Ballybeg, society more often than not functions as a strong source of friction and unhappiness in Friel’s oeuvre. Unease and a phenomenon which is identified by Higgins as an “impossibility of dialogue in the isolation of selfhood” (54) and which is described by Corbett as “the evident discontinuity of communication” (3) actually constitute the norm in Ballybeg. Summarising, then, Ballybeg is a place in Friel’s oeuvre that is not easily left in spite of the suffering and misery experienced by a majority of its inhabitants. At the same time, however, the village is repeatedly presented as a place of homecoming that fails to fulfil the expectations of its returnees and shatters their concept of what constitutes home. Hence, feeling misunderstood or alienated within their family or community, Friel’s characters start to share their secrets or their inner self with the audience trying to justify their own perspectives, behaviour and actions. The society depicted in Ballybeg thus consists of a “hermetic” group whose members are engaged in a permanent act of publicising their inner self and constantly make their private agonies and thoughts public (Translations 40). Invariably publicising their most private sentiments and feelings, Friel’s characters seem to hope that the innermost core of their identity will eventually be grasped, which will help them feel ‘at home’ and ‘whole’ again. Nevertheless, the strong sense of introspection that defines the lives of most characters in Friel’s plays predominantly fails to be translated into a sense of homeliness and harmony with other members of the family and community. As a result of this lack of unity among the different inhabitants of Ballybeg, the village is peopled with characters that struggle with the loneliness of their Dasein as well as the lacking sense of relational and spatial belonging.

1. Power and (Meta-)Theatrical Aspects

In Brian Friel’s dramatic work, the question of publicness and privateness is not only a key issue with regard to the analysis of the content but also the form. In fact, the form often shapes the content in Friel’s plays insofar as subtle dramaturgical techniques influence and to some extent even control what the audience learns about a character’s public or private realm. Examining the role of memory in Friel’s writing, Emmert refers to some of the dramaturgical practices by means of which the past generates a character’s behaviour or action in the present as “forms of interiorisation” (23, my translation). Although I agree that these techniques, such as the introduction of different narrative voices whose private memories or experiences are re-enacted before

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9 Original: Mittel der Verinnerlichung (23).
the audience’s eyes or the splitting of a character into his public and his private self, are characterised by a strong element of introspection on the level of the plot, with regard to the form of the play, I would argue that on stage they, paradoxically, function as forms of exteriorisation. After all, these dramaturgical devices, for example, allow protagonists (such as Gar O’Donnell in Philadelphia, Here I Come!) to publicise their privateness and disclose their intimate truth to the audience.10 Other characters (such as Gar’s father and their housekeeper, Madge), however, are, as a result of the dramaturgical setup of the play, compelled to keep their thoughts or truths to themselves; their private core remains hidden from the audience, who is only granted access to their public selves.

Addressing theoretical considerations of form in his lecture on “The Theatre of Hope and Despair,” held in 1967, Friel dismisses the unity of place, time and action in drama as he believes the concept of the Aristotelian unities has lost its credibility in modern society:

[T]he days of the solid, well-made play are gone, the play with a beginning, a middle, and an end, where in Act I a dozen carefully balanced characters are thrown into an arena and are presented with a problem, where in Act II they attack the problem and one another according to the Queensberry Rules of Drama, and in Act III the problem is cosily resolved and all concerned are a lot wiser, a little nobler, and preferably a bit sadder. And these plays are finished because we know that life is about as remote from a presentation-problem-resolution cycle as it can be. (22)

Emphasising that “flux is the only constant” in contemporary drama, Friel draws attention to the immense significance of uncertainty in his work (22); in fact, in his play Give Me Your Answer, Do! Daisy Connolly identifies uncertainty as the driving force in the professional writing of her husband Tom Connolly. She explains that, as an artist, “uncertainty is necessary. He [i.e. Tom, a novelist] must live with that uncertainty, that necessary uncertainty. Because there can be no verdicts, no answers. Indeed there must be no verdicts” (Give 79, original emphasis). As a result of the above-mentioned paradox that fluidity is the only permanent feature in his writing, Friel has widely experimented with Brechtian effects and dramaturgical innovations. This has caused Tillinghast to stress Friel’s unique position in Anglo-Irish drama in this respect (36).11 Discussing some of Friel’s dramaturgical innovations, Niel

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10 In Philadelphia, Here I Come! the main protagonist, Gar, is represented by two different actors on stage, namely by Public Gar, who talks to the other characters on stage, and by his alter ego, Private Gar, who provides the audience with Public Gar’s unspoken thoughts, gives voice to his numerous fears or insecurities and challenges Public Gar’s inarticulateness and his passive manner.

11 Friel’s modern style of drama has been rebuked by critics such as Hogan, who referred to Friel’s innovations as “neo-Expressionistic crutches and neo-Brechtian gimmicks” (as quoted
has identified “the abandonment of a logical and chronological presentation of events, direct addressing of the audience, comments, songs […]” as some of the methods which Friel exploited to establish new forms of drama, more apt to present the woes and sorrows of his characters (“Non-Realistic Techniques” 351).

In my opinion, one of the more conspicuous dramaturgical devices used by Friel is the conscious undermining or shattering of the dramatic illusion of reality. It allows characters, such as those, for instance, in *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (15) or in *Living Quarters* (188), to address the audience directly in order to denounce the truth or cast doubt upon the atmosphere of a scene that has just been staged. Due to these characters’ interventions, the audience is presented with multiple perspectives and more than one version of truth. Consequently, the audience has to ponder and judge each character’s trustworthiness in the play and is, therefore, in a Brechtian sense, directly involved in creating the meaning of the drama. As the different characters’ personal perspectives are contradictory in nature, *truth* and *reality* are necessarily turned into two highly problematic concepts in Friel’s oeuvre.

Although the main protagonist at the beginning of *The Loves of Cass McGuire* is reported to still be asleep, the woman’s behaviour is – through indirect presentation – shown to be a source of utter embarrassment for the family. By the time Cass McGuire first appears on stage, the audience has already been introduced to her as “a tall, bulky woman of seventy” who “smokes incessantly and talks loudly and coarsely” (*Cass* 14). Cass, who “appeared out of the blue after fifty-two years,” is a “returned Yankee” who has recently moved in

by O’Brien, *Friel* 52). Referring to Hogan’s comment as “not only unhelpful but also uninformed” (87), Dantanus then offers – as have indeed Kearney and O’Brien – a valuable analysis of the various dramaturgical techniques introduced in Friel’s oeuvre over the years (Dantanus 84–152, Kearney 77–116, O’Brien, *Friel* 52–74). In his analysis, Dantanus criticises that the term ‘experimental’ has repeatedly been used to refer to Friel’s plays. He points out that “only comparatively few of his plays are ‘experimental’ in any genuine sense” (85). He goes on to suggest that “Friel’s drama is more ‘original’ than ‘experimental’,” concluding that “[a] great deal [could] be learnt by approaching some of his [i.e. Friel’s] plays via the classical theatre of Greece. […] Brecht or no Brecht, Pirandello or no Pirandello, many of the techniques used by Friel in his plays cannot be understood solely in terms of the modern theatre” (87–89). Although I share his view concerning the influence of the Greek chorus in Friel’s work and would agree that Friel’s plays are not experimental “in any genuine sense,” I have, nonetheless, decided to use the term to underline the playwright’s constant search for new forms and dramaturgical innovations to open up space for alternative versions of truth.

