Because in a short time Father will *come up here for me*. Shhh” (75, my emphasis). Unlike Boltwood, who states that “even if we assume that in the future she marries into the Lodge, we must remember that within Friel’s dramaturgy such an accomplishment is less than auspicious,” I believe that Margaret’s final utterance demonstrates that Clement is an opportunist who has been shown to oscillate between the landlord’s former power and the recent attraction which Con’s actions and Moore’s lyrics – and their nationalist implications – have on him (212). As a result of the recent developments in Ballybeg, which have drastically altered the power distribution within the community, Clement has decided to take his daughter home and, in a patriarchal act, to submit her to his and the local Irish population’s control again. Thereby, he forces his daughter, who is once more presented as completely passive and powerless, to “rise above” the imperial and colonial mind-set implemented on her as the Gore family’s housekeeper (74). Hence, Margaret resembles the other characters presented in this section of my study who are either forced to sacrifice or willingly submit their personal desires, wishes or perspective to another, more powerful, character’s will or order.

4. The Power of Language

In his introduction to *The Art of Brian Friel*, Andrews quotes Bakhtin, who identifies “language” as “a site of conflict where different social groupings struggle for power” (60). Bakhtin’s view underlines that language is a means of manifesting and enacting power. Friel’s plays, however, even exemplify Foucault’s claim that “speech is no mere verbalisation of conflicts and systems of domination, but […] the very object of man’s conflicts” (“Discourse” 216). Not only does Friel’s writing expose various mechanisms groups or individuals make use of to acquire a powerful position and impose their will on other people, but his plays also lay open the strategies which the unprivileged or powerless characters apply in order to evade these manifestations of power and engage in a battle over language and truth.

Those characters in Friel who do not feel at ease in the public realm either try to behave unobtrusively or withdraw into a mental sphere where they can live in a world of their own and where their behaviour and moral values are not questioned by anyone. Thus, the mental realm turns into the space where they do not have to deny their true identity. In this personal space, attempting to preserve their inner core, these characters begin to disclose their private truths to themselves or to the audience. Quintessentially, articulating their private perspective allows them to shape their own truth and reality.
On the other hand, the groups or characters in Friel’s plays who have power over language and thus indirectly over truth always have at least one opponent who distrusts the assertion that they use language for the good of everyone and who suspects that they shape reality according to their perspective or their interests. In *The Freedom of the City*, the journalist and the judge both provide the public with misinformation and draw conclusions based on their limited and biased point of view. Witnessing what Lily, Skinner and Michael discuss inside the Guildhall, the audience realises that initially the judge’s and the journalist’s conclusions have nothing in common with reality. However, as mentioned above, regardless of the three demonstrators’ private experiences, the journalist’s statements are so powerful that they influence the military measures taken and create a new reality in the public space.

Whereas it is neither the journalist’s nor the judge’s intention in *The Freedom of the City* to use language to harm anyone or to deny a character his or her private truth, Fox Melarkey, the main protagonist and proprietor of an unsuccessful travelling show in *Crystal and Fox*, is perfectly aware of the fact that the struggle for language is at the same time a struggle for power. This linguistic manifestation of power helps Fox pursue his own interests, strengthen his position, and humiliate his family and fellow artists. At the end of a performance, Cid, a member of Fox’s company, demands that he and his wife Tanya “take the last call” that same night so that they will receive the warmest applause (*Crystal* 16). Pretending to comply with Cid’s request, Fox manifests his control over the company as well as over public space by deliberately asking the couple on stage before anyone else:

FOX. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And now once more I’d ask you to show your appreciation of the top-rank artists who performed on these boards tonight. Ireland’s best known and best loved man of mystery and suspense – El Cid and his beautiful assistant, Tanya!

*He strikes a heralding chord. Thin clapping from the audience. Pause.*

CID. Bastard!

*Cid catches Tanya’s band and assuming a radiant smile he runs out.* (16–17)

Fox knows that Cid will interpret the order for the artists’ appearance on stage as a symbol of his and Tanya’s lack of esteem within the company. Although the couple do not show their anger publicly, they confront Fox after the show. Receiving no reaction from Fox, Cid announces that he and his wife will not accept this condescending treatment by their boss and will leave the company in the morning to work for Fox’s rival Dick Prospect. As their group cannot afford to lose any more members, Fox’s wife, Crystal, tries to make amends by begging her husband to apologise to the two artists. Fox, however, has no intention of keeping Cid and Tanya. In reality and contrary to what his wife
thinks, Fox’s linguistic manifestation of power was well planned and amounts to having been his personal way of expelling Tanya and Cid.

Yearning for the past when he “was cycling out to make his fortune in the world with nothing but his accordion and his rickety wheel and his glib tongue,” Fox secretly dreams of the day he first met Crystal, his “princess,” who “had her hair tied up with a royal blue ribbon and a blue blouse, and a navy skirt” (24–25). Discontent with the company’s circumstances and his position as its “affable, bantering entertainer” (Kenneally as quoted by Tallone 36), the male protagonist believes that “[h]is powers of invention are squandered” (McGuinness 20). In addition to glorifying the memories of the times when the company consisted only of Crystal and himself, Fox, as Tallone argues, “begins to dismantle his own show, a process which turns out to be an act of self-destruction” (36). In order to dispose of Pedro, the company’s most senior artist and the family’s most loyal friend, Fox poisons the artist’s dog. Thus, Fox manages to overcome the last barrier which keeps him from materialising his vision of what Andrews refers to as “the lost Eden” with Crystal (Art 108).

Admitting that, throughout her husband’s period of restlessness, she was terrified” that he was “going to shake [her] off too,” Crystal confesses: “[...] I am rotten. Papa’s dying in hospital. Gabriel [i.e. their son]’s going to jail. The show’s finished. We’ve no money. And I am as happy as a lark” (Crystal 60). However, when Crystal promises to accompany her husband on his way to hell and back, Fox, “unable even to ask for the human warmth and connection he seeks,” proves entirely unable to endure the sense of fulfilment and perfection which has finally been achieved between his wife and himself and which he has dreamed of for so long (Higgins 22). Wrecking “the one illusion he has left, the illusion of love,” Fox once more makes use of the power of language to produce a false reality by telling his wife that he betrayed their son Gabriel to the police for financial reasons (Andrews, Art 109). Utterly horrified by her husband’s revelation which she mistakes for reality, Crystal destroys the present harmony between the spouses by leaving him, no longer paying attention to Fox’s attempt to remedy the situation: “Crystal! Crystal! (Quietly, tensely) It’s a lie, Crystal, all a lie, my love, I made it all up, never entered my head until a few minutes ago and then I tried to stop myself but I couldn’t” (Crystal 64). This instance between Crystal and Fox exemplifies a tragic element in Friel’s plays: out of a deep necessity, Friel’s characters, such as Fox, pursue their own dreams and try to reinvent the rare moments in the past in which they recall having been happy, entirely satisfied and free from sorrows. Whereas most of Friel’s protagonists simply cherish their few memories of former happiness and are shown to be too afraid to truly try and fulfil their secret dreams, Fox’s power of language allows him to return to the twosomeness which he has come to associate with bliss. However, the development of Crystal and Fox’s relation-
ship painfully underlines that as soon as Fox has actually reached his goal, he is so utterly overwhelmed by and unable to endure and control the emotions which he has evoked that, out of the same inner necessity which made him fight for the reinvention of the past, he has to destroy the atmosphere of perfection and fulfilment between Crystal and himself. Hence, Friel’s characters are imprisoned by their desires and dreams of happiness, which they utterly fail to enjoy in the rare cases in which they are reached.

Like *Crystal and Fox*, *Faith Healer* is another play epitomizing the role of language. In fact, Frank Hardy abuses his linguistic power to manipulate other people in a similar fashion to Fox Melarkey. Commenting on the strong resemblance in character between the two male figures in Friel’s plays *Crystal and Fox* and *Faith Healer*, Tallone aptly refers to Fox and Frank as “magicians and masters of words” (58). However, despite the similarities between these two protagonists, Friel upgrades the position of the female character in *Faith Healer* by granting Grace a monologue to express her own perspective. Hence, Frank Hardy’s linguistic power is not as uncontested as Fox Melarkey’s. Although Frank regularly wields his control over language and truth to shape his wife’s reality according to his ideas and wishes, the perfectly self-contained speech in which Grace verbalises her private experiences and expresses her view of the instances described in Frank’s first monologue undercuts Frank’s credibility and (linguistic) power. In fact, dissonance becomes a key characteristic of the play. Thus, as O’Brien notes, “[v]irtually every circumstance in the play is subject to different interpretations,” after the audience has listened to both characters disclosing their private truths (Friel 98).

In the course of the four divergent monologues in *Faith Healer*, “the ugliest battles are fought over who exactly each character is” (DeVinney 113). This fact underlines Hall’s claim that for human beings “language is the privileged medium” to “make sense’ of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged” because meaning quintessentially provides people with a “sense of [their] own identity, of who [they] are and with whom [they] ‘belong’” (1 and 3). One of the “significant discrepancies in the retelling of some of the principal events” in the couple’s lives together can be found with regard to Grace’s background (Grene, “*Faith Healer*” 53). Constantly changing his wife’s origin and surname, Frank denies Grace’s roots, nationality and, in general, her identity. As he contemplates his relationship with Grace, Frank describes his wife as his “mistress. A Yorkshire woman […] Grace Dodsmith from Scarborough” or maybe “Knaresborough” thus unveiling to the audience that he cannot really remember where his wife was originally from (*Faith 335*). Indicating that in his opinion the significance of (place) names is overestimated, he expresses his conviction that since “they all sound so alike, it doesn’t matter” (335). Moreover, he explains to the audience that Grace
“never asked for marriage and for all her tidiness I don’t think she wanted marriage – her loyalty was adequate for her” (335). However, in her monologue Grace emphasises Frank’s subtle and malicious use of language as well as his “talent for hurting” her (345). She reveals how distressed she used to be by his denial of her name and identity. After the couple had been married for seven years and shortly after she had “had a pleurisy and then two miscarriages in quick succession,” Grace, unable to “endure the depravity of [their] lives any longer,” decided to leave Frank (346–347). Having taken a bus to Omagh, Grace describes how she “walked the three miles out to Knockmoyle” to her parent’s home (347). This discrepancy between the two accounts, in which Frank, a Dublin man, denies Grace’s Irish heritage and insists on her British roots whereas Grace points to her Irish descent and background, highlights the “unreliability” of at least one of the two narrators (Grene, “Faith Healer” 53).

