audience, they constantly express their woes or talk about their few memories of the past when reality and dream still coincided in their concept of home and happiness.

Summarising, I believe that Friel’s plays underline Steiner’s notion that “[a]ny model of communication is at the same time a model of translation, of a […] transfer of significance” as every “human being performs an act of translation, in the full sense of the word, when receiving a speech-message from any other human being” (47 and 48). In order to communicate one is always obliged to “interpret between privacies” (Translations 67). No matter whether two people share the same language or culture, mutual understanding depends on the ability to translate one’s own sensations and interpret someone else’s feelings, utterances or privateness. As my reading of Making History has shown, trusting that one’s private truth can be suitably translated into public knowledge is particularly difficult in Friel’s work. His characters distrust language as they struggle with the insight that their feelings and experiences will never be perfectly identical with any translation. Hence, unlike Maire and Yolland in the love scene or the Mundy sisters during their dance, whenever Friel’s characters use language to communicate their inner selves, they believe that their identity can never be fully grasped or understood and that they remain imprisoned in their conditio humana. Still, I fully agree with FitzGibbon and Welch that Friel’s true achievement is that his theatre translates and makes public what his characters cannot articulate amongst each other (FitzGibbon 78, Welch 138). Adopting the strong tendency of Irish writers to publicise the private in their texts, Friel has found a number of dramatic means to linguistically represent, on the one hand, his characters’ superficial inarticulateness and, to explore, on the other hand, their vivid inner self, quintessentially making both aspects of their personality known to the audience.

5. **Home** in Friel’s Writing: A Site of Power and Conflict or a Hell of a H(e)aven

The idea of home as a site of happiness, shelter or belonging functions as an underlying metaphor in all of Friel’s plays. However, the reality that the playwright’s main protagonists experience within their own homes does not correspond with their ideal notions. As a result of this marked discrepancy, Pine claims that Friel’s oeuvre displays a deep unease with “the idea of home” (as quoted by Kurdi 311). In fact, the characters’ actual home no longer serves as their personal paradise and has ceased to be associated with protection and homeliness. Hence, Friel’s obsessive preoccupation with the microcosm
within the community originates in “the whole question of what [actually] constitutes the home” under these circumstances (311).

The concept of home is questioned in Friel’s plays, for instance, when the main protagonist’s fond memory of home is unmasked as a myth in The Loves of Cass McGuire, when Mabel Bagenal’s associations with her old and new homes are characterised by a complex overlapping of self and other in Making History, and when the female protagonist in Molly Sweeney is forced to invent a mental realm in order to preserve some freedom and ease in an alternative home. Whereas these different adaptations of home as a site of h(e)aven will be closely examined in the second part of this chapter, the first part will focus on the identification of a number of elements and characteristics which all of the homes in Friel’s plays have in common.

Home in Friel’s work is a space which can invariably be equated with the realm inhabited by the family. This fact is consistent with Rybczynski’s findings in Home: A Short History of an Idea that, due to the separation of home and workplace, the two concepts home and family became closely entangled after the eighteenth century. As outlined in the discussion of the historical transformation of the public and the private realm, home gradually came to represent “a more private place” and “[t]ogether with this privatization of the home arose a growing sense of intimacy, of identifying the house exclusively with family life” (Rybczynski 39, original emphasis). People began to idealise home as “the seat of family life” and as a site of “domestic intimacy” where one experiences comfort and cosiness (48 and 49). In the course of history, home thus came to symbolise not only “the house, but also everything that was in it and around it, as well as the people, and the sense of satisfaction and contentment that all these conveyed,” whereas domesticity began to refer to “a set of felt emotions” which “has to do with family, intimacy, and a devotion to the home, as well as with a sense of the house as embodying – not only harboring – these sentiments” (62 and 75). Hence, the two terms home and family are often used interchangeably in Friel’s writing as home serves as a sign of his characters’ spatial rootedness and family as a sign of their relational or communal sense of belonging. Most importantly, however, the terms denote two complex and precarious concepts as the homes in Friel’s oeuvre are places where the main protagonists’ ideals of the concepts home and family as he(a)ven and as a site of fulfilment regularly clash with the reality within their private sphere.

Although the ideal notions that Friel’s main characters have of home regularly fail to be fulfilled, they resemble prototypical ideas identified by

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44 A more detailed summary by Arendt and Habermas of the transformation of the public and private sphere as a result of historical developments can be found in Chapter II (p. 12 – 19).
Blunt and Dowling in their theoretical approaches to *home*. In their most general definition, these critics describe *home* as “a place, a site in which we live” as well as “an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings” of “belonging, desire and intimacy” (2, original emphasis). More concisely, the concept, therefore, denotes “a place/site, a set of feelings-cultural meanings, and the relation between the two” (2–3). Similarly, Wilcocks, Peace and Kellaher attribute three different “dimensions” to *home*: “the physical, which relates to objects, spaces, and boundaries; the social, involving people and their relationships and interactions; and the metaphysical, which is the meaning and significance ascribed by individuals and communities to home” (3). Unlike Blunt and Dowling, who indicate that the concept of *home* does not always evoke positive feelings because the failure to realise one’s ideal concepts tends to arouse emotions such as “fear, violence and alienation” (2), Wilcocks, Peace and Kellaher base their study on the positive or idealistic connotations that people have with this space. Emphasising how important the power of the self over his or her own space is, the critics identify the inner core of one’s home and dwelling as “that physical space which an individual habitually uses – and within which people feel secure and in complete control” (3). This view recalls Jung’s reading of “an individual’s home as the ‘universal archetypal symbol of the self’” (as quoted by George 19). Linking the power over one’s own space to a person’s well-being in her essay “Brian Friel as Postcolonial Playwright,” Bertha also stresses the strong psychological dimension of *home*: “Identity, both personal and cultural, is closely related to the idea of home. There is an ontological need for people to feel at home in their own place, country, village…” (156).

In Friel’s writing, the characters’ expectations of and their longing for autonomy and comfort, however, appear to be incompatible with the (post-) colonial context in which the plays are set: as colonial or postcolonial subjects, the main protagonists are neither firmly rooted in their environment nor in themselves. Contrary to the characters’ desires, warmth and understanding are two qualities that are missing or at least not experienced within their homes. The atmosphere within their families and homes, therefore, greatly differs from the main protagonists’ ideals or from their memories of brief moments in the past in which their home indeed functioned as a site of security, shelter, mutual bonding and happiness.

Due to the prevailing atmosphere in the private realm, most of Friel’s characters feel alienated and uprooted in their homes, and the lack of communication within their private sphere symbolises the families’ dysfunctionality. Apart from mentioning the (post)colonial context which Friel’s characters find themselves in, critics have identified gender aspects as another reason why *home* fails to function as a sanctuary in Friel’s oeuvre. As (post-)
colonial subjects or as sons and daughters of a *pater familias* who prevents his children from developing independently and pursuing their interests, the vast majority of the main characters in Friel’s plays are deprived of the power to define or to shape home from the inside. The protagonists’ feeling dependent on or even under the control of the *pater familias* threatens their process of forming healthy self-concepts and diminishes their belief in their being able to realise their personal dreams.