I fully agree with Niel that Friel’s Brechtian effects are not normally meant to accomplish an alienating effect but to evoke a feeling of empathy in the audience for his characters who are shown to be imprisoned in their own worlds and perceptions (“Brian Friel” 42).
with her brother’s family (15 – 16). As a result of her brother Harry’s inquiries, both the family and the audience are informed that Cass spent the previous night in the pub ravaging the place after a few drinks and mudding her shoes when visiting the cemetery. Cass’ nephew, Dom, seems to have some affection for his aunt; he offers to “bring up her tray” and mentions his buying “a bar of chocolate for her” (12). However, Dom’s interest in Cass might actually originate in a fascination with her unruly behaviour, as he reveals to his mother that he “could hear her [i.e. Cass] singing at the top of her voice half the night” (12). Despite the discrepant awareness – Cass cannot know what exactly was discussed while she was asleep/offstage – she immediately senses how she has been portrayed when she appears on stage. Her usage of the third person pronoun to talk about the other characters indicates that her meta-theatrical comment, a justification for having missed the beginning of the play, is directed towards the audience:

CASS. What the hell goes on here?
ALICE. Cass —!
HARRY. Cass, you can’t break in, Cass, at —!

Cass addresses the audience directly. They are her friends, her intimates. The other people on stage are interlopers.

CASS. Cass! Cass! Cass! I go to the ur-eye-nal for five minutes and they try to pull a quick one on me! (15)

In order to silence Cass’ protest at how she has just been treated by the other actors/members of the family, her brother Harry likewise breaks the theatrical illusion in a rather casual way: “The story has begun, Cass” (15). His statement reveals that, although the exposition has taken place without her, it cannot be undone. Moreover, Harry does not seem enthusiastic about the prospect of Cass establishing too close a relationship with the audience and offering her personal point of view – a point of view beyond his control. However, as the main protagonist, Cass insists on her unique position in the play. In her meta-theatrical comment, she demands unrestricted power over the scenes and her presentation: “The story begins where I say it begins, and I say it begins with me stuck in the gawddam workhouse! So you can all get the hell outa here!” (15) Trying to maintain control over the scenes, Harry dismisses her statement by claiming that “[t]he story begins in the living-room of my home, a week after your return to Ireland. This is my living-room and we’re going to show bit by bit how you came –” (15). Taking up her brother’s introductory remarks in a perfectly matter-of-fact voice, Cass fights back by adding a piece of truth which is too honest and open to correspond with what Harry must have had in mind and what he would have presented as the official truth of the family:
CASS. (Looking around set) Sure! Real nice and cosy! (Directly to audience) The home of my brother, Mister Harold McGuire, accountant, brick manufacturer, big-deal Irish businessman. Married to Alice, only child of Joe Connor, the lawyer, who couldn’t keep his hands off young girls. (15)

Embarrassed by her unexpected revelation, Harry summons Cass to be “fair” to his family and to unfold the developments which caused him to “[arrange] for [her] to go into Eden House,” a rest home for the elderly, “slowly and in sequence” (15 and 25). However, not only does Cass oppose to Harry’s presentation of the events, but she also dislikes her new home, where, to use Kilroy’s expression, the family has decided to “dump” her (13):

CASS. So we’re going to skip all that early stuff, all the explanations, all the excuses, and we’ll start off later in the story – from here. (Light up bed area) My suite in the workhouse, folks. Drop in and see me some time, okay? Where the hell was I? (Remembering) Yeah – the homecoming – back to the little green isle. Well, that’s all over and done with – history; and in my book yesterday’s dead and gone and forgotten. So let’s pick it up from there, with me in the . . . rest home. (To Harry who is about to go off stage) Go ahead and call out the National Guard if you like; but you’re not going to move me! What’s this goddam play called? The Loves of Cass McGuire. Who’s Cass McGuire? Me! Me! And they’ll [i.e. the audience] see what happens in the order I want them to see it; and there will be no going back into the past! (Cass 16, original emphasis)

Cass’ dismissal of the past once more draws attention to the fact that what the audience knows or thinks of a character is firmly guided by dramaturgical choices or decisions. Telling a story from a certain character’s perspective at the same time means silencing other aspects or leaving them untold. Even a private and true story unfolded before the eyes of the audience is really only one version of truth – there are many other valuable aspects or perspectives which remain perfectly concealed. Engaged in a debate about what scenes should be enacted on stage and which “explanations” or “excuses” they will “skip,” Harry and Cass once more undermine the dramatic illusion of reality (16). Moreover, the entire linguistic battle between the two “rival storytellers,” Harry and Cass, emphasizes how crucial the order of appearance on stage is (Higgins 15). As a result of having been presented indirectly by her brother’s family before she appears on stage, Cass spends the rest of the play “having an odd word with the folks out there,” and trying to develop an intimate relation with the audience (Cass 29). From a dramaturgical point of view, Cass could be seen to do so in order to put herself in a more favourable light and undo some of the damage inflicted upon her during the exposition. With regard to the content of the play, however, Cass is shown to hope that by
expressing “her desperate longing for love and happiness” as well as by sharing her intimate and personal thoughts, feelings or sorrows with the audience, she will gain the confidence, warmth, love, understanding and sympathy of the audience which her brother’s family have failed to offer to her since her return from the States (Niel, “Non-Realistic Techniques” 356).