Corroborating the couple’s marriage as well as Grace’s Irish citizenship, Teddy, Frank’s manager, considerably strengthens Grace’s version of the past in his narrative and actually resolves some of the “divergences” in Frank’s and Grace’s accounts (53). Nevertheless, Teddy’s reliability as narrator and his impartiality as neutral arbiter are likewise undermined because he has become too entangled with these two main characters over the years to be neutral. Instead of dealing with Frank and Grace according to his own principle of handling clients “on the basis of a relationship that is strictly business only,” Teddy admits that Grace is “this terrific woman that of course I love very much and who is “married to this man that I love very much – love maybe even more” (Faith 357 and 368).

Still, regardless of Teddy’s involvement in Frank and Grace’s life and relationship, Grene concludes that, based on the large number of parallels between the two narratives, the audience is “bound to reach the conclusion that Grace and Teddy are telling the truth” (“Faith Healer” 55). According to this reading, Frank then becomes what Tallone describes as “a manipulator of [his own and other people’s] identities” (52). Therefore, Teddy’s report illustrates that there is no reason to believe that Grace’s state of mind at the time of her speech is so distraught that she lives in a world of fantasy in which she invents her Irish heritage. Frank’s credibility, in contrast, is seriously called into question. Of course, one possible reason that his report clashes with the other characters’ narratives is that the conflicting matters are of minor importance to Frank, who is portrayed as someone whose fragmented and troubled sense of himself results in a strong self-centredness that absorbs most of the main protagonist’s energy and thinking. However, reflecting on Frank’s motives for regularly using the power of language to change his wife’s background and her surname, Grace takes a rather different approach to her husband’s conduct. In
fact, she believes that Frank’s behaviour was “one of his mean tricks [...] to humiliate” her (Faith 345). Interpreting her husband’s demeanour as an attempt to degrade and crush her sense of identity also means that Grace contradicts Frank’s claim that “her loyalty” was perfectly satisfying or “adequate” for her (335). Talking about their marital status, she further mentions how hurt she used to feel when Frank pretended that they “weren’t married – I was his mistress – always that – that was the one constant: ‘You haven’t met Gracie McClure, have you? She’s my mistress,’ knowing so well that that would wound me and it always did” (345). I would argue that the “atrophying terror” and the “maddening questions” which Frank admits define his daily life keep him from answering his desire to establish a stable and healthy self-concept (376). His strong urge “to adjust, to refashion, to recreate everything around him,” which Grace refers to as “some compulsion,” appears to provide Frank with the sense of power which he needs in order to feel capable of mastering life (345). Moreover, I agree with Tallone, who highlights that, “inventing new names and new identities for Grace [...] including the role of somebody he has cured,” allows Frank to destabilise his wife’s sense of identity and security, quintessentially leaving her as fragmented as he feels himself (52). Emphasising that “in telling stories about ourselves we are endeavouring to make sense of experience by putting together the often disjointed and fragmented pieces of everyday life,” Woodward underlines the significance of “some kind of structure” in forming one’s identity (28–29). By regularly undermining Grace’s roots, her nationality and her name, Frank questions some of the key characteristics of her identity. At the same time, pretending to have saved Grace’s life enables Frank to enhance his status in the eyes of the public who do not have access to her truth and to increase his wife’s dependence on him. Suggesting that Grace owes her life to him and should therefore be grateful to him, Frank gains some linguistic and moral power over his wife.

However, confessing that his healing powers were a talent and an art he never fully understood or had control over, Frank shows that contrary to Grace, whom he boasts to have healed while they were travelling through Scotland and Wales, his performance in most cases consisted of depriving patients of their money (336). Frank seems convinced that exploiting his customers was so easy because they knew in their hearts they had come not to be cured but for confirmation that they were incurable; not in hope but for the elimination of hope; for the removal of that final, impossible chance – that’s why they came – to seal their anguish, for the content of a finality. (336–337)

Frank believes that his patients did not really have confidence in his spiritual or healing powers, but trusted his linguistic power to publicly acknowledge the
incurability of their disease. Since Frank always found it intriguing and fulfilling to create a public reality by declaring the truth of his patients’ terminal illness, he was able to influence people’s private lives. Nonetheless, the few moments when he successfully healed people offered him a sense of achievement and allowed him to experience a short moment of coherence and unity because the questions that undermined my life then became meaningless and because I knew that for those few hours I had become whole in myself, and perfect in myself, and in a manner of speaking, an aristocrat, if the term doesn’t offend you. (333)

Frank’s statement demonstrates that – just as Grace’s roots and well-being – the patients’ true state of health clearly is of subsidiary interest to him. Seeking to “[satisfy] a demand for some degree of stability and of security,” Frank is primarily concerned with his own troubled self in his engagement with other people (Woodward, xi). On the occasions when his faith healing powers work, his inferiority complex is temporarily suspended and his fragmented self suddenly becomes “whole” and “perfect” (Faith 333). Feeling equipped with godlike qualities at such moments, Frank happily receives his patients’ gratitude as well as their “love, affection, respect,” none of which he can offer himself (372).

Despite Frank’s impression that he linguistically controls or even brings about reality, the absence of communication or interaction is just as significant a characteristic in Faith Healer. In fact, the three protagonists’ relationship is marked by non-communication and silence. As Frank and Grace are unable to share their feelings or emotions by communicating their memories, their accounts of the past overlap only marginally. In her study on identity-forming processes, Woodward states that “[i]dentity provides links between the personal and the social, self and society, the psychic and the social” (xii). In his essay on language and translation in Brian Friel’s plays, Welch notes that, failing to compare their personal sensations or views with one another, the characters’ “[n]arration is unstable” because their “language and memory distort” (143). Consequently, the degree of privateness or intimacy shared between the Hardys is limited. Instead of achieving some congruence over the incidents they experience together, their perceptions and private worlds differ fundamentally. Frank and Grace’s lack of communication keeps the couple from building a bridge between “the personal and the social” and from establishing some common ground between their separate selves (Woodward xii). In Faith Healer the missing “psycho-social” exchange, in which a character’s understanding of the self is linked to the view of the other, results in the three characters’ strong uncertainty with regard to their identities.
(Woodward vii). Hence, their relationship is primarily defined by fragmentation, loneliness and a troubled notion of the self. Regardless of the fact that both Frank and Grace constantly express their beliefs and convictions as to why their partner behaved in a particular manner in the past, they never actually have these assumptions confirmed by their spouse. Consequently, forced to interpret the other character’s past utterances and to contemplate the reasons for his or her actions, Frank and Grace do not succeed in creating a sense of coherence, understanding, warmth and bonding in their marriage.

Grace’s greatest and most private sorrow is the loss of her baby two miles outside a place called Kinlochbervie (Faith 344). According to her recollections of the incident, Frank said a few pseudo-prayers at the child’s burial but never mentioned the child again afterwards. Her husband’s silence is a punishment for Grace, who regrets that

there is no record of any kind. And he never talked about it afterwards; never once mentioned it again; and because he didn’t, neither did I. So that was it. Over and done with. A finished thing. Yes. But I think it’s a nice name, Kinlochbervie – a complete sound – a name you wouldn’t forget easily…. (345)

Although her monologue clearly indicates that Grace feels that Frank imposes the power of silence on her in this context, she does not dare to openly discuss and share her private grief with her husband. However, remembering the place name of the village is central for Grace. As this name is the only concrete element she can hold on to, Kinlochbervie assures her of the reality of the birth and the brief existence of her infant child, who died even before being given a name and an identity of his own. Referring to the same situation, Teddy claims that, contrary to Grace’s memories, it was he, not Frank, who dug the hole to bury the baby boy, mumbled a few words of prayer for the child and finally built a cross to place it on top of the infant’s grave. In Teddy’s account of that day Frank is given the role of a “bastard” who escaped to go for a drink the night Grace gave birth (363). In a somewhat soothing tone, Teddy then admits that it was only when Frank came back “[s]ober as a judge, all spruced up” in the evening that he realised that Frank’s flight was not the “deliberate” and “bloody-minded” act he had suspected but a sign of his utter helplessness and distress (364 and 363). Recognising that in reality Frank is not the reckless and complacent character he attempts to convince the public of, Teddy lays bare the faith healer’s sensitive and vulnerable inner self, which Frank himself never dares acknowledge openly:

[…] even though the old chatter never faltered for a minute, whatever way he kept talking straight into my face, I knew too that – oh, I don’t know how to put it – but I got this feeling that in a kind of way – being the kind of man he was – well somehow I
got the feeling, I knew that he had to keep talking because he had suffered all that she had suffered and that now he was about to collapse. (365, original emphasis)

Unlike Grace, who takes Frank’s silence personally and believes that her husband’s carelessness primarily enables him to hurt her and exercise power over her, Teddy reveals his insight into Frank’s private truth: in order to cope with his inner turmoil, Frank is forced to repress his emotions and desperation because these sensations are too painful to articulate or to even bear.