Whereas the *pater familias* tends to rule the home according to absolutist principles in plays such as *Aristocrats* or *The Home Place*, many of the homes in Friel’s plays are defined by the lack of a strong female character within the family. In a considerable number of plays, the mothers are, in fact, dead (*Living Quarters*, *Aristocrats*, *The Gentle Island*, *Translations*, *The Home Place*, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* or spend part of their time in mental institutions (*Faith Healer*). Considering the striking absence of mother figures in Friel’s plays, Harris concludes that few of the remaining women characters portrayed in Friel’s plays “could be characterized as psychologically healthy; instead, a parade of passive, frustrated, aggressive, embittered, angry, depressed, slightly crazy women characters march across his stage” (69). Daughters, such as Judith in *Aristocrats* or Hanna in “Losers” (*Lovers*), display a tendency to “raise selflessness to an art” when trying to please their dominant, remorseless and uncommunicative parents (Harris 66). On the other hand, the sons in Friel’s plays, such as Gar O’Donnell in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* or Philly and Manus in *The Gentle Island*, are visibly dissatisfied with the situations in which they find themselves. Gar O’Donnell, for instance, interprets the striking lack of communication between his father and himself as a sign of indifference, whereas the audience witnesses that the true problem of Friel’s characters is the general inability of articulating their private world to those round them. Due to their communicative deficiency, the characters’ existential need to feel at home by being in control of or embedded in their homes is not satisfied.

Thus, Friel’s characters resemble those figures in (postcolonial) Anglo-Irish literature who, like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, profoundly lack the rootedness that Bertha claims is needed to feel at home and content with one’s existence. As the “Irish identity is no longer a ‘home place’” for Friel’s characters, their homes turn into sites of conflict while the characters’ inner self becomes a source of unease (Higgins 110). The prevailing atmosphere in the homes in Friel’s work is, therefore, one of

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45 The only play in which the protagonists are controlled by a female and not by a male character is “Losers” (*Lovers*). Like the various *patres familias* in Friel’s plays, Hanna’s mother is not presented as an ideal ruler of the household as she denies her daughter and her son-in-law the freedom to develop their own interests and to experience comfort and happiness in their home.
alienation, displacement and loneliness while the characters’ states of mind delineate anxiety, bitterness or resignation.

Whereas Heidegger’s condition of being ‘thrown’ into the world constitutes an existential state of being in Beckett’s work, Friel’s characters do not believe that their condition of ‘not-feeling-at-home’ in their own private realm is inevitable (Being and Time 174). Although the characters feel out of place and are frustrated with the reality they experience within their homes, they seem to be convinced that it is not their “Being-in-the-world” in general – defined by Heidegger as fundamentally a “Being-with and Dasein-with [Mitsein und Mitdasein]” – but the actual translation of their ideas and ideals into reality which fails to be realised in a satisfactory manner (149). Thus, they strictly adhere to their ideals of home and family. Similar to the argument presented by Franklin, who suggests that people have gradually withdrawn from public life to a “place of their own” hoping that it “[will] restore to them a sense of identity, attachment and belonging,” Friel’s characters invariably dream of home as a private space which provides them with shelter and which is defined by love, understanding and intimacy (as quoted by Morley 25).

Nevertheless, unable to share their feelings or experiences with each other or to express compassion or empathy, family members and close friends in Friel’s oeuvre, on a superficial level, appear to lack Sorge [care] and Fürsorge [solicitude], two necessary qualities mentioned by Heidegger to define the state of Being-with, which in itself is referred to as an “existential constituent of Being-in-the-world” (Being and Time 163). Hence, there is no mediation between self and other in Friel’s plays: the character’s existence is quintessentially one of loneliness rather than one of “Being-with Others” (155, original emphasis). As his characters are virtually incapable of articulating their love or emotions or expressing their concern for one another, their lives represent Heidegger’s “modes of solicitude” as states in which a character’s Being is defined as “without one another, passing one another by, not ‘mattering’ to one another” (158). Thus, although Friel’s protagonists desperately yearn for intimacy and strong family ties and they do care about each other, fathers and sons, in particular, fail to achieve a sense of unity and to establish an atmosphere of protection and security within their private realm. In those homes, where the characters’ Being-with-one-another excludes moments of “opening oneself up [Sichoffenbaren],” the characters are disconnected from one another in spite of inhabiting the same space (161).

Whereas George suggests that home is a realm “built on select inclusions,” a “sense of kinship that is extended to those who are perceived as sharing the same blood, race, class, gender or religion” (9), Friel’s protagonists are frustrated with their inability to build a bridge from their “own subject,
which is given proximally as alone, to the other subject, which is proximally quite closed off” (Heidegger, Being and Time 162).

As the characters do not succeed in fusing their everyday reality with their ideals of home and memories of a happier past, most of Friel’s protagonists do not identify with the private realms they inhabit. Instead, manifestations of power within the home or the community often lead to inferiority complexes or the characters’ fear of appearing unworthy or frail in other people’s eyes. In Aristocrats, for example, Eamon describes the characteristic, daunting effect that his father-in-law’s home has on him. In order to repress or conceal his own sense of intimidation in this “house of reticence, of things unspoken,” Eamon admits that he always chats too much and that, talking for the sake of soothing himself, his utterances mostly remain trivial (279). On the other hand, the issues that are of most concern to Friel’s characters are hardly ever addressed. This fact is even more noteworthy when one takes into consideration that the audience frequently learns that, privately, the protagonists’ thoughts centre round nothing but articulating their personal sensations, feelings and experiences. Moreover, the protagonists’ imaginary conversations with themselves or the audience repeatedly underline how much the characters long for intimate exchange.

Despite these longings for communication, within the private space of their homes there seems to be a tacit agreement which demands that the most intimate or personal aspects of one’s life are not spoken about publicly and are thus kept secret from the other characters. After all, disclosing one’s inner self might be embarrassing or it might upset or greatly distress other characters. It has been indicated above, for instance, that the main protagonist in Crystal and Fox is one of those characters in Friel’s writing who is unable to cope with real emotions. Having dismissed the other members of the theatre company, Fox is finally able to spend time with his wife alone. As soon as Fox has realised his dream of home, he destroys this happiness because the situation is, emotionally, too overwhelming for him to endure.

Not surprisingly then, silence and reticence are two typical elements in Friel’s plays which complicate family matters for the protagonists and threaten their sense of self; hence, home cannot enhance people’s possibilities and strengthen their identity. Since the characters’ concept of home does not correspond to their reality, their private space is perceived as unstable and loveless; instead of feeling at home in their private realm, the characters lack a secure sense of relational and spatial belonging. Thus, the characters’ spatial and emotional homes are no longer equivalent for them.

Commenting on his own roots and background, Friel is said to have described himself as “a member of the Northern minority” and his life as
defined by “a sense of rootlessness and impermanence” (as quoted by Andrews, *Art* 4). Referring to the playwright’s own perspective, Andrews indicates that Friel’s situation is one in which “[b]eing at home” means “at one and the same time being in exile” (4). In my opinion, the overlapping of exile and home established by Andrews is a state which is frequently encountered by Friel’s characters as well. In fact, Pine indicates that Friel’s oeuvre explores “the meaning of home as a place constantly defined by the presence of exile, in a way that makes of reverie and reminiscence merely a potently and frighteningly unsatisfactory bridge between privacies and between the public and private worlds” (*Ireland’s Drama* 229). In his essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger equates the act of “building” with “dwelling” (148). Arguing that “[b]uilding as dwelling unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things and the building that erects buildings,” Heidegger concludes that the true “nature of dwelling” is found in the meaning of the Gothic word *wunian*, which means “to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace” (148–149). Lacking inner peace and fulfilment and to some extent the power or control to shape their lives as well as public and privates spaces, Friel’s characters are utterly unable to pursue their dreams or to “dwell” in order to conceptualise their ideal *homes* (145). Hence, the cosy aspect of *home* is often mingled with a sense of being displaced or banished from paradise.