Apart from undermining the dramatic illusion of reality, as one of his most frequently applied techniques, Friel has reduced the degree of mimesis – according to Potolsky, the “physical act of miming or mimicking something” – in his plays (2). Instead, the playwright integrated narratological elements, which are not normally associated with drama. Friel’s stressing narrativity over plot is all the more surprising because, as Kosok argues, Anglo-Irish drama has traditionally put “an exceptional emphasis on action” (157, original emphasis). Defining ‘narrative’ as “a primary act of mind, a way of comprehending and constructing social and psychic life,” Hardy explains that drama is normally described as being “active, interactive, extrovert, many-voiced, mobile, gestural and immediate” (24–25). Narratives, on the other hand, are normally considered “inactive, introvert, single-voiced, quiet, retrospective or prospective” (25). Applying these definitions to Friel’s texts demonstrates that the voices of the vast majority of Friel’s characters are, in fact, much more closely associated with narrative than with drama. Friel, who started his writing career publishing short stories and radio plays, has repeatedly been referred to as a great storyteller, a term which directly links him with the old Gaelic tradition of the seanchaithe. Indicating that “[a]s an Irish writer, Brian Friel comes from a rich narrative tradition,” Grant further claims that “his drama has continued to display the skill of the master storyteller” (2). Comparing Friel to

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13 The definition of the term mimesis offered in The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative perfectly captures the meaning referred to in this context; mimesis is described by Abbott as “[t]he imitation of an action by performance. According to Plato, mimesis is one of the two major ways to convey a narrative, the other being diegesis or the representation of an action by telling. By this distinction, plays are mimetic, epic poems are diegetic. Aristotle […] used the term ‘mimesis’ as simply the imitation of an action and included in it both modes of narrative representation” (193, emphasis deleted). While my usage of the term is entirely indebted to Plato, Friel’s plays are consequently an enactment of Aristotle’s understanding of the term.

14 Seanchaí (plural: seanchaithe) is the “Irish word for a storyteller and repository of tradition” (“Seanchaí,” Brewer’s Dictionary 731). Since the eighteenth century, the “bearer of ‘old lore’” has been regarded as “an oral story-teller who possesses a wide repertoire of lore including shorter forms of narrative” (“Seanchaí,” Oxford Companion 510). Interestingly, not only does the Irish word ‘seanchaí’ refer to the story-tellers’ “material – lore and tradition – […] [but] […] the term also has the meaning of gossip or chat between individuals” and thus underlines that the “seanchaí was a welcome visitor in most rural homes, especially in the long winters when most céilidhing [i.e. the Ulster name for informal social gatherings] or bothántaíocht [i.e. the Munster name for the same kind of informal evening visiting, including gossip, stories, music or perhaps dancing] took place” (“Seanchas” and “Seanchaí,” Brewer’s Dictionary 732 and 731).
Anton Chekhov, Niel claims that the reduction of plot is characteristic of both writers. Moreover, in their plays, there is a tendency to narrate rather than to present events (“Brian Friel” 40). According to Corbett, in Faith Healer, where the three protagonists take it in turns to address the audience in four long monologues, Friel most prominently and for the first time in his career as a dramatist “returns to a native Irish tradition of storytelling” and I fully agree with his conclusion that “[f]or most of his work, he is never far away from it” (114).

Whereas Friel regularly explores different forms of mediation between his characters and the audience, no such mediators are found in classical drama. Tendencies to incorporate an epic element in plays, such as the chorus in classic Greek tragedies, where a group of performers comment “on the action of the play” or interpret “its events from the standpoint of traditional wisdom,” only serve as an exception to the rule (“Chorus” 54–55). In Friel, however, mediators or “stage-manager[s],” whose roles have mostly developed beyond those of the Greek chorus, are not only common but also powerful; they occasionally decide whether a character’s public or private face is shown, in what order the different scenes are going to be presented and thereby influence how much the audience sympathises with a certain character (Niel, “Non-Realistic Techniques” 354). As a consequence, some of these figures of mediation establish a much more intimate relation with the audience than the rest of the characters. Furthermore, in plays such as Dancing at Lughnasa as well as in “Winners” and “Losers” (Lovers), commentators or narrators – both heterodiegetic and homodiegetic – are introduced to elaborate on or to provide background information to the events presented on stage. In the case of “Winners,” the two heterodiegetic commentators’ neutral reports describing the death of the two teenagers, Mag (Margaret Mary Enright) and Joe (Joseph Michael Brennan), sharply contrast with the scenes enacted on stage allowing the audience to witness some of the situations described by the commentators. The play, therefore, painfully illustrates how dominant public discourse runs the risk of silencing the private and powerless voices whenever conflicting versions of truth exist. Summarising then,

15 I will use the terminology introduced by Genette and then taken over by Rimmon-Kenan, despite the fact that in both of these works the terms refer to positions in narrative texts exclusively. However, as these terms describe the positions obtained by the characters in Friel’s plays and therefore fully serve my purpose, I have nonetheless decided to adapt the terms and apply them to Brian Friel’s dramatic work, so I refer to a ‘heterodiegetic narrator’ as one who “does not participate in the story” he narrates, whereas the term ‘homodiegetic narrator’ designates “one who takes part in it, at least in some manifestations of his ‘self’” (Rimmon-Kenan 95).

16 A close reading of this play will follow later in this chapter (p. 118–119).
although Friel has used different kinds of mediation and narrative figures throughout his career, the functions these characters fulfil in the individual plays differ widely.

From a dramatic point of view, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is the first play in which Friel has introduced a figure of mediation to meticulously record the main protagonist Gar O’Donnell’s emotions and stirrings. In order to capture the character’s public statements as well as his personal thoughts, feelings and dictates of his heart the night before his emigration to Philadelphia, this character is, as indicated above, represented by two actors on stage: “The two Gars, Public Gar and Private Gar, are two views of the one man. Public Gar is the Gar that people see, talk to, talk about. Private Gar is the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the alter ego, the secret thoughts, the id” (11). Friel’s invention of Private Gar, the alter ego of the main protagonist Public Gar, who eloquently expresses his thoughts, feelings or anxieties, provides the audience with the unspoken subtext of the monosyllabic conversations which Public Gar has with himself and with the characters by whom he is surrounded. Although the dramaturgical constellation in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is quite extraordinary, the phenomenon of distinguishing between one’s private and one’s public face is only natural: “Our ‘public face’ is thus that which we allow anyone to see, our ‘private side’ is that to which we restrict access” and which is often related to “‘secrecy’” (Benn and Gaus 8). In Freudian terms, Private Gar can simply be regarded as the externalisation of the unspoken and possibly even unconscious realm of a human being. Having access to Gar’s inner self, the audience not only becomes acquainted with the poetic and expressive side of Gar’s character but, as Corbett argues, also experiences the young man’s countless moments of hesitation witnessing that “[e]ven Gar’s communication with himself is difficult” (36). Tillinghast, moreover, highlights that Private Gar’s remarks

delight the audience because they remind us of our own inner commentaries. For Gar O’Donnell himself, though, they serve a complex and ambivalent function. Interior dialogue is, first of all, a survival mechanism in this character who exists as his father’s employee in the family grocery and dry-goods business [...] On the other hand his rich inner life facilitates Gar’s further isolation, because it does an outlet for his humor, cynicism, idealism, ambition, and hostility, it prevents him from confronting openly his frustrations in the public arena. (38)