Completely unaware of what his wife and manager have told the audience in their monologues, Frank himself offers an example of the superficial recklessness and impudence of his personality of which he tries to convince the public. Misconstruing the actual incidents in Kinlochbervie and pretending that Grace’s stillbirth never occurred, he talks about his dreams of having a son and, thereby, invents his own version of reality:

I would have liked to have had a child. But she [i.e. Grace] was barren. And anyhow the life we led wouldn’t have been suitable. And he [i.e. the baby boy] might have had the gift. And he might have handled it better than I did. I wouldn’t have asked for anything from him – love, affection, respect – nothing like that. But I would have got pleasure just in looking at him. Yes. A child would have been something. (372)

Frank’s statement underlines his utter inability to handle pain or loss. Omitting all the negative experiences of his life, he tries to linguistically construct a private world of illusions based on semi-truths. If the audience were not given Grace’s and Teddy’s views, his public statements might well be taken for real and would not evoke disbelief.

After her husband’s death, the doctor asks Grace about Frank’s profession. For the first time, she draws on the same power of language that used to excite Frank whenever he was given the opportunity to shape reality:

‘He was an artist,’ I said – quickly – casually – but with complete conviction – just the way he might have said it. Wasn’t that curious? Because the thought had never occurred to me before. And then because I said it and the doctor wrote it down, I knew it was true .... (346)

Although she had formerly suffered from Frank’s power over language, she now adopts his practice of inventing reality. As Grace’s statement is his only source of information, the doctor does not question Frank’s occupation and takes Grace’s answer for fact. Highlighting the “predominance of storytelling [in Friel’s writing] and the fore-grounding of narration in all its reliable and unreliable modes,” Higgins argues that plays such as Faith Healer and Making History, indeed, “question the nature of language itself as a tool of communication” (53). Moreover, the critic stresses the playwright’s tendency to ask
his audience “not just to adjudicate between versions of the ‘truth,’ but to recognize the implausibility of truth as an absolute concept” (53).

Although Friel’s plays are marked by “a profound distrust of language” in general, the delicate role of language in representing absolute truth is made most explicit in Making History (Welch 145). In this play, the historical figure Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, who fought for Irish independence in the sixteenth century, is turned into a fictional character. Using “some actual and some imagined events in the life of Hugh O’Neill,” Friel emphasises Hugh O’Neill’s domestic life, his personality and his convictions in Making History (“Programme Note” 135). The playwright explains that whenever a tension arose in the writing process “between historical ‘fact’ and the imperative of the fiction,” he “kept faith with the narrative” (135).

Whereas Friel, therefore, chose to favour fiction over fact on the plot level, his main protagonist, Hugh, is someone who is particularly conscious of the danger of linguistic misrepresentation and thus of fictionalising and distorting reality. When Harry, Hugh’s private secretary, informs him that Archbishop Peter Lombard has started gathering material in order to publish Hugh’s biography, the Earl of Tyrone is rather alarmed. His distrust is further increased when the cleric declares that Hugh’s “birth, education and personal attributes” are suitable elements in portraying Hugh O’Neill as “the natural leader” of the Irish revolt taking place at the beginning of the play (History 256). Hugh’s unease is based on his knowledge that, as Bakhtin argued, meaning is fundamentally dialogic as any discourse is “always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange” (as quoted by Hall 4). After all,

language [...] lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language […], but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. (Bakhtin 293–294)

Aware that history is in this context a struggle over meaning and presentation and that the public tend to mistake written words for absolute truth, Hugh begs Lombard to be perfectly truthful if he insists on publishing a book on his life. Having experienced heteronomy and stereotyping at a young age, Hugh is concerned about authenticity and truth. Partly brought up by Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary in England, he actually felt closer to them than to O’Hagan, who fostered him. Nevertheless, the night before he returned to Ireland, Sir Henry jokingly asked Hugh to comment on a quote which he
received from his friend Andrew Trollope, which states that “[t]hose Irishmen who live like subjects play but as the fox which when you have him on a chain will seem tame; but if he ever gets loose, he will be wild again” (History 293). Recalling this incident, Sir Henry’s “trivial little hurt, that single failure in years of courtesy,” which “pulsed in a corner of [Hugh’s] heart” for years and provided him with a personal reason for fighting British colonial power in Ireland publicly, Hugh aims for absolute truth hoping that this will prevent him from being exposed to any further stereotypes and myths which completely fail to capture his personality and have nothing to do with his life (293).

Adopting a postmodern and poststructuralist viewpoint, Archbishop Lombard, on the other hand, dismisses the concept of absolute truth as a myth. Clarifying that truth will not necessarily be “a primary ingredient” in his tale, he professes that “the life of Hugh O’Neill can be told in many different ways. And those ways are determined by the needs and the demands and the expectations of different people and different eras” (257 and 267). Hence, with a number of options at his disposal, the Archbishop tells Hugh that he has decided to concentrate primarily on the literary quality of his storytelling rather than on authenticity and truthfulness:

I’m no historian, Hugh. I’m not even sure I know what a historian’s function is – not to talk of his method. […] If you’re asking me will my story be as accurate as possible – of course it will. But are truth and falsity the proper criteria? I don’t know. Maybe when the time comes my first responsibility will be to tell the best possible narrative. Isn’t that what history is, a kind of story-telling? […] Imposing a pattern on events that were mostly casual and haphazard and shaping them into a narrative that is logical and interesting. […] Maybe when the time comes, imagination will be as important as information. (257)

Adopting a traditional and empirical standpoint, Hugh fundamentally disagrees with Lombard’s poststructuralist and postmodern understanding of history. Emmert argues that “[w]hereas in Peter Lombard’s historiography the opposition of truth and fiction is deconstructed, Hugh O’Neill is a character who wants to uphold these categories” (198, my translation).37 Asking the Archbishop to present reality and the true facts rather than to shape or tell a good story, Hugh is convinced that imagination and personal interests should be eliminated in a recording of history. Suspecting that Lombard will sacrifice truth and alter reality, Hugh mistrusts the Archbishop’s “hagiography” of transforming one of his greatest defeats in the course of the conflict with the

37 Original: [w]ährend in der Geschichtsschreibung des Peter Lombard die Opposition von Wahrheit und Fiktion dekonstruiert wird, probt die Figur des Hugh O’Neill die Aufrechterhaltung dieser Kategorien (198).
British into an achievement (McGrath 224 and Corbett 12). Regardless of Hugh’s reservations and fears that Lombard is “going to embalm [him] in – in – in a florid lie,” Lombard has decided to offer Gaelic Ireland a narrative that centres round the theme of “Hugh O’Neill as a national hero” (History 329 and 334–335). Endeavouring to turn the war for Irish independence into a holy crusade, Lombard explains: “You [i.e. Hugh] lost a battle – that has to be said. But the telling of it can still be a triumph” (332). Lombard’s plan to make language serve his interests illustrates that his narrative intention is far from altruistic. In fact, “tampering with the ‘truth’” by shaping the past according to his ideas and wishes enables Lombard to benefit as a clergyman (Pelletier 76). Acknowledging that it is impossible to present neutral facts, the Archbishop is tempted to use his linguistic power to write a biography for the public which suits his private interests:

People think they just want to know the ‘facts’; they think they believe in some empirical truth, but what they really want is a story. [...] I’m simply talking about making a pattern. [...] And that narrative will be as true and as objective as I can make it – with the help of the Holy Spirit. (History 334)

Referring to “the help of the Holy Spirit,” Lombard not only indicates that with the help of God he will not disappoint Hugh but also proves that he is eager to strengthen the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland by means of this biography. Moreover, Lombard’s quote recalls Foucault’s notion that discourse “defines and produces the object of [people’s] knowledge” (as quoted by Hall 44). The power of language is then closely related to the creation of a kind of reality which the producer of the discourse desires. Indeed, Lombard would, for religious reasons, prefer to exclude part of Hugh’s private life because his four wives might shock Lombard’s (Catholic) readership and might make a public presentation of him as an Irish hero unfeasible. Hugh, on the other hand, states that to omit his four marriages is to deny a crucial aspect of his life. Favouring private versions of truths over the type of narrative Lombard has in mind, Hugh hopes to have the absolute truth and his innermost sensations revealed by the text.

This clash between Lombard’s postmodern understanding of historiography and Hugh’s insistence on private truth as an absolute concept recalls Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, in which the philosopher contemplates the possible existence of a private language that voices a character’s immediate and innermost moods, sensations and experiences (95–111). Considering the nature of language, Wittgenstein concludes that a private language would be entirely pointless as it would, by definition, only be accessible to the person who is familiar with the actual meaning of the words used. Hence, the meaning of the words would not be understood by anyone
else and communication would break down entirely. To guarantee some kind of mediation between the different users, Wittgenstein stresses the degree to which each language must be defined by its public character in order to be understood. Consequently, the linguistic transmission of a perfectly private experience between different subjects, especially a character’s sensations or feelings such as “pain,” can never be complete. Each translation of the experience necessarily remains an approximation to conventions (95–96).

Unlike Lombard, who realises that taking a few liberties in fictionalising truth offers him certain advantages, Hugh not only fights Lombard’s approach but also unconsciously rebukes the postmodern nature of language as such, which makes it impossible for another character to precisely capture what he regards as the entire truth of reality. Hugh believes that Lombard’s biographical account provides him with the only opportunity to effectively oppose the dominant official discourse of what happened. He is obsessed by the idea of a narrative offering his personal point of view and being faithful to his perceptions of reality in order to give an absolutely truthful version of the past. Lombard’s attempt to influence the reader by highlighting or ignoring certain parts of his life greatly annoys the Earl of Tyrone. Deeply suspicious of Lombard’s deconstructive and poststructuralist myth-making approach for the sake of the public, Hugh feels the readers should be given the entire truth rather than a version of the events which he does not entirely approve of and which has wilfully been distorted. Having lost the battle against the British forces, Hugh, at the end of the play, begs Lombard to stick to the facts and not to mislead the public. After all, an authentic account of the past is all that he is left with: “I need the truth, Peter. That’s all that’s left. The schemer, the leader, the liar, the statesman, the lecher, the patriot, the drunk, the soured, bitter émigré – put it all in, Peter. Record the whole life” and tell “the whole truth” (History 329–330 and 334, original emphasis).