In his plays, Friel often focuses on families or communities on the verge of disintegrating (*The Gentle Island, Translations, Dancing at Lughnasa, The Home Place, Philadelphia, Here I Come!* or he illustrates a character’s failed homecoming (*The Loves of Cass McGuire, Living Quarters, Aristocrats, Faith Healer, Translations, Dancing at Lughnasa*) as these contexts allow him to explore different concepts and metaphors of *home*. As his characters who return home normally end up disillusioned by the situations they find themselves in, Pine remarks that “[h]omecomings and intrusion, more than departures and exile, highlight the sense of fragility, the inherent instability, of homes and families” (*Ireland’s Drama* 85).

In *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, the eponymous protagonist, a typical representative of Friel’s characters who experience a homecoming, has to accept that her nostalgic memory of home as a site of happiness differs considerably from the reality she encounters after her return from America. Having remained abroad for several decades and convinced that her financial support was of utmost importance to her Irish relatives, she sent ten dollars to her brother’s family “every month without fail” for “fifty-two years” (*Cass* 40). Regarding her contribution and selfless assistance as a means of maintaining a strong tie with the family despite the geographical distance, the female protagonist never considered the restrictions this sacrifice actually meant for her. However, after her return to Ballybeg, Cass realises her mistake: she
has to acknowledge that she has preserved a romanticised version of *home* in her mind and has turned this cherished memory into a myth. Her concept of *home*, in fact, stands in such stark contrast to the truth and reality she experiences in the McGuire household in Ballybeg that O’Brien argues that “[t]he home to which Cass returns is as emotionally sterile as that which Gar O’Donnell is about to leave” in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (Friel 55).

In spite of her brother’s initial assertion that “it really is wonderful, Cass, to have you back” and that “[w]e’ll make up for all the lost years,” Cass has to undergo a process of demythologising her concept of *home* in the course of the play (36 and 37). As a well-respected and rich man, her brother has never been in need of her financial support and has put whatever money he received from Cass into a separate bank account. Ashamed of her language and behaviour, which they describe as vulgar and embarrassing, Harry and his wife soon begin to distance themselves from Cass as they consider her unsuitable company for their family. For Cass, the realisation that the McGuires do not owe her gratitude for sending money home on a regular basis and do not consider her a vital member of their family is particularly painful.

Cass’ statements illustrate that sending money home was her mode of staying in touch with her relatives and that her homecoming was a deliberate return to what she regards as her *home* and *family*. However, Harry and his wife “revoke her right to feel a part of this family” when they return her “legacy” (Higgins 15). Informing his sister that they have “arranged for [her] to go into Eden House,” a home for the elderly, Harry also indicates that the money she sent home in the past will be used to finance her stay (*Cass* 25). Whereas Harry tells his sister that one of the advantages of moving into Eden House is that “[it] makes [her] independent of everyone,” Alice adds that “[they had] been planning this as a surprise” (41). However, the main protagonist did not seek the independence offered by Alice and her brother. Underlining how central *home* is for most human beings, Willcocks, Peace and Kellaher emphasise that “for most older people home has a psychological and metaphysical significance over and above being a shelter in which to conduct everyday living” (5). For Cass, Eden House thus comes as a negative surprise, if not as a true shock or even a severe punishment.

When Cass first arrives at her brother’s house, her concept of *home* closely resembles Papastergiadis’ definition of an *ideal home* in that it “is not just a house which offers shelter, or a repository that contains material objects” but it stands for “a place where personal and social meaning are grounded” (as quoted by Blunt and Dowling 22). *Home* thus contains a strong emotional component for Cass. Shortly before Harry announces that he has organised her transfer to Eden House, Cass herself refers to the strong bonding with her brother’s family when she talks admiringly about them to the audience.
Comparing herself to Harry’s children, she admits that, based on common standards, the young people have done exceedingly well:

Harry’s four kids, boy, they got on good: Betty, she’s a doc in London, and Tom’s a priest, and Aidan’s an architect, and Dom – [...] Fine kids – I haven’t met them yet – but you’ll see, they’ll be along one of these days to meet their Auntie Cass. (Cass 24)

This comment also signals that Cass still hopes to become an integral part of the family at this stage. Indeed, she dreams of participating in these young people’s lives and engaging in a relationship in which her Being-in-the-world is one of “Being-with Others” (Heidegger, Time and Being 155, original emphasis).

Realising that she is not really welcome at her brother’s home, Cass is temporarily deprived of all illusions about home. “[C]ast off” from her family just like most other members of the rest home, the female protagonist yearns for her lost home and family until she slowly begins to identify with the other residents of Eden House (Boltwood 53). When the residents happily accept her Christmas presents, Cass suddenly understands that Eden House corresponds to her concept of home much more closely than her brother’s house does. Cass, therefore, makes friends with people who appreciate her personality, value her as part of their group and, like herself, “[exist] only within the fictional world of the rest home” (McMullan 148). Thus, as signified by the reference to ‘Eden,’ Cass unexpectedly finds her own paradise in the home for the elderly, a place defined by the residents’ fantasy world and their interpretation of home as a space where “elaborate alternative realities” are realised and where the space they inhabit is as much an invention of their imagination as a physical entity (Corbett 109). Having found a home outside the realm inhabited by her relatives, Cass soon feels needed at Eden House. Hence, as the rest home begins to represent the space she has always longed for, she gradually distances herself from her brother’s family.

Harry’s development, on the other hand, is diametrically opposed to Cass’. His concept of home and family is shattered on Christmas Eve, shortly after Cass has left his house. No longer able to repress the truth that the family will have “a quiet Christmas after all” because none of the older three children is coming home to celebrate with the family, Harry, Alice and their youngest son, Dom, return to Eden House (Cass 56). Inviting his sister to spend the evening with the family as a substitute for the couple’s absent children and overwhelmed by his own emotional turmoil, Harry discloses his and Alice’s private sorrows to Cass. He admits that the couple “haven’t heard from Aidan for seven years, not since he went to Switzerland [...]. And then Betty’s marriage isn’t just as happy as … as … Even Tom at times … the seculars didn’t suit him.
and we gather that he’s restless again even though…” (56). I share Higgins’ reading that Cass’ “warmth and capacity for nurture” are two of the qualities that are missing in the McGuire household and that the family “only ask for [them this Christmas Eve] when it is too late” (18). In order to fill the private realm of the McGuires with a homely atmosphere and to reduce the sterility and bleakness which O’Brien identified in the homes in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Cass’ personality and the qualities she has to offer would, indeed, be beneficial.

However, pretending not to be aware of her brother’s visit and pretending to live in a world where his words can no longer hurt her, Cass does not acknowledge his presence in the room. Cass’ last words after Harry has left the rest home illustrate that, for her, *home* has ceased to be linked with the concept of *family*: “(To herself.) Poor, poor Harry… (She sighs at Harry’s bad luck. Then brightens, looks round the common-room with calm satisfaction). Home at last. Gee, but it’s a good thing to be home” (Cass 70). Thus, Cass’ process of having created her own space of comfort and homeliness serves as an example of Blunt and Dowling’s claim that

> [h]ome does not simply exist, but is made. Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging. This process has both material and imaginative elements. Thus people create home through social and emotional relationships. (23)

Having realised that her brother’s family are not willing or able to provide her with the *home* and *family* she has been longing for, Cass, at Eden House, succeeds in redefining her concepts of the two terms in order to fulfil her own needs and desires. Moreover, she makes friends with other residents who have started to achieve their concept of *home* and *family*, beyond the realm inhabited by their own relatives.

