richard’s “measuring business,” which Christopher naively describes as “a perfectly innocuous survey,” is, however, interpreted by Con and the “three men down at the foot of the avenue” as a ruthless act of debasement to justify the dominion of British authority over the native Irish *other* (*Home* 55 and 57).

Stressing the settlers’ power and control over the Irish local inhabitants in his experiment, Richard further exacerbates the volatile situation of the British landlords. In fact, before Richard’s survey, turmoil and unrest are only hinted at vaguely. At the beginning of the play, Christopher and David actually return from attending a memorial service for Lord Lifford, a landlord who was murdered as he intended “to oversee the eviction of one of his tenants” (17). Unlike Margaret, who tries to convince Christopher that Lifford’s death was “an isolated crime,” Christopher, both “[f]rightened” and “terrified” by the recent events, wonders which landlord “is next on the list” (17). However, despite David’s reservations about conducting Richard’s anthropometrical experiment in this tense atmosphere where “everybody seems to be a bit […] vigilant” or “on edge,” Christopher argues that there is no reason to “object to
Richard’s silly tabulations” (24). Thus, Christopher is completely unaware of the role surveillance plays in a colonial context. Referring to the crucial part surveillance plays in a colonial and imperial context, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin emphasise that

[o]ne of the most powerful strategies of imperial dominance is that of surveillance, or observation, because it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies and interpellates the colonized subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor. (Key Concepts 226, emphasis deleted)

Richard’s act of measuring the local characters must be regarded as an extreme form of observation which actively exhibits and underlines the scientist’s imperial superiority. In his study of The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, Lacan identifies the significance of the gaze in the development of a character’s identity claiming that “the gaze that surprises me [i.e. the character who encounters his own split] and reduces me to shame […] is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other” (84). Taking up Lacan’s ideas, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain that, according to this line of thought, “the imperial gaze defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalternity and powerlessness” (Key Concepts 226, my emphasis). Mulvey also refers to Lacan’s concept of the gaze in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” when she argues that gazing is never a neutral action. Distinguishing between an “active controlling” self and “an objectified other,” Mulvey expresses her view that “[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly” (17 and 19). With regard to The Home Place, two of the three Irish volunteers whom Richard begins to examine for his “colonial taxonomy” are indeed female characters; the only exception is a character whom Higgins describes as “an outspoken urchin” (Higgins 109). However, apart from the gender distinction, Richard’s act of gazing, in the colonial context in which Friel’s play is set, additionally exemplifies a division between the coloniser/settler and the colonised/local. In preparation of his experiment with the local population, Richard exemplifies his method by codifying the looks of Sally, the second maid who works in the Gore household. Her powerlessness and inferiority as a female and colonised character “typical of the Celtic breed in Donegal” is crassly emphasised when Richard “slaps her bottom in dismissal” after the examination and tells her to go “[b]ack to the paddock” as if he were talking to an animal (Home 35). This scene recalls Frantz Fanon’s description of his experiences with racial discrimination in situations in which he felt under
the scrutiny of white people’s observing looks and which resulted in turning his own perception of himself into an experience with the *other*:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships [...]. On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? (112)

In Friel’s play, Richard’s gaze also provokes a counter-examination. Instead of interiorising the experience and identifying himself as inferior and *other*, as Fanon does, Con focuses the attention on the coloniser’s imperial behaviour. Fiercely against Richard’s “measuring business,” which he finds “offensive” as it dehumanises and objectifies the local characters in a condescending manner and deprives them of their right to privacy and freedom, Con intimidates the landlord by reminding him of Lifford’s fate (*Home* 57). His powerful appearance does not fail to have an impact on Christopher, who expels his cousin Richard from his estate. In doing so, the landlord betrays his own “caste” and roots (*Roche, Theatre* 55). In fact, the Gore family’s fate resembles the doomed trees which David marks with white-wash so that they can be felled later. In the midst of this action, David tries to show his father a falcon; with the brush in his hand, he “swings round excitedly to point to the bird,” but accidentally he “splashes a large white-wash mark across Christopher’s chest,” echoing the marks the two men used for those trees that should be felled (*Home* 73). The symbolic value of this scene indicates that by subjecting themselves to Con’s dictate, Christopher and his son David are doomed. They pave the way for the Gore family’s decline and, indirectly, foreshadow the historical rise of local characters such as Con Doherty during the civil unrests.