In his study After Babel, Steiner notes that, in comparison to the upper classes, to the lower or powerless classes, “speech is no less a weapon and a vengeance” since “[t]he patronized and the oppressed have endured behind their silences, behind the partial incommunicado of their obscenities and clotted monosyllables” (33–34). Having lost the power over the official truth by losing the war of Independence, the Earl of Tyrone is, indeed, anxious to preserve at least the power over the alternative version of truth in his hands. Horrified by Lombard’s approach, he concludes that the Archbishop had better trust him to write his own autobiography. However, despite his insistence on precision and authenticity, Hugh, paradoxically but perhaps inevitably, falls into the same trap as Lombard. By adding that “one of the advantages of fading eyesight is that it gives the imagination the edge over reality,” he, possibly unconsciously, hints at the fact that writing his own
autobiography will result in a personal narrative which cannot eliminate the linguistic rules detected by Wittgenstein in his private language argument and will therefore be inevitably defined by being a combination of fact and fiction (History 333). In fact, this last statement underlines Wittgenstein’s conclusion that in using language one is forced to accept that “words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of sensation and used in their place” (Wittgenstein 89). Thus, even if one strives for authenticity, the law of language, which Lacan refers to as ‘the Symbolic,’ does not coincide with reality but only echoes it. In this context, Wittgenstein’s example of “pain” and the “beetle,” helps to explain why Friel’s characters regularly despair of their attempts to communicate their most private feelings and moods and why they tend to withdraw into silence as a result of their frustrating experiences:

If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word ‘pain’ means – must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the one case so irresponsible? […] Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call a ‘beetle’. No one can ever look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. – Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. […] That is to say: if we construe the grammar of expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant. (106–107, original emphasis)

Despite yearning for coherence and understanding in their lives, Friel’s characters doubt whether any character except themselves really succeeds in grasping the “essential” sensation or feeling which they describe in their own private experiences (95). As Welch indicates, “Friel’s theatre […] is the place for realizing the lack of congruence between the word and the situation” (147). Struggling to accept that there are, as Steiner states, “no twin psyches” as “[n]o two human beings share an identical associative context” as “such a context is made up of the totality of an individual existence, because it comprehends not only the sum of the personal memory and experience but also the reservoir of the particular subconscious,” Friel’s characters tend to stop communicating their sensations and lapse into silence in conversation with other characters (178–179). Because the characters are afraid of being unable to communicate the incommunicable essence of their sensations or experiences, I would suggest that what Welch says of Gar O’Donnell and the other characters in Philadelphia, Here I Come! in fact, applies to Friel’s characters in general:

Private Gar continuously underlines the difficulty of adequately conveying, in the social context of life […] in Ballybeg, the complexity of a human narrative. […] None of the characters in the play can find a language capable of conveying their own view of how they are to any other character. They cannot ‘translate all this loneliness, this groping, this dreadful bloody buffoonery.’ [Philadelphia 88] But Friel’s theatre does
translate it, by making evident the gap between the realm of desire and that of necessity and by making that gap the object of our contemplation. (137–138)

Wittgenstein’s theoretical considerations are, therefore, useful for the analysis of Friel’s oeuvre insofar as the playwright’s characters – like so many characters witnessed in Anglo-Irish literature throughout the centuries – display a strong need to publicise their private truth and oppose it to dominant public discourse. However, the necessary gap which results from the transfer of reality to the linguistic representation of a situation or sensation and which Wittgenstein contemplates in his private language argument fills Friel’s characters with a deep feeling of uncertainty and unease. Exploring their inner selves, Friel’s characters frantically try to make their true identity and personality known to themselves and to others.

In his essay “A History of Secrets?” Vincent declares that “[t]he history of private life is also a history of various kinds of fear” (173). In Friel’s writing, the protagonists are almost invariably horrified of being misunderstood by their peers. However, as the discussion of the terms private and public has shown, people’s comfort and security is closely related to the overlap of familiarity with privateness in modern times. As soon as Friel’s characters feel that their concepts of home are threatened, their belief in their own existence or Dasein is fundamentally shaken. Hardly able to bear life in a world devoid of security and homeliness, a world that has nothing in common with their personal notions of what constitutes home as a haven of safety and shelter, they withdraw into their private realm to suppress their isolation and the loss of their sense of belonging.

When analysing the inability of Friel’s characters to share their private grief and sorrows with those round them, repression as an act of self-protection plays an important role. Freud argues that a necessary precondition for repression is a person’s objective to avoid “unpleasure” (147). Counting repression as a “method of defence,” Freud explains that “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious” because

the satisfaction of an instinct which is under repression would be quite possible [...] [and] in every instance such a satisfaction would be pleasurable in itself; but it would be irreconcilable with other claims and intentions. It would, therefore, cause pleasure in one place and unpleasure in another. It has consequently become a condition for repression that the motive force of unpleasure shall have acquired more strength than the pleasure obtained from satisfaction. (147, original emphasis)

By sharing their intimate thoughts or feelings with the characters around them, Friel’s characters would allow the others to gain power through
knowledge, which they could abuse to harm the character who has formerly disclosed his or her inner self. Thus, afraid that the other characters who would, therefore, know about their most personal anxieties or worries could cause them “unpleasure,” Friel’s characters, in spite of their existential need to express their private world and sorrows, often end up keeping their feelings secret even from their friends and relatives.

One of the most striking examples of repression in Friel’s plays is found in *Wonderful Tennessee*. Stranded on Ballybeg pier and failing to reach Oileán Draíocht, the island which “stands as a symbol of all their [i.e. the three couples’] desires for transcendence and release from immediate reality,” the six protagonists are forced to spend their night camping outside (Coult 112). In order to pass the time, they sing and tell stories. Emmert points out that

the story-telling […] does not only put the birthday party in a row with the tradition of the pilgrims of the *Canterbury Tales*, but also establishes a proximity with the tales in *Arabian Nights* which are narrated for self-preserving purposes. (221, my translation)

The stories the characters in *Wonderful Tennessee* appreciate most are the familiar ones. Frank, Terry’s brother-in-law, argues that “[a]ll we want of a story is to hear it again and again and again and again and again,” implying that people feel most comfortable and secure with the repetition of the well-known (*Tennessee* 409). As the same old stories contain nothing overwhelming or frightening, the couples much prefer them to the unexpected ones, such as Terry’s tale of a young man who was killed on Oileán Draíocht. Indicating that “[w]e are products of stories we tell about ourselves” and that “[w]e are the protagonists in narratives we have internalized,” McGrath hints at the extent to which narratives answer people’s “need for love, hope, dignity, self-esteem, meaningfulness, or sometimes just the need to escape an existence that is mundane, meaningless or painful” (13). Although each character in *Wonderful Tennessee* has serious problems on his or her mind, their casual conversation is trivial. It appears to be too distressing for the characters to publicly acknowledge or address what pre-occupies their minds. From this point of view, the three couples’ outing can be seen as an attempt to escape reality for one night and their singing and storytelling games can be interpreted as life-sustaining activities.

As the characters’ troubles and worries linger below the surface of their “raucously celebrating” of Terry’s birthday, Cave argues that “little of this [i.e. their efforts to cope with disappointment] is openly stated; the frictions and
tensions, the anxieties and yearnings, the repressed anger and subdued fatalism are rather sensed” (195, original emphasis). Both consciously and unconsciously, the protagonists repress their thoughts or, when they do mention what disturbs or troubles them, the other characters immediately change the topic to repress the issue. Thus, in Wonderful Tennessee, “meaning lies behind what is actually uttered and is to be inferred through details of tone, placing of actors in relation to each other within the stage space, gesture” (Cave 195 –196). Thus, “what is spoken is frequently a veiled surface behind which profounder, more urgent and private dramas are being played out by the characters” (196). Gradually the audience learns about the six characters’ private miseries, as the protagonists’ traumas or problems resist repression and are, therefore, regularly evoked again. Behind each other’s backs, the protagonists begin to share personal information with one another. At the beginning of the play and just after their arrival in Ballybeg, Berna, a barrister who is psychologically unstable, begs her husband Terry to take her home. Terry, who is having an affair with Berna’s sister Angela, dryly belittles Berna’s panic:

BERNA. Take me home, Terry – please. [...] Have you any idea how desperately unhappy I am? [...] I don’t think I can carry on, Terry.

TERRY. Of course, you can carry on. The doctor says you’re a lot better. (He reaches out to touch her.) Did you remember to take your pills this morning? (Tennessee 352)

Officially, Terry pays more attention to the doctor’s words than to Berna. However, talking to his sister Trish, Terry at a later stage admits that he is familiar with Berna’s truth of being “most content when she’s in the nursing home” (379). This demonstrates that he knows his wife’s feelings although he silenced her earlier by denying her perception of the excursion as a nightmarish experience. In a very intimate discussion with her sister Angela, Berna herself reveals that, according to Terry, the root of her problems lies in their childlessness. In reality this has never troubled her. She suggests instead that he “[m]arried the wrong sister” and explains that “[w]hen you [i.e. Angela] married Frank a little portion of him atrophied. Then he turned to me. I’m the surrogate” (387). Aware of being second choice, Berna concludes that “[h]e has no happiness with me – Terry. Not even ‘about-to-be’ happiness. He should leave me. I wouldn’t mind if he did. I don’t think I’d mind at all. Because in a way, I feel I have moved beyond all that” (387). Berna’s reasons for sharing this information with Angela remain equivocal; the text does not indicate whether she trusts Angela as a sister or whether she has told her because Angela causes her pains. It also remains uncertain whether Berna knows that Angela and
Terry are (still) having an affair. If she does know, she keeps these feelings secret, despite talking about Terry’s lack of love and her indifference to him. Even when Berna climbs to the top of the wall towards the end of the night and jumps from the pier into the sea, her action again remains ambiguous. Defending herself by claiming that she had previously announced she wanted to go swimming, Berna declares that it has had a purifying and refreshing effect on her. However, Trish, her sister-in-law, scolds her, suggesting that her action “was a naughty thing to do. It was a cruel thing to do. […] Particularly cruel to Terry” (416). Trish believes that Berna’s jump was an attempt to commit suicide in order to frighten or even punish Terry. Since Berna abruptly changes the topic after Trish’s reprimand, no solution is offered by the text. As Berna’s private reasons for jumping are hidden, a certain degree of uneasiness remains with the audience as well as with the other characters; to repress the awkwardness which has been aroused by the incident, the couples start singing a traditional Irish folksong pretending nothing has happened.