Although a number of Friel’s characters find a small degree of ease and comfort in a (mental) space that does not correlate with their actual home site, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is the only play in which the intimacy that is missing within the family is substituted for by that of other characters and in which the act of ‘dwelling’ corresponds to the quality of Heidegger’s *wunian*, where one is said “to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace” (“Building Dwelling Thinking” 149). Cass’ phrase “Home at last. Gee, but it’s a good thing to be home” underlines that, although the actual space and characters vastly differ from her expectations, she has found those elements of *home* and *family* which she sought when she returned to Ballybeg at the beginning of the play and which offer her some peace, security and provide her with a sense of belonging (Cass 70).
Like Cass McGuire, Frank Hardy in *Faith Healer* is another character whose homecoming is not met with immediate success and whose concept of home, therefore, needs some adjustment. As in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, Frank’s expectations of Ireland as home and as a site of his restoration do not correspond to the actual feelings he encounters when he first arrives “in a pub, a lounge bar, really” outside the village of Ballybeg (*Faith* 338). Associating home with a sense of familiarity, shelter, security, coherence and unity, the main protagonist describes the emotions which Ballybeg first aroused in him as “wan and neutral” and claims that “[t]here was no sense of home-coming. I tried to simulate it but nothing stirred” (338). Frank’s life-long hopes and desires for peace with himself are only fulfilled when he deliberately sacrifices himself to a group of wedding guests on the night of his homecoming. After he has successfully straightened a man’s bent finger, this group of “savage bloody men” challenges him to perform his art on a young friend of theirs in a wheelchair (374). Towards the end of his first monologue, Frank tells the audience that he immediately sensed that his healing of this handicapped man, McGavern, would be a failure as he “knew with cold certainty that nothing was going to happen” at all (340). Nevertheless, he asserts that he willingly accepted his fate “pretending to subscribe to the charade. […] [T]he restoration of Francis Hardy” (341). His wife’s description of the same incident, on the other hand, suggests that, due to his personality, Frank was not just resigned to his fate but actively sought the challenge: “I knew at once – I knew it instinctively – that before the night was out he was going to measure himself against the crippled in the wheelchair” (352). I agree with Grace’s interpretation of this event, as I believe her view reveals an aspect of Frank’s true character. Desperately trying to evoke some emotions within himself and “possessed” by the art that he admits he has no control over, Frank regularly embraces the chance of becoming “whole in [himself], and perfect in [himself],” regardless of whether it is in life or in death (333). Satisfying his needs to stop the “atrophying terror” and “the maddening questions” which he himself claims govern and undermine his life (376), Frank, following what Andrews defines as “the self-destructive impulses of the artist,” courageously faces the consequences of his gift and welcomes death (160). Describing the last moments leading to his death, Frank stresses that although I knew that nothing was going to happen, nothing at all, I walked across the yard towards them. And as I walked I became possessed of a strange and trembling intimation: […] that in all existence there was only myself and the wedding guests. And that intimation in turn gave way to a stronger sense: that even we had ceased to be physical and existed only in spirit, only in the need we had for each other. […] And as I moved across that yard towards them for the first time and offered myself to them, then for the first time I had a simple and genuine sense of home-coming. Then for the first
Hence, as Frank experiences death as “a simple and genuine sense of homecoming,” *home*, in *Faith Healer*, eventually represents the main protagonist’s sense of redemption and inner peace. The reconciliatory tone in the above-cited quotation shows that, for the first time in his life, Frank knows where he belongs. His “dislocation, his restless insistence on ‘no fixed abode’” as well as his “self-loathing” have come to an end (Higgins 54 and 56). Whereas O’Brien suggests that “Frank is nothing without his questions. He is an instrument of faith, empowered and stigmatized by his gift,” I believe that Frank’s death successfully answers the desire for coherence and a sense of groundedness which he has strived for throughout his life (*Friel* 98). Death, as Andrews notes, allows him to escape from his own life, which has turned into a mixture of fiction and reality: “Frank Hardy is the fiction-maker who has sacrificed life to fiction and finds that he is the creature and the creator of his own fiction” (*Art* 160). By sacrificing himself to the wedding guests in Ballybeg, Frank frees himself from having to comply with his partly fictional *Dasein* as “fantastic” conman and faith healer (*Faith* 332). At long last, *home* and *self* conflate in Frank’s life and his restlessness is replaced by a “definitiveness and completeness” which he has so far only experienced temporarily after a patient’s successful healing (O’Brien, *Friel* 99). The main protagonist’s final claim that he “was renouncing chance” displays that his longing for recognition, security and unity has finally been fulfilled and that his life-long search has ended (*Faith* 376). In her essay “Brian Friel,” Niel argues that this night in Ballybeg, “Frank faces his skills and his failure as an artist and as a human being […]”. After he has travelled around restlessly, he ceases to fight any inner battles, ceases any attempt to achieve something, and, by doing so, discovers some inner peace” (47, my translation).  

I would suggest that Frank’s death emphasises how strongly *home* and a character’s psyche are linked and how a character’s successful homecoming affects his concept and understanding of the *self*.

A fascinating variation on the relationship between *home* and *self* is found in *Making History*. In this play, the concepts *home*, *family* and *domesticity* are most closely related to Mabel Bagenal. As Hugh O’Neill’s fourth wife, the female protagonist “crosses cultural, political, and religiously sectarian lines” (O’Brien, *Friel* 118). As her father’s home is compared to Hugh’s home after she eloped with the Irish leader, Mabel is faced with two different sites and sets
of feelings which are mutually exclusive. Having grown up as a Protestant Upstart in the New English community in Newry, Mabel is not only the daughter of the retired Queen’s Marshal but also the sister of the present one. As the locals, unlike the English settlers, mainly breed cows and horses, Mabel was reared to believe that all Irish tribes are “wild and barbarous” (History 265). Thus, when Mabel elopes with Hugh O'Neill shortly after her twentieth birthday and joins the Irish community, she is compelled to settle “in an alien environment, removed from her own kind and unable to return to them” (Jones 139). Redefining her concept of home and reconsidering her preconceptions about her husband’s culture and community, Mabel needs to decode and then to recode this foreign and formerly uncanny space that now serves as her new home. Thus, in the course of the play, Mabel consciously redefines the space of the former other as the space of her new home and self. The play skilfully demonstrates how Mabel repeatedly struggles with her ambivalent feelings, which still oscillate between regarding her new environment as exile that is connoted with hell and the other or as home, paradise and self.