Gar’s conversation with himself is helpful and restrictive at the same time. In fact, far from being happy with his life, Private Gar mercilessly unmasks Public Gar’s inner self and lays bare what Kilroy describes as the protagonist’s “own inner insecurities, his essential innocence and vulnerability before the future that awaits him” and what I would refer to as an unhealthy self-concept (11).
Although Gar – consisting of his public (outer) and his private (inner) self – is the only character to whose thoughts the audience is given full access, his powerful position on stage is not uncontested. Gar’s point of view is occasionally questioned by other characters’ statements. For example, Madge, who has reared Gar and who has, therefore, had a chance to observe the father-son relationship since the boy was born, mentions that, contrary to Gar’s belief, the father’s uncommunicative behaviour has nothing to do with his son and must not be interpreted as a lack of interest or love:

[]Just because he doesn’t say much doesn’t mean that he hasn’t feelings like the rest of us. […] He said nothing either when your mother died. It must have been near daybreak when he got to sleep last night. I could hear his bed creaking. (Philadelphia 20)

From the father’s rare utterances and especially from his nonverbal communication, Madge knows that he suffers as much as his son, and she suggests that Gar has inherited his father’s inability to share privateness: “And when he’s [i.e. Gar] the age the boss is now, he’ll turn out just the same. And although I won’t be here to see it, you’ll find that he’s learned nothin’ in-between times” (109).

In spite of offering insight to a character’s unconscious by introducing the figure of Private Gar, “Gar’s part dominates but does not drown out the others” (Maxwell 69). Thus, the unusual dramaturgical constellation draws attention to a void in the play; as soon as the audience is familiarised with the private thoughts of one character, the missing alter ego of all the other characters, their private feelings and notions become significant. The audience’s intimate relation to Gar is to a certain extent called into question by this lacuna; after all, the father’s non-communicative behaviour is particularly telling in this respect. The night before Gar’s departure for America, his father enters from the shop and sits down to read the newspaper. Madge, who looks at him for a while, temporarily loses her composure and confronts him “with his inadequacy and insensitivity” (Jones 34). Bursting into tears, she accuses him of sitting in the kitchen “night after night, year after year, reading that aul paper […]. It – it – it – it just drives me mad, the sight of you!” (Philadelphia 67) When she rushes out, Gar’s father “stares after her, then out at the audience. Then, very slowly, he looks down at the paper again – it has been upside down – and turns it right side up. But he can’t read. He looks across at Gar’s bedroom, sighs, rises, and exits very slowly to the shop” (67). As he holds the newspaper upside down, too distracted to be able to read the newspaper, Gar’s father’s non-verbal communication proves that he suffers as much as his son. The stage directions, therefore, imply that S.B. O’Donnell’s public face probably hides as sensitive and expressive a character as the one revealed by Private Gar.
The subtle undermining of the seemingly overruling perspective of one character, as witnessed in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, is a phenomenon exploited once more in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Michael, who functions as a homodiegetic commentator, accompanies the audience through his “different kinds of memories” as he recalls “that summer of 1936,” when he was seven years old (7). Although he does not deliberately mislead the audience, the reconstruction of the period he spent with his mother and aunts depends entirely on his childhood memories. Therefore, the reality presented in the play is far from being objective and does not report the ultimate truth. Concerning the meaning of *history* and *memory* in Friel’s work, Emmert explains that

[t]he [...] growing scepticism with regard to an objectification of the past [leads] to the insight that memory and history must be regarded as narrative, re-interpretable constructs of a past which cannot be grasped by actual facts. (203, my translation)¹⁷

At first sight, Michael’s point of view is, in fact, more developed and powerful than anyone else’s. However, the audience’s impression that Michael’s story might be challenged by other characters if they were to express their private thoughts is intensified when he begins to describe the other characters’ behaviour and personality and when his memories are re-enacted on stage; hence, a certain dissonance is created. In Michael’s eyes, his aunt Kate, “a national schoolteacher and a very proper woman,” is rather strict and domineering; moreover, she is shown to have lived according to strong principles or morals (7). Nevertheless, the text in a clever way gradually undermines Michael’s power and points to her alternative perspective, which is understood to be equally valuable, although it is not verbalised as directly as Michael’s point of view in the play. In fact, witnessing the different events of that summer, the audience gradually learns that Kate seems to have been the only member of the family with a realistic perception of their current situation:

KATE. You work hard at your job. You try to keep the home together. You perform your duties as best you can – because you believe in responsibilities and obligations and good order. And then suddenly, suddenly you realize that hair cracks are appearing everywhere; that control is slipping away; that the whole thing is so fragile it can’t be held together much longer. It’s all about to collapse [...]. (56)

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¹⁷ Original: Die [...] wachsende Skepsis hinsichtlich einer Objektivierbarkeit der Vergangenheit [führt] zu der Erkenntnis, dass Erinnerung und Geschichte als narrative, reinterpretierbare Konstrukte einer faktisch nicht fassbaren Vergangenheit betrachtet werden müssen. (203)
Albeit being less playful than the young boy’s mother and other aunts, not only does Kate provide the sole regular income of the Mundy family, but, as the confession quoted above indicates, she has also shouldered most of the responsibility in the family and she is the character who is particularly concerned about the well-being of the different members of the family. Portrayed as someone who is deeply dissatisfied with her own status and the situation her family finds itself in as well as someone who has a strong need to be in control of things, Kate was distressed when she realised their life was about to disintegrate. In spite of depicting her from a critical point of view, the adult narrator Michael has to admit that, in fact, his aunt’s “forebodings weren’t all that inaccurate. Indeed some of them were fulfilled” before the end of that summer in 1936 (64).

Michael’s final remarks, then, resemble Kate’s gloomy perception: in fact, when they arose in the morning of Michael’s “first day back at school,” the family learnt that his aunts Rose and Agnes had disappeared during the night because, as the adult narrator puts it, “[t]he Industrial Revolution had finally caught up with Ballybeg” and his aunts’ “hand-knitted gloves” were no longer in demand (90–91). Michael’s uncle, Father Jack, who had been called back from his missionary work in Africa a few months before because he had adopted the native population’s pagan beliefs, felt so uprooted in Ballybeg that “he died suddenly of a heart attack – within a year of his homecoming” (92). Because of Jack’s transformation, Kate, his disgraced sister, was made redundant at the end of that summer and Michael’s mother, Chris, “spent the rest of her life in the [newly established] knitting factory and hated every day of it” (107). Contemplating the events of that summer fifty-four years later, Michael concludes that as a result of his aunts’ disappearance and his uncle’s death “the heart [had] seemed to go out of the house” and “much of the spirit and fun had gone out” of his mother and the two other aunts’ lives (106–107). Therefore, Kate’s worries foreshadow the actual decline of the family and their bleak future: when the narrator finally managed to track his aunts Rose and Agnes down in London years later, he learnt that they “had moved about a lot. They had worked as cleaning women in public toilets, in factories, in the Underground. […] They took to drink; slept in parks, in doorways, on the Thames Embankment” (91). Thus, despite the fond and precious childhood memories which Michael has kept of this summer in 1936, the fact remains that, at exactly this stage in the history of the Mundy family, his home fully disintegrated, the family’s reputation became severely tarnished and the aunts’ fate began to decline.