Trish’s husband George is hardly able to participate in the conversation and the storytelling at all. Suffering from a terminal illness, he has nearly lost his voice. Trish tells Terry “to stop sending that huge cheque every week” because George has no more than three months to live and they can “manage fine” without it (365). When Terry asks whether George is aware of how much time he has left, Trish quickly says, “[h]e’s very brave about it,” and immediately changes the topic again. She prefers not to go into any detail. A thoroughgoing discussion might be too intimate or painful for her; she supresses such thoughts and distracts Terry by announcing to the others that her brother is “going to make a speech” (365). George himself only mentions his health at the very end, when he tries to convince Angela to return to this place: “You’ll come back some day. […] And when you do, do it for me. No, no, I don’t mean for me – just in memory of me” (445, original emphasis). George’s sudden public acknowledgement of his terminal illness surprises Angela. According to the stage directions, “[s]he looks at him for a second. Then quickly, impetuously, she catches his head between her hands and kisses him” (445). Her reaction indicates that one reason for repressing and silencing the most intimate aspects of life is that such conditions as George’s go beyond language. Angela’s behaviour recalls her husband’s story. Frank has told the others a story of monks who see apparitions and are in touch with “[w]hatever it is we desire but can’t express. What is beyond language. The inexpressible. The ineffable” (398). In a situation of utter hopelessness or impending death, the characters no longer find any words to articulate their feelings and emotions; gestures are used instead, while their fears and uncertainties are denied for as long as possible.
Shortly before their return home, Terry, who, apparently, has financially supported the three families for years, announces that he is bankrupt and will not be able to keep the island:

Things will pick up. The tide will turn. I'll rise again. [...] To own Oileán Draíochta for two whole months – wasn’t that wonderful enough? Wasn’t that a terrific secret to have? Anyway … One small thing. I’d be glad if you kept it to yourselves – that I’m broke. Don’t want a hundred creditors descending on me. (441)

Concerned about the financial future of the other two couples, Terry finds it hard to admit to being insolvent and leaves the revelation until the last minute. After all, they all depend on his income. Moreover, as the two other couples have kept praising him for his success and thanking him for his generosity throughout the trip, he appears to be embarrassed and to regard this temporary situation as a personal failure. Finally, he knows that in a society where any negative publicity could be the end, secrecy – or at least his relatives’ discretion – is a matter of survival and self-protection. His attempt to keep his bankruptcy secret from the public might well be his only chance to rise again in his fortunes.

In *Faith Healer*, Molly Sweeney and to some extent in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* repression turns into a personality trait which is characteristic of the main protagonists. While the conversation between Public Gar and his father resembles the trivial exchange found in *Wonderful Tennessee*, there is no more communication between the characters in *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*. Referring to Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogic nature of discourse, Emmert observes that

Bakhtin regards the dialogic relationship of the speaker to himself as fundamental for a monologue, which is based ‘on the disclosure of the *inner man*, of one’s ‘own self,’ which is not accessible by passive introspection, but only by means of an active, *dialogic approach to one’s own self*: (84, original emphasis, my translation)\(^{39}\)

Thus, although the protagonists’ longing for warmth, understanding and a stable sense of belonging is repressed on the level of the plot in Friel’s writing, the audience, who listens to the characters’ monologues or follows Private Gar’s revelations and subtexts to the monosyllabic conversation with his father, is made familiar with the characters’ personal needs.

\(^{39}\) Original: Bachtin betrachtet das dialogische Verhältnis des Sprechers zu sich selbst als wesentlich für den Monolog, dem „die Öffnung des *inneren Menschen* zugrunde [liegt], des ‘eigenen Selbst’, das nicht passiver Selbstbeobachtung, sondern nur aktiver *dialogischer Einstellung zum eigenen Selbst* zugänglich ist (84).
In one of her monologues, the eponymous protagonist in Molly Sweeney recalls the “pre operation party [sic] held in her honour” the night before she underwent her eye surgery (Higgins 99). Her husband’s phrase that the evening felt “like a wake” already foreshadows the final outcome of the operation which deprives Molly of her home and the life she has been familiar with up to this point (Molly 29). Indicating that the spontaneous gathering of a number of friends and neighbours to celebrate Molly’s impending operation “asserts her [i.e. Molly’s] position as a valued friend and neighbour,” Higgins identifies the main protagonist’s “special knowledge of the community” as “the social glue that binds them together” (99). The occasion described by Molly, indeed, illustrates the high estimation the main protagonist holds among her circle of friends, which is partly due to her ability to understand the incommunicable of the Ballybeg society. The frequent visits the other characters pay to Molly when she lives in the sanatorium at the end of the play give further evidence of her popularity and her crucial function as a figure of bonding within this local community. However, that particular night, despite sensing a considerable degree of friction among her friends and neighbours, Molly is equally incapable of articulating her anxieties and her concerns as the other characters. Instead of addressing the feelings of anger and hatred which she senses, Molly only mentions the neighbours’ marital problems and Mr O’Neill’s devastation over the loss of his wife retrospectively. Describing to the audience the memories of that particular night, which the group spent singing and reciting poems, Molly recollects how Tony and Betty, whose daughter, as she proudly declares, had been named after her, sang ‘Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better’ (Molly 30). Although Molly states that “there was so much tension between them you knew they weren’t performing at all,” the prevailing atmosphere of unease and strain between the two characters is not touched upon in the conversation (30). Moreover, Molly reveals that whereas Jack Quinn “wasn’t drinking for some reason,” his wife Mary “certainly was” (29). In contrast to Tony and Betty’s case, Billy Hughes, “an old bachelor friend of Frank” who arrived at the party already “well tanked,” publicly refers to the delicate situation between the couple when he invites Jack to “do the decent and volunteer to leave since he was in a bad mood and wasn’t drinking anyway” (29–30).40 Jack’s wife immediately welcomes Billy’s proposal as “the brightest idea all evening” (30). However, her statement also demonstrates that rather than really articulating the tensions

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40 In Molly Sweeney, intoxication serves as a powerful means to cope with problems. Apart from Billy Hughes and Mary Quinn, Mr Rice is said to “[reek] of whiskey” (26). The “suffocating” smell of alcohol repeatedly reminds Molly of her own father, a judge, of whom Molly says that every night he used to come home and “after he’d had a few quick drinks, he’d pick me up in his arms and carry me out to the walled garden” (66 and 13, my emphasis).
and difficulties between herself and her husband, she would prefer if Jack left and allowed her to indulge in the state of oblivion or repression that appears to define the mode in which this group of friends tackle their personal problems. Compared to Molly’s guests, most of whom are shown to struggle with their private difficulties, the audience realises that the main protagonist’s life, despite the fact that it does not conform to the norm, is considerably happy before her operation. Still, when the “fiddler” Tom McLaughlin starts to play “The Lament for Limerick,” Molly can no longer repress how “utterly desolate” she feels (30 and 31). Afraid of losing the life she has known and upset that “nobody once mentioned the next day or how they thought the operation might go,” Molly concludes that the other characters prefer to suppress the true reason for gathering in Frank and Molly’s home by silencing her own as well as their insecurity (31). Molly finally concludes that “because nothing was said, maybe that made the occasion a bit unreal, a bit frantic” (31). Trying to release the tension which has gradually built itself up inside herself in the course of the evening, Molly

in a rage of anger and defiance [...] danced a wild and furious dance round and round that room; then out to the hall; then round the kitchen; then back to the room again and round it a third time. Mad and wild and frenzied. But so adroit, so efficient. No timidity, no hesitations, no falterings. Not a glass overturned, not a shoulder brushed. Weaving between all those people, darting between chairs and stools and cushions and bottles and glasses with complete assurance, with absolute confidence. Until Frank said something to Tom and stopped him playing. (31–32)

No longer able to comply with what Molly perceives as her friends’ and neighbours’ need to repress their inner world and feelings, Molly “expresses her fear at the forthcoming ordeal in a frenzied dance” which is as “clearly an expression of self as in Dancing at Lughnasa” as “a vivid enactment of her skilful negotiation of the tensions and rivalries in the community” (Higgins 99). Corbett claims that, in this dance, “Molly is expressing something beyond words, but also demonstrating before the audience of neighbours and friends that her mastery of her world is quite as complete as their casual acceptance of theirs” (127). Therefore, Molly’s operation has its true origin in the power of the norm. From this point of view, Molly’s dance is, as in Dancing at Lughnasa, a “momentary rebellion” before the power of the majority crushes the alternative lifestyle of the other and forces Molly to adhere to the ideology and inherent principles of Ballybeg society (Harris 44).

Following her negative presentiments and her “sudden anger” the night before the operation when she realises that the other characters have no idea what they are depriving her of, Molly soon deteriorates after her eye surgery (Molly 31). Likewise Jack and Mary Quinn’s relationship does not survive the
silence and tension that exists between the couple. In her last monologue in hospital, Molly tells the audience that, although Mary often visits her at the hospital, she “hasn’t told me yet but I’m afraid Jack has cleared off” (65). The only friendship that Molly mentions which has improved since she moved to the hospital is the one between Rita and herself. In spite of normally living in a world of her own, Molly still enjoys listening to Rita sharing the latest gossip with her. In the end, the two friends are as attached as they were before Frank entered Molly’s life and before she underwent the operation to please him. Nonetheless, acknowledging the failure of her own marriage, Jack and Mary Quinn’s separation as well as Mr O’Neill’s transfer to a hospice in her final speech, Molly serves as an illustration of Niel’s claim that because the characters on stage do not communicate with one another, “only the audience […] – and this is once more typical of Friel – is able to recognise the full extent of failure” in Molly Sweeney (“Brian Friel” 43, my translation). The audience thus witnesses the degree of tragedy in the Ballybeg community, where the various members portrayed in the play tend to repress their problems and tend to suffer silently instead of addressing their problems openly.