Mabel’s colonial prejudice towards the Irish and her concept of what constitutes home are not the only reasons that she occasionally feels alienated within the community. As a result of her act of hybridisation, of crossing the “tribal and cultural boundaries” by marrying outside her own tribe and community, Mabel is exposed to “problems that beset those who attempt to embrace ‘the other’” in too casual a manner (Jones 118). For instance, at the beginning of the play, which is set in Hugh O’Neill’s undecorated and comfortless living room in his home in Dungannon, Hugh’s confidants are rather reluctant to accept Mabel, “that Upstart bitch,” in her husband’s home and welcome her into their community (History 266). Having been asked by Hugh to show Mabel “civility” if a warm welcome is “beyond [them],” the Earl of Tyrconnell and the Archbishop Peter Lombard hesitate before they shake hands with Mabel, while both of them actually refuse to speak to her (265). Slightly disconcerted by the treatment she has received and eager to ease the tension in the room, Mabel tells Hugh’s private secretary, Harry, that she could not sleep when she tried to rest because she was too excited and because

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47 Mabel’s marriage with Hugh O’Neill recalls Jimmy Jack’s statement in the last scene in Translations where he wonders whether the goddess Pallas Athene might consent to marrying him. Contemplating marriage within the tribe (endogamein) and outside the tribe (exogamein), he stresses that the act of crossing “those borders” must not be done “casually” because “both sides get very angry” (68). Indirectly, Jimmy’s utterance explains the deep distrust and the strong feelings of antagonism which Maire and Yolland’s affair was greeted with by the local population in Ballybeg. Like Mabel, Maire is regarded as having betrayed her own people by bonding with the enemy.
the “noise” of the “millions” of cows outside her window kept her awake (268). Overwhelmed by the unknown and the other, Mabel underlines how exhilarating, and, at the same time, puzzling her new home and the pastoral farming of the Irish community is for her: “I’m all right. Just a little bit confused, Hugh. Just a little bit nervous. Everything’s so different here. I knew it would be strange – I knew that. But I didn’t think it would be so … foreign. I’m only fifty miles from home but I feel very far away from everything I know” (271, my emphasis). Obviously, Mabel still feels alienated in Hugh’s house at this stage, as the concept of home she grew up with does not coincide with her new experiences. When Hugh presents her with a watch which he had crafted especially for her in London and when he mentions that, to his knowledge, Queen Elizabeth is the only other person who owns a watch, Mabel is so touched that, in an attempt to adapt to the local customs, she promises never to “cry like that again” and concludes that, after all, “[w]e’re a tough breed, the O’Neills” (272). Ironically, Mabel begins to regard the local tribe as her new family and to feel at home in her new environment at a moment when Hugh presents her, the representative of the New English in Ireland, with a gift which she shares only with the Queen and which acknowledges her British background, which differs considerably from that of the local inhabitants.

Regardless of the fact that Mabel tries to identify with the Irish community on a superficial level, her insecurity with the local customs and her sense of displacement are emphasised several times in the play. For example, when her sister, Mary, comes to visit her, the stage directions indicate that Mabel is annoyed by “boisterous laughter, shouting, horseplay and a rapid exchange in Irish between a young girl and a young man” outside her living room (272). Yelling at the two young people and telling them to “shut up,” she proposes that if they “want to behave like savages,” they should “go back to the bogs” instead of loitering outside her home (272–273). Although she downplays the scene as an instance of “horseplay” when she realises that her sister “has overheard her outburst,” the scene illustrates that, unconsciously, her attitudes still reflect the views held by her family (273). In a conversation between the two sisters, Mary mentions that her family now owns over a hundred hives, that they have their own orchard and vegetable garden and that their father has built a fishpond. Asking Mabel about the local inhabitants, Mary quite distinctly does not consider her sister as part of the Irish community. Mabel, on the other hand, determined “to face up to the cross-cultural, politically fraught transition she has committed to undertake” (Roche, Theatre 167), chooses to answer her sister’s questions by identifying with the locals:
MARY. *They* have no bees here, have they?
MABEL. No, we haven’t.

[...]

MARY. *They* have no orchards here, have they?
MABEL. No, we haven’t.

MARY. Mostly vegetable growing, is it?
MABEL. We go in for pastoral farming – not husbandry; cattle, sheep, horses. We have two hundred thousand head of cattle here at the moment – as you have heard. Did you say anything about a herb garden?

MARY. Oh, that’s a great success. [...] I’ve brought you some seeds. (*She produces envelopes from her bag.*) I’ve labelled them for you. (*She reads.*) Fennel. Lovage. Tarragon. Dill. Coriander. Borage. [...] Don’t plant the fennel near the dill or the two will cross-fertilize.

MABEL. Is that bad?
MARY. You’ll end up with a seed that’s neither one thing or the other. (*History 274–275, my emphasis*)

Mary’s use of the agricultural metaphor on the effect of ‘cross-fertilisation’ indirectly alludes to Mabel’s decision to cross the tribal boundaries and underlines that the family will never understand Mabel’s decision to marry Hugh. Moreover, it illustrates that, for the other characters in *Making History*, home is defined more easily than for Mabel. Albeit living only fifty miles from Mabel and her husband, home and enmity, friends and foes are clearly defined in Mary’s world. For Mabel’s sister, Hugh is related to the concept of *hell*; she even denounces him as a “traitor [...] to the Queen, to her Deputy, to everything you and I were brought up to believe in. Do you know what our people call him? The Northern Lucifer – the Great Devil – Beelzebub! Hugh O’Neill is evil incarnate, Mabel!” (279–280) From Mary’s point of view, her sister left Eden when she decided to marry this devilish Irish figure. Although Mary admits to feeling lonely in her big house after Mabel’s departure, she does not want to diminish the distance between the sisters by familiarising herself with the Irish lifestyle. She remains convinced that, outside the planters’ carefully ploughed and fenced site, Ireland is a place which is equivalent to hell and which is unbearable for a civilised English woman. The two sisters are, therefore, separated by an alien civilisation, different lifestyles and diametrically opposed outlooks on the world.

In contrast to his sister-in-law, Hugh O’Neill, who ends up living as an exile in Rome, cherishes his memories of Ireland as a place of happiness and perfection. This can be seen when the Archbishop Lombard, who knows how much Hugh yearns for his homeland, offers him a glass of poitin one day explaining that the spirit

[a]rrived this very day. From home. [...] Poitin. Waterford poitin. I was never much help to their spiritual welfare but they certainly don’t neglect the state of my spirit!
Referring to the poitin as ambrosia, the Archbishop indirectly equates Ireland with the Olympos. Lombard and Hugh O’Neill are thus placed in the position of gods who nurture themselves on divine food and potations found exclusively at their home site.

The different connotations with Ireland portrayed in Making History indicate that the complex meanings of home in this play are directly related to the point of view and the cultural background of the characters. Whereas Mary’s and Hugh’s perspectives represent the two antipodes of regarding Hugh’s home as heaven or hell, Mabel’s feelings oscillate between the two extremes. Her inner struggle and unease with the absolute concepts symbolise that the concepts of self and other overlap with those of home and exile in her case and are not so easily defined.

Similar to Faith Healer, where Frank Hardy’s striving for unity and coherence is achieved by his death, in Philadelphia, Here I Come! the realisation of home as a place of fulfilment and happiness is presented as an unattainable dream and an unverifiable memory of the past held by Gar O'Donnell. Whereas Jones describes Gar’s existence in Ballybeg as “stultifying” because the O’Donnell household is “a cheerless place” (18 and 20), O’Brien highlights that “[t]o Gar, Ballybeg has meant lovelessness, boredom, and the fecklessness of imperfectly realized ambitions,” and he concludes that the young man’s life resembles “an emotional and cultural wasteland” (Friel 48). Feeling uneasy and lonely in his father’s house, Public Gar, therefore, retreats into his inner self, where he converses with his alter ego, Private Gar. However, the miscommunication or silence between Public Gar and the characters around him prevents him from realising his ideal home; his behaviour and actions bespeak his sense of isolation, frustration and exclusion. In fact, the state of feeling both homeless and ill at ease within the private sphere represents the nightmarish reality that the main protagonist experiences in his father’s home.