On a personal level, as Boltwood suggests, “Christopher’s surrender to the peasants’ bold defiance of aristocratic privilege shames him before his family and leads to his emotional collapse after Margaret rejects his marriage proposal” (204). In fact, Christopher’s encounter with the local inhabitants – and their private viewpoints – unveils that he must be regarded as a prototypical British settler who is “displaced” from his own home place as he and his family have failed to establish a secure “identity in the new place” because “their own identity depends in part [...] on retaining their sense of difference from the ‘native’ population” (*Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, Key Concepts* 211). Although the Gore family have lived in Ballybeg for generations and although Christopher recognises the faces of the local volunteers, he
cannot recall their names during the anthropometrical experiment. This instance demonstrates that “the ‘home place’ (family seat, origins) and ‘home’ (where one lives and feels at home) do not coincide in the play” and that both father and son “still have not penetrated into ‘the private core’ of the natives” (Bertha 160 and 161). Utterly unable to even begin to decode the local tribe, Christopher lacks their sense of belonging and is excluded from being a true member of their community. Thus, he is a planter and lodger with “[n]o home, no country, a life of isolation and resentment” who has “to be resilient” in order to fulfil his father’s motto to “rise above” the local inhabitants and obtain the superior position of a coloniser (*Home* 68). Although he frequently stresses that he regards Ballybeg as his home, Christopher has, in fact, always remained alienated from the place and the Irish population. At the end of the play, he confesses to Margaret that the gulf between him and the Irish population is too great, as they “don’t share a language” (67).

In a discussion of their respective wedding plans the night before the experiment and Con’s appearance on the scene, Richard and Christopher both reveal the patronising and snobbish arrogance of the coloniser. Wondering whether Christopher “[w]ouldn’t be inhibited about marrying down,” Richard informs his cousin that “going native” means that “whatever is still Kentish in you will be extinguished” (30 and 33). Reassuring Richard, Christopher – possibly unintentionally – displays a similarly condescending colonial attitude: “Or perhaps the very lucky Irish woman will become a little Kentish” (33, my emphasis). Telling Margaret about this exchange the following day, Christopher refers to her being invited to Richard’s wedding as “a big gesture” (21). This phrase shows that, like his cousin Richard, Christopher has interiorised colonial beliefs and “is more closely affiliated with his English family heritage than would be expected” (Boltwood 205). In his opinion, as a colonial subject, Margaret lacks the necessary background and possibly the demeanour or manners to attend such an event (*Home* 21). To avoid feeling embarrassed or exposed to criticism as a result of her presence, Christopher further explains that he immediately declined the invitation suggesting they would be occupied with the harvest at this time of the year (21). Thus, whereas Richard actively aims at seizing power and control and does not understand why exhibiting colonial superiority could offend the local population, Christopher’s case is subtler. In spite of his love for Ballybeg and its inhabitants, he has interiorised the way of thinking which is typical of his class. Therefore, more than just the language separates him from the local community.

Whereas Richard’s and Con’s manifestations of power in *The Home Place* differ from the other instances discussed in this chapter, Margaret’s final sentence in the play links her to Judith’s submission under her father’s rule after giving birth to her illegitimate child in *Aristocrats*. Despite the fact that
throughout the play Margaret’s utterances mirror the ideas expressed by the planters and despite the fact that she rejects her cousin Con’s conduct and actions, I believe that Margaret’s father wrongly accuses his daughter of having abandoned her roots in favour of the Gores’ positions (*Home* 40). In fact, I agree with Bertha’s reading of Margaret when she claims that the female protagonist “hesitates between the two worlds,” and that Ballybeg House is “a liminal place, a place of ‘exile’” for Margaret (160). After all, the school choir’s performances of Thomas Moore’s song *Oft in the Stilly Night* in the far distance, which frame the play, occurring at the beginning and at the end of it, have a remarkable effect on Margaret. Her demeanour shows, as Higgins notes, that she has only “seemingly” dissociated herself from her native background (108). In fact, according to the stage directions,

> [t]he moment she becomes aware of the singing Margaret stands motionless, enraptured. Then she is drawn as if mesmerized to the edge of the lawn [...]. She stands there for two full verses, absorbing the music, listening with her whole being, now and then silently mouthing the words of the song. (*Home* 11)

It is not only, as Higgins claims, “the ethereal sound of Clement O’Donnell’s choir,” providing “an insistent undermusic of loss and hope, drowned out by the exigencies of class and colonial hierarchies” (108), which leaves Margaret explicitly “enraptured,” or literally speaking, “[r]apturously delighted,” “entranced” or “ravished” (*OED* 275). Rather than being simply captivated by the sound or the message transported by Moore’s song, Margaret, her father’s “first born” and once his “prime chorister,” is indeed captured by the power and control which her father exercises over her (*Home* 23). When Christopher mentions that he vividly remembers how Clement “presented [his daughter] very formally” to the Gore family, when the girl was fourteen, Margaret confesses that she was “terrified” at the time, underlining that her father’s plans did not comply with her wishes and that she found herself in a heteronomous situation to which she subjected herself (23 and 22). Finally, when Christopher, “shattered” and “in total confusion,” suffers a complete breakdown in the last scene and explains that he will not be “able to rise above any more,” she counters his statement by declaring: “That’s what we all do,” implying that, contrary to Christopher’s colonial belief that rising above the masses defines his class, it is a law of nature that people are forced to adapt to rules and circumstances different from their own desire (74). In fact, her last conversation with Christopher, in which she asks the landlord three times to listen and pay attention to her father’s music, she unveils her private truth that, although she loves David and has repeatedly proved to have adopted the colonisers’ convictions, both as daughter and chorister she is willing to submit herself to the command of her father and conductor: “Shhh. Just listen.