In an interview with Kurdi about Brian Friel’s Theatre, Pine pinpoints “the until recently prevailing difficulty of talking about emotions, talking about relationship, inhibitions which are there partly from the school system, partly from the religious environment” and concludes that in Irish society “[p]eople do not open up and talk about things” (Kurdi 306). Yet, Pine argues that, although the Irish are not used to publicising their feelings and emotions, scenes centring Gar O’Donnell in Philadelphia, Here I Come! or the autistic girl Bridget in Give Me Your Answer, Do! “will strike chords […] [as] many people cannot talk about” their inner selves (Kurdi 307). After all, “[i]t’s something that is familiar to the Irish Catholic mindset, because it has to do with the ‘confessional’ method of communicating and gaining some level of absolution from that silent experience or exorcizing oneself from it” (307). I would like to put Pine’s expression “the ‘confessional’ method of communicating” into a context with Foucault’s History of Sexuality. I believe that while a large number of characters in Friel lack the gift of the gab in conversation with other protagonists, they are what is defined by Foucault as “a confessing animal” who “confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles” and quite generally “goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell” (59). In Foucault’s opinion, people’s constant “self-examination” has become a defining element

41 Original: Nur der Zuschauer […] – und das ist wieder einmal typisch für Friel – kann das ganze Ausmass des Scheiterns erkennen (43).
In the history of Western religious practices established since the Middle Ages. In fact, he believes that “[t]he obligation to confess” is indeed “so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface” (60). Arguing that “[c]onfession frees” while “power reduces one to silence,” Foucault links the disclosure of private knowledge to “truth” and “freedom” (60) and, thereby, recalls Sofsky’s claim that “[t]here has never been a society in which people have not sought to occupy their own terrain and to defend it against attacks” (24). Prevented from articulating their private knowledge either because of their personality, the cultural environment or their life in Ballybeg during the colonial age when their private views were negated or silenced, Friel’s characters invariably withdraw into the private realm in order to answer their existential need to make their most intimate thoughts known. Thus, they resemble Foucault’s confessing animal that has internalised confessional practices by irrevocably giving a detailed account of “what one is and what one does, what one recollects and what one has forgotten, what one is thinking and what one thinks he is not thinking” (60).

In Philadelphia, Here I Come! Gar yearns for love and warmth within his home. Under the supervision or even surveillance of his father, who treats him like an infant and will not let him “order even a dozen loaves without getting [his] permission,” Gar believes he cannot articulate his feelings or lead an independent life (Philadelphia 40). In the course of the play, the audience learns that Gar’s father is unaware of the effect he has on his son. He does not realise that Gar feels that he is being controlled. Wondering about their relationship, the father suggests to the housemaid that perhaps their difficulties arise from the fact that he “could have been his [i.e. Gar’s] grandfather” (107). However, the problem between the father and the son is not, as Gar believes, one of control, or as his father is convinced, of age, but primarily one of (mis-)communication.

Like many of Friel’s characters, Gar and his father cannot share their private thoughts within their home or in public because they, both consciously and unconsciously, repress their fears to protect themselves and to avoid embarrassing themselves in front of others or being subjected to power from the outside. At the beginning of Philadelphia, Here I Come! Private Gar argues that any conversation between him and his father is pointless since their interactions have no real meaning. Whatever they say or do is ritualised; Private Gar easily predicts his father’s sentences or actions (38–39). Private Gar even admits that his true reason for leaving Ballybeg and his father is that “we embarrass one another” (40, original emphasis). Incapable of talking to his father in an intimate and familiar fashion, Public Gar cannot express his
‘private side.’ Longing for an intimate and relaxed chat with his father which would at long last acknowledge their (deep) relationship and reduce their mutual estrangement, Public Gar is shown to prepare and practise his public conversations in private. Nevertheless, whenever the opportunity for an exchange of thoughts or feelings arises, the father-son conversations remain tight-lipped and banal in comparison to Private Gar’s previous imaginary versions. Private Gar once admits: “If one of us were to say, ‘You’re looking tired’ or ‘That’s a bad cough you have’, the other would fall over backwards with embarrassment” (40). Consequently, just like his father, he keeps all his thoughts and desires to himself. He hardly ever makes his secret or private side known out of fear of embarrassing either his father or himself. Describing Gar’s father as an “undemonstrative, unappealing, unprepossessing figure, his mind fixed on practical matters and his emotions heavily under wraps,” O’Brien aptly defines Gar’s life as “an emotional and cultural wasteland” (Friel 49 and 48). He rightly concludes that “Gar is not his [father’s] victim; he is his heir. He represents an intensification of his father’s mentality rather than the antithesis of it” (49). Horrified by the stiffness and customary silence in the O’Donnell household, Madge, their housekeeper and Gar’s most intimate relation, finally decries the father’s lack of initiative to change the communicative situation by addressing him in an ironic voice: “The chatting in this place would deafen a body. Won’t the house be quiet enough soon enough – long enough?” (Philadelphia 41). Even on these rare occasions, when a certain degree of intimacy could be established between father and son, they lapse into silence and withdraw into their own secure space of privateness to which the other one has no access, either because they are ill at ease or overwhelmed by their emotions. In an attempt to calm himself and to ease the tension which Madge’s statement has built up between Public Gar and his father, Private Gar starts to quote the opening lines of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: “It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles…” (41). Whenever anything unusual or ‘revolutionary’ happens in the O’Donnell household, such as Madge reproaching Gar’s father for his inarticulateness, which seems to threaten the stifling, stultifying and dismal atmosphere, Private Gar cites what has been described by Jones as “essentially a defence of the *ancient régime*” (24, original emphasis). Albeit longing for change and for intimacy in his home, Private Gar cannot handle the situation when the stiffness he is familiar with is even vaguely undermined. Thus, silence in the O’Donnell household has, paradoxically enough, both a disturbing and reassuring character.
Lacking the language to express intimacy and emotions, Public Gar fails to communicate the private truth that he longs for his father to establish a link to him and his inner self, Private Gar. The play culminates in Public Gar’s revelation that apart from his desperation over their poor communicative patterns and his failure to ask permission to marry the girl he loves, he no longer knows why he is about to emigrate: “I don’t know. I – I – I don’t know” (Philadelphia 110). Yearning for his father’s recognition of his true or inner self, Berkeley’s esse est percipi shows that Gar’s expectations must necessarily fail because he does not manage to make his father part of his private world. Ironically enough, intimacy and confidentiality, the two aspects Public Gar is no longer able to experience or recognise in the relationship with his father, are established on a theatrical level between the protagonist’s alter ego and the audience.

Whereas Philadelphia, Here I Come! addresses the difficulties which the lack of communication causes on a personal level, the manifold consequences that the loss of the Irish language and the cultural identity has had on the Gaelic population are portrayed in Friel’s masterpiece Translations, the second play apart from Making History with a colonial background. The play’s “action takes place in a hedge-school in […] Baile Beag/Ballybeg, an Irish-speaking community” in August 1833 (Translations 10). The play is set at a time when the British army arrive in the village because “[h]is Majesty’s government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey” of Ireland and the soldiers are, therefore, asked to produce a detailed map of the country and anglicise all the Irish place names (31). In a conversation about the different languages spoken in Ballybeg, Hugh, the schoolmaster of the hedge school, explains that, although he speaks English like his two sons, he prefers to teach Greek and Latin to the local inhabitants. He expresses his conviction that the Irish “culture and the classical tongues [make] a happier conjugation” than English and Irish, because, in his opinion, English is a language which “couldn’t really express” the Irish people (25).

Choosing to have the supposedly Irish-speaking characters use Hiberno-English to converse with one another on stage, Friel has found an impressive means to illustrate the enormous sense of loss the Irish population has suffered by being deprived of their language and culture. After all, forced to voice their sensations and feelings in English, the characters are, according to Hugh, no longer able to fully articulate themselves.42 Indirectly taking up Hugh’s point

42 In Translations, the schoolmaster, Hugh, teaches his grown-up students Greek and Latin. Their meetings appear to have a social function as well as an educational one. In the Times Literary Supplement, Seamus Heaney partly blames the National School system for the loss of the Gaelic language arguing that, in Translations, “[w]e do not hear Irish on the stage, of
that the language of the Irish population after the advent of the British army fails to represent their reality in a satisfying manner, Corbett states in his introduction to Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe: “In Translations, Friel pinpoints the moment at which the Irish psyche divided. As the language of the people no longer matched the landscape in which they lived, so the people became displaced in their homes” (2). Corbett’s analysis of a situation in which a people’s home is no longer associated with security and a reasonably strong sense of belonging but turns into a space of alienation, which is linked with the new and unknown, is encapsulated in a nutshell in the first scene of Translations, in which Hugh’s son Manus is trying to teach Sarah, who has been mute all her life, to speak at all.