Before Mabel eloped with Hugh in Making History, she and her sister Mary think of Ireland beyond her father’s home as hell. Gar, on the other hand, strongly associates home in his father’s house with hell; his mention of devils and his frequent use of the expression ‘to hell with’ serve as metaphors for his frustration with the private space.49 In fact, several scenes in Philadelphia, Here I

48 “Poitin” is the Gaelic word for “homemade (illicit) spirits, once distilled from potatoes in a little pot (hence the name)” (“Poitin” 202).
49 Gar refers to ‘hell’ sixteen times during the play, normally using it as a swearword and suggesting that women and children, his father, his friends, his alter ego Private Gar, Ballybeg and all strong silent men should go to hell. The only other characters to utter the word are
Come! allude to passages in John Milton’s Paradise Lost. For instance, in the epic poem, Satan observes Adam and Eve in an embrace. Although he physically shares the same space with them, he feels excluded from their intimacy and, therefore, considers himself banished from paradise emotionally (Milton 119, l.505–511). In Philadelphia, Here I Come! Gar actually plans to leave his father’s home in Ballybeg because, like Satan, he considers himself an outcast in the private sphere that he inhabits with his father. Feeling isolated in his home, Gar is dissatisfied with the private realm. As there is no understanding, warmth, nurture or comfort in the O’Donnell household, Gar’s personal concept of home as a h(e)aven of happiness and love has turned into one which is associated with hell. Whereas Satan is convinced that it is “better to reign in hell than serve in heaven” and, therefore, deliberately chooses power, control and freedom in hell over heteronomy and the position of the outsider in heaven, Gar believes that he is not equipped with Satan’s intellectual strength and power to redefine and transform his private sphere according to his personal desires (25, l.263). In fact, he lacks both Satan’s reassurance and self-confidence. In the first Act in Paradise Lost, Satan claims that his mind is uncontrollable and his evil power equivalent to God’s intellectual capacity: “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven” (24, l.254–255). In comparison, Gar is unable to mentally escape the misery that he feels exposed to in his father’s home and thus he cannot realise his home as a site of comfort and happiness.

Escaping from his hometown and abandoning what constitutes home in Ballybeg appears to be the only option for Gar to evade the solitariness and silence from which he suffers. When his aunt and uncle happen to visit Ballybeg on Kate’s wedding day, the relatives invite Gar to move to Philadelphia to live with them. Having hoped to be Kate’s groom, Gar feels even more alienated and displaced in Ballybeg on this particular day. As Gar is highly vulnerable under the circumstances, his aunt’s offer is tempting. As his girlfriend is marrying someone else and as he believes that he and his father will not overcome their mutual estrangement, Gar decides to leave for America, which implies that the lovelessness he experiences in Ballybeg is worse than any possible loneliness he might encounter in Philadelphia, away from his own home.

Hoping that a change of location will allow him to escape the feelings which his father’s home arouse in him, Gar, at this stage of the play, appears to successfully repress the truth that his need for love and empathy will not be
answered by moving to Philadelphia. Unless he learns to be more communicative and to disclose his inner self to those round him in order to find peace and satisfaction within himself, any future home will also feel like hell. In contrast to Gar, Satan embraces hell knowing that there is, quintessentially, no escape as he embodies the very concept. Referring to hell as a state of mind rather than a location, Satan exclaims: “Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell” (107, l.75). Tragically, the same is true for Gar: as long as Gar keeps his private feelings hidden, home is likely to be a torment no matter where he lives. Gar’s departure will, therefore, only recast his sense of homelessness into a sense of displacement or homesickness.

When Gar’s former girlfriend Kate comes to say goodbye to him the night before his departure, his phrase “[t]o hell with Ballybeg, that’s what I say” causes her to leave the house quickly (Philadelphia 81). From a psychological point of view, the phrase proves how emotionally connected to his hometown Gar still is. In fact, trying to deny his pain and his fears of leaving behind the private and familiar space to which he has become accustomed and to which he is attached, Gar pretends to be striving for “[i]mpermanence” and “anonymity” in his future life (81). Privately, however, he admits to doubting his decision to leave Ballybeg, and he makes an effort to memorise every impression of the night before his flight to America:

PRIVATE. Watch her [i.e. Madge] carefully, every movement, every gesture, every little peculiarity: keep the camera whirring; for this film you’ll run over and over again – Madge Going to Bed On My Last Night At Home … Madge … [Public and Private go into bedroom.] God, Boy, why do you have to leave? Why? Why?

PUBLIC. I don’t know. I – I – I don’t know. (110)

This scene illustrates that Gar does not really want to leave his home, which – if only it were connoted differently – bears the potential of being his secret paradise. Private Gar’s expression “[t]o hell with all strong silent men” articulates the central point of Friel’s writing and the true nature of his problem in the missing bond between his father and himself (Philadelphia 98). If Friel’s characters were able either to accept a human being’s quintessentially existential isolation as a conditio humana or to communicate and share some of their private feelings and thoughts with their families and friends and also endure the intimacy and privateness thus established, their quest for meaning and their yearning for a purposeful life in Ballybeg would be partly answered.

As if driven by an inner need to satisfy his yearning for happiness and for home, Gar, on the night before his departure, tries to undo the estrangement which defines his relationship with his father. However, the members of the O’Donnell household are all equally unable to perceive or understand the
other characters’ longing for love and intimacy. Evoking a childhood memory of fishing on Lough na Cloc Cor with his father on “an afternoon in May,” some “fifteen years ago” Private Gar, in an imaginary conversation with his father, recalls how

between us at that moment there was this great happiness, this great joy – you [i.e. Gar’s father] must have felt it too – it was so much richer than a content – it was a great, great happiness, and active, bubbling joy – although nothing was being said – just the two of us fishing on a lake on a showery day – and young as I was I felt, I knew, that this was precious, and your hat was soft on the top of my ears – I can feel it – and I shrank down into your coat – and then, then for no reason at all except that you were happy too, you began to sing [...]. (89–90)

Wondering whether his father – “behind those dead eyes and the flat face” – shares his own “memories of precious moments in the past” (Philadelphia 89), Public Gar translates Private Gar’s recollection of this afternoon to his father, hoping for his father’s “validation” and confirmation of his feelings and emotions at this particular moment of their shared past (Higgins 13):

PUBLIC. [with pretended carelessness] D’you know what kept coming into my mind the day? [...] The fishing we used to do on Lough na Cloc Cor.
S.B. [confused, on guard] Oh, aye, Lough na Cloc Cor – aye – aye – [...] That’s not the day nor yesterday.
PUBLIC. [more quickly] There used to be a blue boat on it – d’you remember it?
S.B. A blue one, eh?
PUBLIC. I don’t know who owned it. But it was blue. And the paint was peeling.
S.B. [remembering] I mind a brown one the doctor brought from somewhere up in the –
PUBLIC. [quickly] It doesn’t matter who owned it. It doesn’t even matter that it was blue. But d’you remember one afternoon in May – we were up there – the two of us – and it must have rained because you put your jacket round my shoulders and gave me your hat –
S.B. Aye?
PUBLIC. – and it wasn’t that we were talking or anything – but suddenly – suddenly you sang ‘All Round My Hat I’ll Wear a Green Coloured Ribbono’ –
S.B. Me?
PUBLIC. – for no reason at all except that we – that you were happy. D’you remember? D’you remember?
S.B. No … no, then, I don’t …
PRIVATE. [quickly claps his hands in nervous mockery]
PUBLIC. [quickly] There! There! There!
S.B. ‘All Round My Hat’? No, I don’t think I ever knew that one. It wasn’t ‘The Flower of Sweet Strabane’, was it? That was my song.
PUBLIC. It could have been. It doesn’t matter.
PRIVATE. So now you know: it never happened. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha. (Philadelphia 104–105)