The technique of presenting a plot retrospectively, which Friel has made extensive use of in his dramatic work, means that characters, like Michael, who reflect upon their past, are equipped with more knowledge than was available
to them at the time the events actually took place.\textsuperscript{18} This retrospective approach, then, paradoxically contains a strong element of foreshadowing. Casting their mind back on events in the past enables these characters to comment on the effect their decisions or behaviour had and to mention what conclusions they drew at a later stage; most importantly, however, this device not only enforces the strong private or personal element in a character’s disclosure but also adds depth to their interpretation of situations or actions. Moreover, as a result of the distance the characters have gained since the occurrence of the events, the audience is made to feel that the element of private truth revealed in the narrative is exceptionally strong.

In a number of Friel’s plays, dead voices recall certain events on stage which occurred during their lives; due to their metaphysical condition, the characters’ descriptions of these incidents often contain an unspoken claim for absolute truth.\textsuperscript{19} Nonetheless, Friel skilfully undermines this notion of the absolute by opposing these accounts with alternative versions delivered by other characters. An interesting version of this practice “of having on stage characters that are revealed to be dead” is explored in \textit{Performances} (Tallone 39). In this play, the main protagonist on stage, Leoš Janáček, who is “played by an actor in his fifties or energetic sixties” (3), is supposed to have been dead for quite some time and appears to be fully aware of his fate: “I know when it [i.e. the piece of music “On that Javorina Plain”] was published, don’t I? Twenty years after I was buried, for God’s sake” (7). Throughout the play, Janáček constantly questions the reliability of private statements he made and the pieces of truth he revealed in some seven hundred letters to Kamila Stösslova during his lifetime. Anezka Ungrova, an “anxious, intense and earnest young” PhD student, writes her thesis based on her conviction that “there must be a connection between the private life and the public work” (6 and 14). She firmly believes that Janáček’s artistic output

\textsuperscript{18} Favorini defines a play in which “the intention to remember and/or forget comes prominently to the fore, with or without the aid of a remembering narrator; in which the phenomenon of memory is a distinct and central area of the drama’s attention; in which memory is presented as a way of knowing the past different from, though not necessarily opposed to, history; or in which memory or forgetting serves as a crucial factor in self-formation and/or self/deconstruction” as a \textit{memory play} (138). With regard to Friel’s writing, Emmert uses this term not only for plays such as \textit{Dancing at Lughnasa}, \textit{Molly Sweeney}, or \textit{Faith Healer} but also for plays in which a narrative voice has been introduced and where instances of the remembered past are re-enacted in the consciousness of a homodiegetic figure such as Gar in \textit{Philadelphia, Here I Come!} or Cass in \textit{The Loves of Cass McGuire}.

\textsuperscript{19} Examples include \textit{The Freedom of the City} and \textit{Faith Healer}, both of which will be discussed below (p. 118–121 and 121–126).
can only be fully understood if one is familiar with his letters and understands his private life:

In fact, that is the core of my thesis [...] the relationship between the writing of that piece and those passionate letters from a seventy-four-year-old man to a woman almost forty years younger than him – a married woman with two sons – and what I hope to suggest is that your passion for Kamila Stösslova certainly had a determining effect on that composition and indeed on that whole remarkable burst of creative energy at the very end of your life – probably caused it, for heaven’s sake – and only six months away from your death! (15)

The play, however, speaks a different language; Janáček becomes rather irritated with Anezka, who “keeps producing these ridiculous quotations” (12). Disregarding the statements he made in the past, he, at one stage, suggests that “[y]ou invent them, Ms Ungrova, don’t you?” (12) Deeply distrusting the power of language and, most importantly, another character’s interpretation of his own words, he smashes Anezka’s theory that one’s private disclosure is more valuable than the artistic, public output. Instead, he advises her to concentrate on his music, the original and not so easily distorted reality:

Anezka, my dear, you’d learn so much more by just listening to the music. [...] The people who huckster in words merely report on feeling. We speak feeling. I remember when I finished it I really thought that – yes! – this time I had solved the great paradox: had created something that was singular to me, uniquely mine, bearing the imprint of my spirit only; and at the same time was made new again in every listener who was attentive and assented to its strange individuality and to its arrogance and indeed to its hesitancies. (Laughs.) Vanity. That’s what distance lends: clarity. You’ll learn that in time, too, Anezka. I promise you. (24–25, original emphasis)

Janáček’s comment underlines his point of view that time changes reality and that truth cannot be verbalised, let alone interpreted accurately by another character. Moreover, his statement reveals the composer’s deep-seated distrust that his artistic output can be directly related to and explained with his private experiences around the same time.

In Living Quarters, another example where a plot is entirely based on retrospection, Sir, an omniscient narrator and commentator, makes extensive use of his position as a godlike figure or mediator between the fictional characters and the audience. O’Brien claims that Sir “embodies a principle of coherence and integration, which is the opposite of the tendency toward dissolution and destruction in actual, so-called historical facts” (Friel 90). According to the stage directions at the beginning of the play, “Sir sits on his stool down left, his ledger closed on his knee” (Living 177). In his opening speech,
Sir informs the audience that the story is set in the “living-quarters of Commander Frank Butler” a few years back and that the characters now scattered all over the world, every so often in sudden moments of privacy, of isolation, of panic, […] remember that day, and in their imagination they reconvene here to reconstruct it – what was said, what was not said, what was done, what was not done, what might have been said, what might have been done; endlessly raking over those dead episodes that can’t be left at peace. (177)

Consequently, in this “retrospective of the events,” the key points of the plot are public knowledge that all the characters involved agree on, while quite a considerable part of the story concerning feelings or unspoken thoughts is known only by a minority, possibly one character (Countryman 11). Thus their memories may well overlap, but they do not completely match. However, the plot, part of the mind-boggling activity the characters are individually engaged in, is entirely in the hands of Sir, who is in total control of the ledger, “the key to an understanding of all that happened” (Living 177, original emphasis). Based on the thoughts and impressions that are included in the ledger, a public reality is created. Additional aspects or alternative views are silenced as if they had never existed. Aware of the delicate position in which he finds himself, Sir promises to strictly stick to the ledger and not to (ab)use his power to manipulate any scene:

[…] they have conceived me – the ultimate arbiter, the powerful and impartial referee, the final adjudicator, a kind of human Hansard who knows those tiny details and interprets them accurately. And yet no sooner do they conceive me with my authority and my knowledge than they begin flirting with the idea of circumventing me, of foxing me, of outwitting me. Curious, isn’t it? (177–178)

Not surprisingly, several characters feel misunderstood and disagree with their presentation. They believe that the power of the ledger (represented by Sir), which is superimposed on them, denies their private truths. At the very beginning of the play, Tom, in an attempt to elucidate how he is characterised in the ledger, challenges Sir (179). Helen, on the other hand, in her meta-theatrical comment objects to one scene sensing that her feelings and sensations are not captured truthfully:

It’s not right! […] It’s distorted – inaccurate. […] The whole atmosphere – three sisters, relaxed, happy, chatting in their father’s garden on a sunny afternoon. There was unease – I remember – there were shadows – we’ve got to acknowledge them. (188, original emphasis)

Frank, finally, complains to Sir informing him that he was not permitted to develop his point of view in the play and was therefore treated unfairly
Having spoken his mind, Frank begins to move offstage where he will shoot himself as prescribed by the ledger. Suddenly he “stops and looks around at the others – all isolated, all cocooned in their private thoughts. He opens his mouth as if he is about to address them, but they are so remote from him that he decides against it” (241). Frank’s comment, enhanced by the subsequent stage directions, implies that he has lost faith in communication and presentation; on a textual level, he is presented as isolated and estranged from the other members of the family. From a structural point of view, however, theledger forces him to act according to the plan and denies him the possibility to remedy the situation and address his children. This reading of the text is reinforced by Tom, who begs Sir to change the “corrupt ledger” and to prevent Frank from committing suicide (241). However, Sir ignores each of these entreaties; there is neither space for Frank’s private truth nor for Tom’s desire to alter the past. As the written word in the ledger triumphs over the characters’ hidden feelings, the audience is in the uneasy position of having to assess the truth; a truth that consists of what the audience sees (public knowledge) as well as of what the audience understands is kept concealed or secret from it (private knowledge).

In “Winners,” the first of two stories contained in Lovers, and in The Freedom of the City, a similar dramaturgical technique has been employed illustrating how widely public knowledge of an event can differ from a character’s private experience of the same incident. “Winners,” as indicated above, works on two different levels which are intertwined with one another; the love-story between the teenagers, Joe and Mag, is contrasted with the presumably official and neutral report investigating the deaths of the two young lovers. This official account is presented by a male and a female commentator whose reading is described as “impersonal, completely without emotion; their function is to give information. At no time must they reveal an attitude to their material” (11). The commentators’ rational and carefully phrased assumptions and speculations, which have been referred to by O’Brien as “a framework of generalized objectivity,” clash with the vivacity between Joe and Mag as they study for their final examinations at grammar school and anticipate their wedding and the birth of their first baby (Friel 61). The atmosphere between the two young lovers and their playful and emotional discussions reveal their genuine love for one another, but their communication also exposes the tensions and uncertainties that have arisen as a result of their personality clash as well as Mag’s unexpected teenage pregnancy. As their interests appear to differ considerably, their conversations tend to be monologic: as soon as one of the two characters starts to chit-chat, the other one’s responses turn rather monosyllabic as the character is seen to be deeply immersed in his or her study books. Conse-
quently, the audience witnesses a day between these two teenagers that is full of imagination, joy, dreams, sorrows, anxieties and arguments.

To antedate the fatal outcome of the teenagers’ study session this day, the commentators’ reports function as instances of prolepsis. Kosok rightly highlights that “the accidental death of Joe and Mag […] has been deliberately eliminated” because the relevant “information is provided before Joe and Mag enter; consequently their presence on stage does not lead up to their deaths” (161, original emphasis). As a result of choosing this technique of presentation, the narrative aspect in “Winners” is accentuated at the cost of action or suspense. To the audience, who has access to both the commentators’ public and the characters’ private truths, the reality of the report is strangely altered. Comparing the actual situation to the tone of the linguistic reproduction by the commentators, the audience painfully experiences what Foucault refers to as the power of discourse to create, or in this case distort, reality when he claims that speech can itself be the site as well as the “object” of “man’s conflicts” (“Discourse” 216). The public report, a reconstruction of the youngsters’ last hours before their deaths, utterly fails to capture the atmosphere of the day for it presents a reality based on pure facts. Moreover, the impersonal, factual language used in the report by no means does justice to the personality of the young people.

The use of prolepses and the presentation of conflicting public and private truths are elements which are further developed in *The Freedom of the City*, where three young people participate in a peaceful protest march for justice and equal rights. As the situation escalates, these people manage to escape the police by locking themselves into the mayor’s parlour in the Guildhall, one of the most meaningful symbols of British power in town. As in “Winners,” the staging of the actual events inside the mayor’s parlour alternates with the official reconstruction of the same situations by different characters, such as a member of the police or the media. According to the stage directions in the opening scene, “[t]he stage is in darkness except for the apron which is lit in cold blue. Three bodies lie grotesquely across the front of the stage” (*Freedom* 107). Throughout the play, a judge attempts to elucidate and comprehend what exactly happened.