Sarah’s body language reveals how frightening this new access to intercourse and communication with those around her is for her: “She is sitting on a low stool, her head down, very tense, clutching a slate on her knees” (Translations 11). Making a huge effort to express herself in public, she eventually succeeds in articulating her own identity by timidly declaring: “My name is Sarah” (12). Celebrating Sarah’s breakthrough, Manus announces that this phrase will open up an entirely new world for her, which will offer him some insight into her secret world: “Soon you’ll be telling me all the secrets that have been in that head of yours all these years” (12). Jones highlights that in this incident in which “[n]ame and identity are synonymous […] Sarah’s first words are an act of personal identification” (70). In fact, both Sarah’s phrase and Manus’ reaction bring to mind Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage. Against the background of Lacan’s theory, which stresses the role of language in the formation of subjectivity, Sarah’s sentence is significant in her own development as a subject. In the eyes of the normative society of Ballybeg, represented by Manus, Sarah’s expression allows her to leave behind the stage of “a pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal infant whose subjectivity is formless, shapeless and otherwise fragmented” and to linguistically identify herself as an active member of the community who can communicate her inner world to other characters, who can share her secrets with them and who “as a separate being in a world of objects” has, at least unconsciously, some kind of notion “of difference and delimitation, self and (m)Other” (Lane, Fifty 193). Although Manus triumphantly greets the young woman’s step towards communication, Sally’s achievement, “to break out of the circle of the Innerwelt [i.e. the inner world] into the Umwelt [i.e. outer world],” is double-edged; not only will language bind her more closely to the public life of the Ballybeg community but, intruding into her own private sphere, communication will also partly course – and that ‘of course’ tells us how successful the National School system was…” (as quoted by Niel, “Brian Friel” 50).
deprive her of former privacy (Lacan, “Mirror Stage” 138, original emphasis).

Sarah’s step towards acquiring the Irish language by leaving her private and mute realm is paralleled by the homecoming of Hugh’s younger son Owen, who has worked in Dublin for six years. His arrival in Ballybeg will turn out to mark the moment when the local inhabitants lose their own language and culture and are forced to abandon Irish and accept English as the official language. In fact, Owen’s homecoming coincides with his father’s return from the local christening and the two people’s appearance suddenly interrupts the playful conversation among the Ballybeg community gathered at the hedge school. Their entrance proves Sofsky’s claim that in a place [w]here everyone knows everyone else, privacy can scarcely be maintained. The more closely woven the social network is, the more oppressive the proximity of others. […] Being completely integrated means being bound by social fetters. Everything private is public. Every offense against customs and etiquette is immediately noted. Freedom grows only when distance and mobility increase. (31–32)

All of the characters present in the barn are delighted to see Owen, who is supposed to have been exceptionally successful in Dublin. Owen is immedi-

43 Tragically enough for Manus, who has spent so much time and effort teaching Sarah how to speak, “the only secret which Sarah will ever tell Manus […] will lead to the destruction of his hope for love and to the catastrophe at the end of the play” (Niel, “Disability” 209). This scene, which was already mentioned in the Introduction, will be further discussed below (p. 201–202). The aspect of secrecy witnessed with regard to Sarah’s muteness as well as the power of naming, which, as Pine argues, “for Friel as for Beckett is the key to identity,” are further emphasised by the scholars’ dialogue about a christening which Manus’ father Hugh is attending at the beginning of the play (Ireland’s Drama 15). The naming of a newly born child, or “the ritual of naming,” described by the community as the “caerimonia nominationis,” positions a baby within the community (Translations 23, original emphasis). In this particular case, Nellie Ruadh, the baby’s mother, causes some tension within Ballybeg society because she has not yet made the name of the child’s father known. The discussion among the community members proves that Nellie is playing with the power this secret provides her with:

BRIDGET. Our Seamus says she [i.e. Nellie] was threatening she was going to call it after its father.

DOALTY. Who’s the father?

BRIDGET. That’s the point, you donkey you! (18, my emphasis)

In her study Secrets in Families and Family Therapy, Imber-Black states that “[t]hose who hold power become entitled to keep secrets that, in turn, feed back and amplify positions of power. Those who have little or no power are intimidated into silence” (22). Doalty apparently does not realise that Nellie has the power to change the life of a community member by naming her child after the father.
ately confronted with the gossip that has spread as far as Ballybeg demonstrat-
ing that, in this remote village, the local community forms a unity from which
the individual can hardly keep anything secret. Apparently touched by the
warm welcome, Owen expresses his pleasure to be back with "civilised" people
(Translations 28, original emphasis). Owen’s choice of words seems to indicate
that he has not forgotten his background and that he disagrees with the
imperialist point of view of the English, who regard the Irish as an uncivilised
people. However, based on his later behaviour, Owen might intentionally be
flattering the inhabitants of Ballybeg before introducing them to his friends. In
the course of the play, the audience learns that Owen’s demeanour reveals that
having lived far from the local population, his customs have changed and he
has ceased to feel obliged to comply with “the social fetters” or rules of
Ballybeg (Sofsky 32). As Owen encourages the Irish community to offer their
hospitality to his friends, he unwittingly asks them to embrace the enemy.
Owen’s presence will, therefore, have a disastrous effect on the Ballybeg
society. Trying to help the two British soldiers who have employed him to
anglicise the Irish place names, Owen, rather naively, believes that all he is
going to do is translate a number of simple and straightforward words from
Irish into English. As will be shown below, this is only one of Owen’s
misjudgements in the play: no longer part of the Ballybeg community, he
has forgotten what defines the Irish psyche. In fact, his actions and mis-
derstandings illustrate that he is just as unfamiliar with the British mindset
as with the other Irish characters.

A short exchange between Manus and Owen offers some insight into
Owen’s outlook on the world. Explaining that the English either had his name
“wrong from the very beginning” or “can’t pronounce” his real name, Owen
declares recklessly, “Owen – Roland – what the hell. It’s only a name. It’s
the same me, isn’t it? Well, isn’t it?” (Translations 33) Manus’ condescending
answer, “Indeed it is. It’s the same Owen,” unveils the older brother’s
contempt and disagreement. Contrary to Manus, Owen seems perfectly
ignorant of the prospect that his cooperation with the British forces could
result in the local population’s dispossession and alienation and might strip the
tribe of its language, culture and freedom.

Equally unaware of the tremendous consequences the personal invitation
will have for the public, Hugh trusts his son and proclaims in his welcoming
manner: “Your friends are our friends” (28). Thus, as soon as Owen introduces
the English Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland to the Irish community,
Hugh offers them a glass of whiskey/uisce beatha, pompously translating the
Irish words into Latin: “Perhaps a modest refreshment? A little sampling of
our aqua vitae?” (30, original emphasis) Ironically, Hugh’s joke is lost on
Lancey and Yolland, as they are the only monolingual characters in the play.
Their inability to understand any other language than their own is a source of amusement for the local inhabitants and signals the intellectual superiority of the Irish. Nonetheless, in the prototypical imperialist manner which intensifies the strong paradox between the soldiers’ ignorance and their military power, Lancey talks to the Irish “as if he were addressing children – a shade too loudly and enunciating excessively” (30). His patronising behaviour bewilders the Irish; Jimmy cannot avoid wondering, “Nonne Latine loquitur?” (30, original emphasis) Embarrassing himself even more, Lancey apologises to Jimmy by saying, “I do not speak Gaelic, sir,” causing Owen to finally take control and translate the second part of the Captain’s speech (39). However, Owen’s translation also offers some interesting insights. As a result of the translation which Owen provides, the audience is made to believe that Owen’s true motive for his homecoming is the prospect a powerful job and a good salary. After all, in order to ensure that Lancey’s plans do not outrage the Irish, Owen offers a cross-cultural translation in which he omits every piece of information that might offend the Irish. Completely altering some of the Captain’s statements, he actually invents an entirely new reality – one that is acceptable for the Irish community:

LANCEY. His majesty’s government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country – a general triangulation which will embrace detailed hydrographic and topographic information and which will be executed to a scale of six inches to the English mile.

HUGH. (Pouring a drink) Excellent – excellent.

(\textit{Lancey looks at Owen.})

OWEN. A new map is being made of the whole country.

(\textit{Lancey looks to Owen: Is that all? Owen smiles reassuringly and indicates to proceed.})

LANCEY. This enormous task has been embarked on so that the military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire.

OWEN. The job is being done by soldiers because they are skilled in this work.

LANCEY. And also so that the entire basis of land valuation can be reassessed for purposes of more equitable taxation.

OWEN. This new map will take the place of the estate-agent’s map so that from now on you will know exactly what is yours in law.

LANCEY. […] the present survey has for its object the relief which can be afforded to the proprietors and occupiers of land from unequal taxation.

OWEN. The captain hopes that the public will cooperate with the sappers and that the new map will mean that taxes are reduced. (31)

Owen’s translation conceals the true intention of the English invaders; by anglicising the place names and reassessing the land, they culturally and legally deprive the Irish of their personal property and emphasise their colonial and imperialist intentions. When Manus harshly criticises his younger brother for
betraying his people after the meeting, Owen’s answers are evasive and intended to distract Manus:

MANUS. What sort of a translation was that, Owen?
OWEN. Did I make a mess of it?
MANUS. You weren’t saying what Lancey was saying!
OWEN. ‘Uncertainty in meaning is incipient poetry’ – who said that?
MANUS. There was nothing uncertain about what Lancey said: it’s a bloody military operation. (32)

Manus seems to be aware of the fact that not only Lancey’s survey but also Owen’s translation dispossesses the Irish people of their culture, land and language. As soon as the English occupiers take control of the public space – symbolised in the play by Owen and Yolland working in the barn and leaving no space for the Irish scholars – the community’s independence as well as the realm of their shared privateness are at stake.

Unlike his brother, Owen is entirely unconcerned about the effect which his work will have on the local inhabitants. In fact, he celebrates his power to produce a new public world by translating the names. Anglicising or even mistranslating Irish place names, he willingly adopts Yolland’s expression “welcome to Eden,” exclaiming, “Eden’s right! We name a thing and – bang! – it leaps into existence!” (45) Like Doctor Rice in Molly Sweeney or Frank Hardy in Faith Healer, Owen relishes his powerful position. While Doctor Rice and Frank Hardy are granted power for their reputed medical or spiritual knowledge, Owen’s immense power is based on his multilingualism. Just like the other two characters, he regards himself as a godlike figure, equipped with the power to create a linguistic reality. However, changing the Irish place names, he denies the roots of his people and imposes a new world and identity on them. Only towards the end of Translations does the renaming of every street, river and hill cause Owen to stop and ask his father, somewhat concerned, whether he will still be able to find his way in the ‘English village’ of Ballybeg (42). This is the first piece of evidence that Owen is becoming worried about depriving his people of their familiarity and homeliness. Lancey’s speech after Yolland’s disappearance, in which the British soldier threatens to “shoot all livestock in Ballybeg” and to begin “evictions and levelling of every abode” within the community if the missing lieutenant has not been found two days later, finally comes as a sudden and shocking revelation for Owen (61–62). As soon as Lancey has left, Hugh returns home. He takes the Name-Book that Owen has used to translate the place names and starts to memorise the new names. Regretting his collaboration with the British army, Owen, however, “snatches the book from Hugh,” and says: “I’ll take that. (In apology.) It’s only a catalogue of names. […] A mistake – my
mistake – nothing to do with us” (66). Hugh, who has missed Lancey’s speech, declares his intention to make the new names his own and to accept change in Ballybeg. He explains that “[w]e must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home” (66). Owen’s answer, “I know where I live,” illustrates that the prodigal son has finally come home to Ballybeg (66).