The stage directions in this scene offer great insight into the actual exchange between the father and his son. As soon as Public Gar mentions their excursion to Lough na Cloc Cor “with pretended carelessness,” the father is described as being “confused” and “on guard,” indicating that sharing personal memories and emotions is rather unusual in the O’Donnell household and this causes a certain degree of distress to both men (104). Although Public Gar “quickly” emphasises that neither the owner nor the colour of the boat matters and that it could also have been a different song that his father intoned at that time (104), he fails to create a sense of home which connotes ease, shelter and comfort by forming a sustainable “social and emotional” relationship between his father and himself, which Blunt and Dowling have identified as a fundamental element in the “process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging” (23).

Thus, Gar’s hopes of redefining his current home by arousing a sense of unity and by reducing the feeling of dysfunctionality in his relationship with his father are tragically shattered. In his study Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity, Morley quotes Douglas, who claims that “home starts by bringing space under control” (16). Morley further indicates that, according to Descombes, a “(person or) character is at home when he is at ease in the rhetoric of the people with whom he shares life. The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others, without any need for long explanations” (17). Heller concludes that, under such circumstances, “[n]o footnotes are needed” because “from few words, much can be understood” (as quoted by Morley 17).

However, all of the above-mentioned characteristics are missing in the O’Donnell household. Neither Gar nor his father “hear the similarity of their two memories” and they are unable “to read the other signals of love transmitted throughout the play” (Higgins 14). In fact, as FitzGibbon highlights, the result of the exchange between the father and his son is “bathos” (77). After all, like most protagonists in Friel’s plays, Gar and his father despair of their inability to connect their memories with those of another character.

In Friel’s plays, this deficiency is not restricted to the male protagonists. As soon as Gar leaves the kitchen disappointed with his father’s responses to his memory of their fishing trip, the father asks Madge whether she remembers “the trouble [they] had keeping him [i.e. Gar] at school just after he turned ten” because “nothing would do him but he’d get behind the counter” of his father’s shop (Philadelphia 107). Recalling how, one particular morning,
Madge’s coaxing was so fruitless that he had to accompany Gar, who “had this wee sailor suit on him,” to school, the father stresses the exuberant atmosphere between himself and his son: “I had to go with him myself, the two of us, hand in hand, as happy as larks – we were that happy, Madge – and him dancing and chatting beside me – mind? – you couldn’t get a word in edge-ways with all the chatting he used to go through…” (107). Once more, the two characters’ perceptions do not correspond; instead of understanding and empathy, there is a strong emphasis on superficial details. Claiming that Gar “never had a sailor suit,” Madge falls into the same trap as the two male protagonists who, despite Gar’s insistence that the colour and the ownership of the boat are of no significance, did not succeed in connecting their memories on an emotional level (107). Like Gar’s father, Madge cannot react to the father’s memory of “an imaginary shared sense of ease” which has since been lost and which both father and son desperately yearn for but “cannot replicate in the reality of their existence” (Corbett 40). Hence, the lack of cohesiveness and mutual recognition of each other’s memories dashes Gar’s, his father’s and Madge’s secret hopes of love, happiness and the establishment of homeliness within their private realm.

Whereas Beckett’s main characters, such as Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot or Hamm and Clov in Endgame, often find themselves – to use Heidegger’s terminology – ‘thrown’ into a world in which they are deprived of their rootedness and homeliness and where it is a character’s responsibility to search for security and happiness, I want to suggest that there is a fundamental difference between Beckett’s plays and Friel’s plays (Time and Being 174). In contrast to Clov, who claims to have existed devoid of any positive memory in his life, Gar O’Donnell and his father resemble Nell and Nagg, the two characters in Endgame who can, in fact, recall moments in their past when they felt happy and ‘whole.’ However, in both plays, the memories of these characters do not coincide, which intensifies the characters’ sense of displacement and uprootedness. In their study on domicile, which they define as “the deliberate destruction of home by human agency,” Porteous and Smith stress “the importance of the home as a meaningful place” and distinguish between “an outward-looking focus on ‘home as a centre’” which functions as “a place of refuge, freedom, possession, shelter and security” and “an inward-looking focus on ‘home as identity,’ bound up with ‘family, friends and community, attachment, rootedness, memory, and nostalgia’” (as quoted by Blunt and Dowling 175–176). However, in Friel’s writing, the struggle for a site equipped with these qualities, which would ease the characters’ agony and provide them with a feeling of comfort and homeliness, is invariably in vain and, therefore, leaves Friel’s protagonists feeling as isolated and uprooted as Clov.
Although Friel’s characters no longer experience their private realm as a site which represents them and which contributes to their feeling free, sheltered or secure, Gar O’Donnell and his father are representative of Friel’s protagonists insofar as their memories of former happiness and fulfilment function as a strong driving force in their lives, regardless of whether the moments they recall actually happened or how long they lasted. Moreover, I believe that, despite the Beckettian undertones in Friel’s plays, his characters are more strongly indebted to Bachelard’s credo that a human being’s existence starts with a sense of comfort and ease:

[W]hen we examine a nest, we place ourselves at the origin of confidence in the world, we receive a beginning of confidence, an urge toward cosmic confidence. [...] Our house, apprehended in its dream potentiality, becomes a nest in the world, and we shall live there in complete confidence if, in our dreams, we really participate in the sense of security of our first home. In order to experience this confidence, which is so deeply graven in our sleep, there is no need to enumerate material reasons for confidence. The nest, quite as much as the oneiric house, and the oneiric house quite as much as the nest – if we ourselves are at the origin of our dreams – knows nothing of the hostility of the world. [...] The experience of the hostility of the world – and consequently, our dreams of defense and aggressiveness – come much later. In its germinal form, therefore, all of life is well-being. Being starts with well-being. (103–104)

Born into their own home and family and recalling instances of exuberant happiness, fulfilment and security in their past, which Bachelard refers to when he talks about being “at the origin” of one’s dreams, Friel’s protagonists – having experienced these feelings – are convinced that these sentiments have only vanished but are no mere fantasy (103). The fact that Friel’s characters associate moments in their past with happiness and their own well-being suggests that, in their cases, it is only in the course of their lives that their existence has taken on Beckettian characteristics. Moreover, in contrast to characters such as Vladimir or Estragon in Waiting for Godot, Friel’s characters appear to regard the misery and unease which define their lives as situational rather than existential. Disregarding that their isolation might, indeed, be “existential,” as FitzGibbon argues, they long to return to the past, hoping to rediscover their sense of meaning, well-being and rootedness in life which they experienced when they were young (78). However, except for the characters’ memories of past happiness, the fundamental human need to find inner peace and happiness which Heidegger referred to as Being-in-the-world in the sense of “Being-with Others” mostly fails to be fulfilled in Friel’s plays (Being and Time 155). Like Beckett’s characters, most of Friel’s protagonists lack the “[r]eleasement toward things [i.e. Gelassenheit zu den Dingen],” which the German philosopher identified as a “possibility of dwelling in the world in a
totally different way” (Discourse 55). As a result of this, Friel’s characters are also unable to “dwell” and “to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace,” which would allow them to feel “preserved from harm and danger” or “safeguarded” in their existence (Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking” 148–149). However, in contrast to Beckett’s characters whose life is presented as a constant reiteration of the day before, the memories of past happiness reveal that Friel’s characters are preoccupied with their past and with disclosing their experiences and private sensations in an attempt to return to or recreate their highly treasured memories of happiness and fulfilment. Tragically, however, as the fates of Sarah Johnny Sally in Translations and the eponymous protagonist in Molly Sweeney suggest, Friel’s characters, despite their life-long efforts, can never regain a paradise which has been lost on an emotional level.