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20 Grant rightly points out that in various plays “Friel exploits the dramatist’s power to deconstruct chronology” (20). From a chronological point of view, the main characters’ experiences in Friel’s plays could be regarded as analepses. However, as the focal point of Friel’s plays is on the juxtaposition of the main protagonists’ realities with other characters’ powerful reconstruction of the same events, much more emphasis is on the aspect of linguistic power to distort reality than on suspense and the chronological unravelling of the actual events. Consequently, I have decided to regard the main protagonists’ experiences in “Winners” (*Lovers*) as well as in *The Freedom of the City* as the main storylines. I will thus interpret those interceptive scenes in which other characters – in a postmodern manner – comment on what happened at a later stage in time as instances of prolepses.
and why the army shot these three young people as they were leaving the Guildhall. The judge’s insight will remain limited, whereas the audience once more has access to both public and private truths. It sees what happens inside the Guildhall and follows the subsequent hearing in court. Moreover, the audience can witness how – apart from this judge – a priest, a journalist, a balladeer and a sociologist also each draw their own conclusions about the situation and how they invent the truth that best suits their interests. Again, as in “Winners,” none of these interpretations has anything in common with the actual experience of the victims: “Neither the courts, the church, nationalist mythology, nor the mass media can find language that adequately recounts the trio’s experience or its significance” (O’Brien, Friel 81). Nonetheless, each interpretation is a manifestation of linguistic power to produce (a false) reality. Emmert rightly points out that, in The Freedom of the City, “the contrast between power and powerlessness […] will be shown to be based on a juxtaposition of reality and fiction” (156, my translation). Public knowledge or truth produced by those in power in the play is primarily subject to prejudice and generalisations, while the actual, true experience of the powerless, young people remains entirely hidden. Neither the representatives of the court, the church nor the university appear to care what really happened; the incident simply confirms their beliefs. Thus, those in power of the dominant discourse produce a truth – or, more concisely, a lie – that “has the purpose of preserving its own interests” (Deane, “Introduction” 18). Although the judge tries to choose his words carefully, he openly refers to the three people as “terrorists” (Freedom 134). Moreover, objectivity is shown to be beyond his reach when he states that “our only concern is with that period of time when these three people came together, seized possession of a civic building, and openly defied the security forces” (109, my emphasis). It is as if the victims had been found guilty before the hearing started: the judge’s expressions imply that the three people belonged and co-operated together, followed a plan (“seized possession”) and intended to provoke the army. In the end, the judge adopts a strong British point of view and concludes that:

[t]here would have been no deaths in Londonderry on February 10 had the ban on the march and the meeting been respected, and had the speakers on the platform not incited the mob to such a fever that a clash between the security forces and the demonstrators was almost inevitable. […] There is no reason to suppose that the soldiers would have opened fire if they had not been fired on first. […] I must accept the evidence […] that two of them at least […] used their arms. (168, my emphasis)

21 Original: […] wird sich zeigen, dass die Kontrastierung von Macht und Ohnmacht […] auf einer Gegenüberstellung von Realität und Fiktion basiert (156).
In spite of this official summary by the judge, the audience is aware that none of the three characters was armed when, according to the stage directions, they left with “their hands above their heads” (167). Moreover, at this point, the audience has already listened to the three characters describe what happened at the moment they left the Guildhall. Because Elizabeth (Lily) Doherty, Michael Hegarty and Adrian Casimir Fitzgerald (Skinner) voice their individual points of view, Friel, once more, allows three protagonists to “speak beyond the grave” at the beginning of Act Two (Grant 20). Michael, the first one granted the power to recall the moment of his own death, expresses his disbelief over what happened as he reveals his serious misjudgement of the situation: “[T]here was no question of their shooting. I knew they weren’t going to shoot. Shooting belonged to a totally different order of things” (Freedom 149). The moment he “heard the click of their rifle-bolts,” he was convinced that “a terrible mistake had been made” (149). Summarising his emotions, he concludes: “And this is how I died – in disbelief, in astonishment, in shock. It was a foolish way for a man to die” (150). Michael’s narrative is then contrasted with Lily’s and Skinner’s less naive accounts of the same experience; Lily immediately sensed that they would be killed when they “stepped outside the front door,” while Skinner tells the audience that, as soon as he realised that they had escaped to the mayor’s parlour for shelter and protection, he became aware of the final outcome and left the Guildhall fully prepared for what was going to happen (150). Unlike Lily, who claims to have “died of grief” and felt “overwhelmed by a tidal wave of regret […] that life had somehow eluded [her],” Skinner does not lament his demise (150). He explains that he had decided to die as he had lived: “in defensive flippancy” (150). Individualising the last few seconds before their deaths, the voices of the powerless victims assume “greater authority than all the posturing of the various external witnesses” (Grant 20). Juxtaposing the characters’ private experiences with the public interpretations, therefore, produces great tension and lays open the mechanisms of power used by those who are given the right to verbally express or produce reality (Foucault, “Truth and Power” 131). Although the feelings evoked by the three victims’ accounts differ substantially, the audience’s sympathy, as in all of Friel’s plays, belongs to those whose private truth is repressed or silenced by powerful public opinion.

A slight variation of the technique observed in The Freedom of the City is presented in Faith Healer and Molly Sweeney, where the audience always tends to empathise with the character currently delivering his private view of the past events. Whereas Friel introduced an extra character to express the private self of Public Gar in Philadelphia, Here I Come! the ordinary, public view of characters is abandoned altogether in Faith Healer and Molly Sweeney; the plays concentrate exclusively on the characters’ private sphere. The two plays
radically break with traditional communicative patterns; any direct dialogue between the characters has been abolished, symbolising, on the level of the plot, what FitzGibbon aptly describes as “the inescapability of existential isolation” (79) or what Emmert refers to as “the theme of malfunctioning communication as well as the inaccessibility and alienation of the individual” (81, my translation).22 In this sense, Faith Healer and Molly Sweeney are, according to DeVinney, two plays which completely “replac[e] action with narration” (111). Instead of conversing amongst each other, the characters speak only to themselves or address the audience. Thus, DeVinney further indicates that the “meaning [of the events] resides not in what actually happens but in how they are narrated by and to the people who participated in them” (111). Therefore, whenever a character’s utterance or monologue is overheard by the audience or whenever a character actually attempts to turn the audience into his or her ally or into an “anchor to the logic of her own psychological narrative,” as the main protagonist does in The Loves of Cass McGuire, the listener is invariably turned into an insider who has to assess the information given by comparing it to those characters who are less communicative or have not verbally expressed a particular issue (Higgins 16).

Both plays centre round the life of a married couple, complemented by a manager in Faith Healer and an ophthalmologist in Molly Sweeney. In both cases, one major event is talked about, namely the failed homecoming of the artist Frank Hardy in Faith Healer, which culminates in his being murdered in Ballybeg, and the eye operation in Molly Sweeney, which deprives the protagonist of her independent and confident life and ends with her withdrawing to her own space where “fact – fiction – fantasy – reality” seem to mingle (Molly 67). As the characters grant each other access neither to their private space nor to their thoughts or feelings, their “emotional and, indeed experiential” isolation becomes, on the dramaturgical level, “the core of his [i.e. Friel’s] theatrical form” (DeVinney 112 and 116). Instead, the silence or the complete lack of communication between the characters is replaced by the private contemplation of their own memories which are presented in monologic form.23 The characters’ memories, as they are expressed on stage, are enacted as

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22 Original: [.. .] die Thematik der gestörten Kommunikation und der Isolation und Entfremdung des Individuums [...] (81).