Contrary to Lancey’s denigrating conduct towards the Irish, Yolland glorifies Ballybeg and its inhabitants. Fascinated by the Irish language and the community, Yolland represents “the type of sentimental Englishman who looks on Ireland as a rural paradise” (Corbett 27). However, his encounter with the island and its inhabitants is by no means the result of careful planning. Having missed the boat for India, where he was supposed to work for the East India Company, Yolland decided to join the British army and was immediately transferred to Dublin. Thus, as in McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes*, a link is established between India and Ireland; proving that it is utterly irrelevant what colony a British subject travels to, the two places are treated as if they were identical or at least easily comparable. However, Yolland’s life takes an interesting and unexpected turn when he falls in love with Manus’ girlfriend, Maire, shortly after his arrival in the village. Impressed by people’s language as well as their hospitality, Yolland experiences a kind of homecoming. This “momentary sense of discovery […] a sense of recognition, of confirmation of something [he] half knew instinctively,” leads him to dream of a life in Ballybeg (*Translations* 40). Nonetheless, talking to Owen about his future prospects in Ballybeg, Yolland also voices his doubts whether crossing the language and culture barrier will really allow him to become fully integrated in the Irish community: “Even if I did speak Irish I’d always be an outsider here, wouldn’t I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won’t it? The private core will always be … hermetic, won’t it?” (40, my emphasis) Yolland intuitively senses that, although he might be able to learn the superficial rules of the foreign language, he will always be excluded from the private core of Irishness and might never decode the unspoken elements of the local Irish culture. His statement further illustrates that at a moment in history when the Irish as a tribe lose their power and language to the English, they – as did the poets who wrote *The Poems of the Dispossessed* – paradoxically, still have the power to exclude outsiders from their private lives. Speaking to each other in Gaelic, Greek or Latin, the Irish community in *Translations* repeatedly succeeds in evading the power of the English occupiers. Although Owen requires Manus to talk to Yolland in English “[o]ut of courtesy,” Manus refuses to make Yolland part of his private space and deliberately excludes him from the discussions with his brother (37). As a result of this, Duncan notes that “language is a tool of dominance in the hands
of the colonizer and a tool of resistance in the hands of the colonized” (3). Emphasising their multilingualism, the inhabitants demonstrate that they can exercise power through their intellectual superiority over the English soldiers, whose power is based on military strength only. Hugh even quotes Ovid, who suggests that it is a sign of missing education if one cannot converse with the local population because one has no command of their language: “Barbarus hic ego sum quia non intelligor ulli” (Translations 64, original emphasis). Duncan is right when he highlights that Jimmy’s translation of this sentence “ironically indicates that the real barbarians are not the native Irish but the encroaching English soldiers who are not understood by the Irish” (5). Although the English army possesses the power to change the Irish place names, people like Yolland are forced to acknowledge that, regardless of the fact that the British military power considerably weakens the local community, the inhabitants of Ballybeg retain some degree of power to resist the English occupiers. The power of language as well as ‘the inarticulate aspect of culture’ excludes the English soldiers from the private core of Irishness. In fact, the power of violence or military resistance allegedly leads the radical members in the community to kill Yolland. The hermetic core of life in Ballybeg defines that space which is reserved for the insider, namely the Ballybeg community, and which the radical inhabitants of the village are not willing to share with their enemies and invaders. Dispossessed of the land and confronted with new place names, the private core is the only realm the local community manages to protect and retain after the British occupation.

Before the lieutenant’s disappearance, Yolland and Maire develop a remarkable degree of intimacy despite their speaking different languages. Warning Maire about the difficulties one encounters in a cross-cultural and multilingual relationship, Hugh suggests that living between two cultures one is constantly forced to “interpret between privacies” (67). However, in a society in which mutual understanding is hardly ever reached among spouses and members of the same family or tribe, Maire and Yolland manage to enjoy love and happiness together. Thus, I agree with FitzGibbon that, despite “the absence of a common language,” the two lovers have “found other means for interpreting each other’s privacies” (73).

Thus, in Translations as well as in Friel’s writing in general where failure in communication connotes an existential condition in human beings and where, according to Lojek, “[e]migration is a constant temptation,” of all the different characters in Friel’s plays, these two lovers “who do not share a language, have discovered how to understand each other” (“Sense of Place” 186). Aware of their inability to linguistically decode the other, the two protagonists experience a moment of perfect fulfilment and unity in their love scene:
YOLLAND. (Indicating himself) George.
(Maire nods: Yes – yes. Then)
MAIRE. Lieutenant George.
YOLLAND. Don’t call me that. I never think of myself as Lieutenant.
MAIRE. What – what?
YOLLAND. Sorry – sorry? (He points to himself again.) George.
(Maire nods: Yes – yes. Then points to herself.)
MAIRE. Maire.

[...]
YOLLAND. I’m not going to leave here.
MAIRE. Shhh – listen to me. I want you, too, soldier.
YOLLAND. Don’t stop – I know what you’re saying.
YOLLAND. ‘Always’? What is that word – ‘always’?
MAIRE. Take me with you, George. (Translations 49–52)

However, their happiness does not last. Reminding the reader that their relationship started by waving at each other across the fields, Welch stresses how the two lovers disregard that “the fields that lie between them are fields of language, of discourse” and that “it takes a great deal of work to make the translation, before the field day is possible” (144–145). Paying no attention to these rules, Maire and Yolland “rush headlong, at each other and to disaster,” because Sarah, seeing the two lovers, destroys their private tryst (Welch 145). Shouting for Manus, Sarah makes the secret relation between Maire and Yolland public. Manus, enraged and deeply hurt, decides to leave Ballybeg immediately. Sarah, who watches him make his last preparations, is horrified by the result of her action. She feels that by teaching her to speak Manus has given her a deadly weapon to destroy his secret dreams. Before she withdraws from public interaction again, Sarah apologises to Manus, who tries to calm her down and to convince her that

[t]here is nothing to stop you now – nothing in the wide world. (Pause. He looks down at her.) It’s alright – it’s alright – you did no harm – you did no harm at all. (He stoops over her and kisses the top of her head – as if in absolution. Then briskly to the door and off.) (56–57)

The departure of the man Sarah trusts and loves and who gave her access to the public world at the beginning of the play throws her back into isolation and muteness. Sarah’s tragic encounter with the other, therefore, stands for the entire country’s fate as it symbolises “a people’s loss of tongue and name” (Smith as quoted by Duncan 8). Her experience of communicating with the public world is rather traumatic; voicing her feelings of shock and surprise, she has made the life of the person she loves a misery. Soon after Sarah has made the affair between Maire and the lieutenant public, Yolland goes missing.
When confronted by Captain Lancey, the inhabitants of Ballybeg officially know nothing about Yolland’s whereabouts. Privately, however, they presume that the lieutenant has been murdered by radical members of their community who insist on endogamous marriage practice (“endogamein”); these people disapprove of characters, like Maire, who “cross those borders casually” by marrying outside the tribe (“exogamein”) and who threaten the lives of the entire community by embracing the enemy (Translations 68). These phrases by local inhabitants unveil how uneasy the community feel about Yolland’s presence. Manus’ statement, “I understand the Lanceys perfectly but people like you puzzle me,” shows that people are even more suspicious of Yolland because he cannot be categorised as a prototypical occupier (37). To people like Manus, an invader like Yolland who is involved in renaming their environment and thereby deprives the local inhabitants of their cultural heritage, cannot develop an interest in the Irish culture and community at the same time. Failing to fit into the local inhabitants’ simplifying scheme of friend or foe, he remains an “enigma” and thus a potential threat for the community (Jones 90).

Paradoxically enough, Maire and Yolland discover the word ‘always’ in their respective languages, at a time in which the entire life in Ballybeg is being changed forever. When Maire asks Hugh to translate the words for her later, he informs her that, if she wants to learn English, this “silly word” is the wrong one to “start with” (Translations 67). Unlike the two lovers, Hugh is a typical representative of Friel’s Ballybeg society: he mistrusts language but is convinced that in order to know where he lives and in order to be understood he must learn the new code names. The attitude of familiarising oneself with the necessary codes reminds the audience of his younger son’s attitude towards language and culture. When Yolland asks Owen whether he believes the inner core of Irishness is so hermetic that it will always elude him, Owen casually replies: “You can learn to decode us” (40). The development of the play, however, shows that Owen mistakenly regards language as a simple business of translation and believes that the local inhabitants are more open-minded than they really are. Quintessentially, however, I want to suggest that Owen makes a much more fundamental error of judgement; in fact, except for Maire and Yolland, Friel’s characters, both inside and across the tribe, lack the code for mutual understanding as there is no absolute transfer from the private to the public realm, no absolute translation of one’s sensations and feelings. Not even within the tribe or the family can characters decode each other’s private core. In fact, except for Maire and Yolland, this is shown to remain entirely private and hermetic in Friel’s work. Deeply frustrated by this insight, the playwright’s characters tend to engage in rituals such as singing or dancing or to withdraw to their private realm. Communicating with themselves or with the