Disillusioned with the meaning of home that the norm of seeing or speaking has forced on them and which they experience as a form of exile from their own private definition and former experience of the same space, the two female characters withdraw from society into a mental realm that is entirely concealed from everyone else. Thus, the only way for these two female protagonists to realise their personal concept of home is to abandon life within society at the end of the plays.

Sarah’s muteness and Molly’s blindness distinguish them from the average member of the societies depicted from the outset of the plays; from the public point of view, both characters are thought to suffer from a deficiency, one which the men they love try to obviate by teaching them to speak or to see. Temporarily, the women are, therefore, made to conform to public norms. However, as access to public intercourse or to sight is a disappointment for them, both Sarah and Molly quickly withdraw from the public space and retreat into a private world that is inaccessible to others.

The night before her eye surgery, Molly Sweeney expresses her dismay when she suddenly realises that she is going to be removed from the private realm which has served as her personal home all her life: “It was the dread of exile, of being sent away. It was the desolation of homesickness” (Molly 31). Looking back, Molly claims that access to sight and to the public world did, indeed, not offer her the feelings of intimacy and familiarity she was accustomed to before the operation. In fact, her private reality and world, which were based on imagination and fantasy, were much more colourful than the life she experiences after the restoration of her eyesight. At the same time, security and home stop being synonymous for her. Thus, when she loses her eyesight again, Molly withdraws from the public world and tries to rediscover her former happiness and sense of security. However, as with most of Friel’s characters, the idea of returning to her former private realm, her former home,
is a futile undertaking – there is no homecoming for her. Her new mental space is no longer associated with happiness and contentment:

I think I see nothing at all now. But I’m not absolutely sure of that. *Anyhow my borderline country is where I live now. I’m at home there. Well … at ease there.* It certainly doesn’t worry me anymore that what I think I see may be fantasy or indeed what I take to be imagined may very well be real – what’s Frank’s term? – external reality. Real – imagined – fact – fiction – fantasy – reality – there it seems to be. And it seems to be alright. And why should I question any of it anymore? (67, my emphasis)

The space Molly lives in after her withdrawal from the public world offers her some comfort, but her immediate rephrasing of the expression “I’m at home there. Well … at ease there” indicates that for her *home* has connotations which are missing in her new world (67). Molly’s access to sight and the public view no longer allow her to fully return to her former *home*. A sense of “ease” is all that she is able to achieve after her withdrawal. Consequently, her attempted homecoming is as unsuccessful as Frank Hardy’s in *Faith Healer* and Cass’ in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. From a psychological viewpoint, Molly Sweeney remains in exile or in a state of resignation, as she does not encounter the type of redemption which Pine hints at when he argues that the “point of coming home, whether it is physical or metaphysical, is to complete an odyssey which began with leaving home” (*Ireland’s Drama* 102). In Pine’s reading, *home* is considered a place of reconciliation. However, in Friel’s writing, the characters’ homecomings do not allow them to regain a sense of *home* and privateness which was lost when they either left or were expelled from the private realm which they used to inhabit.

Similarly, Sarah’s return to muteness in *Translations* is emotionally charged and indicates how deeply troubled she is after her access to language has proved a deadly weapon. Feeling guilty of having betrayed Maire’s relationship to Yolland and of causing Manus to leave Ballybeg because of her gasp towards the end the play, she withdraws to her former space of silence. Having experienced the negative effects that the power of language can have, she loses the ability to speak after Manus’ departure. In fact, she cannot utter a single word when she is asked to answer Lancey’s questions. At the same time, however, Sarah’s demeanour suggests that her return to muteness and to her inner self is one in which her conscience prevents her from feeling comfortable and at ease within her perfectly private sphere. Her newly established privateness is one which is charged with guilt.

Hence, the two women’s experiences hint at the danger involved in forcing individuals to abandon their private realm and their individual concepts of *home* in order to conform to the norms and expectations of the majority. Sarah’s and Molly’s cases indicate that once they are deprived of their
privateness, which offered them security and happiness, their former state of peace and comfort can never be attained again. However, withdrawing from the public space and from society at least offers Sarah and Molly the opportunity to be less dependent on the power of those who rule the public space. They are, at least, no longer expected to conform to public standards as it allows them to re-establish a realm to which they can restrict access and which offers them a certain degree of independence and autonomy.

I believe that *Translations* and *Molly Sweeney* are, therefore, typical of Friel’s plays: unable to regain their former happiness, the utmost his characters can hope for is to achieve a state of oblivion in which they forget the misery and agony that define their lives. Thus, whereas the term *Seinsvergessenheit* [oblivion, forgottenness, of being] has been used by Heidegger to denote a state in which God has either forgotten the human being or in which human beings are oblivious to the essence of their *Dasein* on earth and “have forgotten to ask about the ‘sense’ or ‘truth’ of being,” the state in which a character temporarily forgets to question his own condition of being in the world could be described as bliss in Friel’s writing (Inwood 72). In various rituals, such as storytelling or music (in *Wonderful Tennessee* and in *Aristocrats*), dancing (in *Dancing at Lughnasa* or *Molly Sweeney*), and healing performances (in *Faith Healer*), Friel’s characters experience brief moments during which they feel ‘at home’ or ‘sheltered’ in a mental space of freedom and privateness to which no one else has access, and where they can neither be hurt or exposed to heteronomy.

This once more pinpoints how closely the characters’ concept of *home* is related to their identity and their psyche. When the characters engage in performing these rituals or when Frank Hardy dies because he sacrifices himself to the group of young men in Ballybeg, *home* suddenly turns into a space of interiorisation or privatisation where they stop disclosing their inner self to those around them in an attempt to be grasped in their complex identity. FitzGibbon emphasises that “the disciplined fury of the dance,” for instance, offers the main protagonist in *Molly Sweeney* the opportunity of “a more total, intuitive and self-expressive life” on the night before her eye surgery (83). As a result of the different “modes of self-liberation,” the tormenting questions and the discontentment with the actual *Dasein* which Friel’s characters are exposed to in everyday life temporarily vanish (90). For a short period of time, their strong emotional need of *Being-with Others* is either abandoned as they find fulfilment and contentment within themselves or it is fulfilled as they experience a sense of belonging and community in performing the ritual with the others (Heidegger, *Time and Being* 155, original emphasis). No longer feeling dependent on other characters’ opinions or under their control, Friel’s characters are able to experience a short and rare moment in which their
concepts of the ideal *home* and of *happiness* correspond with reality and in which their self is restored for the time being.