23 In an extra note to his stage directions in Faith Healer, Friel refers to the characters as “monologist[s]” (331). According to Nichols, the term ‘monologue’ is “not […] restricted to a specific genre but rather a point of view,” although there are “clear connections to drama” (799). Moreover, a ‘monologue’ is typically related to “the idea of a person speaking alone, with or without an audience,” thereby stressing “the subjective and personal element in speech” (798 and 799). Like most critics, I have decided to follow Friel’s example and refer to the speeches of his characters by using the umbrella term ‘monologue,’ despite the fact that any character’s utterances could also be described as a ‘soliloquy,’ a “form of monologue in
“reconstructions [...] whose inaccuracy with regard to the historical actuality is caused by subjectivity and the axiomatic unreliability of human recollection” (Brunkhorst 228–229, my translation). In other words, objective truth is sacrificed at the expense of unlimited subjectivity and individual versions of truth. This fictionalising of truth, however, at times unveils a – in the Greek sense of the word – tragic conditio humana: although the characters do not intend to misinterpret or equivocate situations by publishing their private and, at times, even repressed version of truth, due to their cultural prejudice or their limited insight, they cannot always prevent this from happening.

Listening to the characters’ private sorrows or worries as well as to their interpretations of the other characters and their actions, the audience is more informed than each individual character. Based on what has already been said, the audience witnesses how these three characters misunderstand and misinterpret each other since they appear to be unable to communicate or share privateness with one another. Although their accounts are characterised by perfect honesty, their realities or perceptions do not always match. Indeed, their perspectives produce a certain degree of dissonance. Moreover, the fact that the audience is better informed than the characters on stage leads to an extreme case of discrepant awareness; completely unaware of what the other characters have told the audience, the attempt to clarify one’s own standpoint is intensified.

Enforcing their point of view, the characters often speculate on motivations or ideas of the others, thereby illustrating that “people behave according to the way they perceive the world, not simply on the basis of the way the world is. Knowing how the decision-makers see the world [...] will help to explain and predict their behaviour” (Sack 95). Typically, the statements about another character primarily reveal something about the speaker’s own personality. When Mr Rice in Molly Sweeney, for instance, ridicules Frank Sweeney, he calls him “Mr Autodidact” and describes him as “an ebullient fellow; full of energy and enquiry and the indiscriminate enthusiasms of the self-taught. And convinced, as they usually are, that his own life was of compelling interest” (25 and 16). Decrying Frank, the ophthalmologist cannot avoid coming across as rather snobbish and disagreeable himself. Frank, on the other hand, also admits that he “really never did warm” to Mr Rice, and he mischievously adds: “No wonder his wife cleared off with another man” (20). Although Frank regrets this statement as soon as it which an actor speaks alone on stage” representing “a character’s attempt to verbalize his thoughts, consciously or distractedly [...]” (799).

24 Original: […] Rekonstruktionen [...], deren Ungenauigkeit gegenüber der historischen Tatsächlichkeit durch die Subjektivität und grundsätzliche Unzuverlässigkeit menschlicher Rückbesinnung bedingt ist (228–229).
has been uttered and he immediately tries to make up for it by adding “[n]o, no, no, I don’t mean that; I really don’t mean that; that’s a rotten thing to say; sorry; I shouldn’t have said that,” the damage of presenting himself as well as Mr Rice in an unfavourable light is irreparable (20). Therefore, although there is no mediator in these two pieces of drama, the aspect of power is by no means abandoned. The different voices are engaged in “power struggles over reality,” and in these two plays in which “[n]arration is the action; the conflict is between words and the people who believe in them” (DeVinney 111 and 115).

In these linguistic battles, the order in which the speakers address the audience becomes particularly meaningful; the first and last thoughts that are expressed have a tremendous impact. Not surprisingly, in both plays, the first and the last speeches belong to the main protagonist. In their first speeches, Molly Sweeney and Frank Hardy set the atmosphere, and as their ideas are consistent in themselves, they are taken for granted. Incongruities between the different accounts, such as whether Grace and Frank Hardy, the couple in *Faith Healer*, were married and what family members’ deaths are for ever associated with Kinlochbervie, gradually arise with the different characters’ statements which undermine or negate what was taken for fact up to a certain point in the play. As the audience listens to Molly Sweeney’s childhood memories, it comes as a certain surprise that both Mr Rice and her husband Frank express their view that Molly had nothing to lose by undergoing eye surgery. Consequently, despite each character’s perfect honesty, intimacy or secrecy between the characters and the audience are repeatedly shattered when what was said before is weakened by another character’s description of the same event which he or she experienced or interpreted quite differently. Whenever the audience is made aware of multiple points of view because some new information is revealed, the various accounts have to be carefully assessed in order to create a coherent picture of what most likely happened. Furthermore, after every monologue, the audience is asked to reassess their judgement of the different characters on stage. Hence, a sense of definite truth cannot be constructed easily; once more, the aspect of absolute truth remains a difficult concept in this respect. In the end, a vague feeling of sympathy and confidentiality is steered towards the main protagonists because their last thoughts are no longer contradicted; however, due to the experience of constantly being presented with different views and interpretations, the audience’s sense of empathy remains subject to doubt.

Apart from the order in which the characters express their thoughts, another reason that influences what the audience thinks of the individual characters in these two plays can be found in the type of monologue that they deliver. In his study of *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquy*, Hirsh distinguishes between “[a]udience-addressed speech,” “[s]elf-addressed speech” and
the “[i]nterior monologue” (13). Claiming that these three forms “have radically different functions and effects,” he defines an audience-addressed speech as an utterance made by “[a] character who addresses an audience of hundreds or perhaps thousands of people” and thus “engages in an extremely public form of behaviour” (13 and 14, original emphasis). If a character “addresses only himself,” he or she “engages in one of the most private forms of outward behaviour,” while each of these forms, in turn, “fundamentally differs from an interior monologue, which represents purely internal experience rather than outward behavior” (14, original emphasis). Adapting Hirsh’s distinction to Friel’s use of monologues helps to differentiate the degree of publicness or privateness expressed in the various characters’ speeches. While none of the speeches in Friel’s plays can actually be described as an interior monologue, it is the monologues by the two female figures, Molly Sweeney and Grace Hardy in particular, which remind the audience of Joyce’s last chapter in *Ulysses*. Not only does Molly Bloom lend her first name to one of these characters, her unspoken fantasies, worries and thoughts closely resemble the mostly self-contained reflections of the two female figures in *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*.

Grace Hardy, for instance, never explicitly acknowledges the audience. Throughout her monologue and consistent with her frame of mind, she appears to be engaged in a discussion with herself when, according to the stage directions, “[w]e discover [her] on stage […] She is in early middle-age. Indifferent to her appearance and barely concealing her distraught mental state” (*Faith* 341). In fact, she starts her monologue in the same way as her husband: by “reciting the names of all those dying Welsh villages” in which he performed what he calls his art of “faith healing. A craft without an apprenticeship, a ministry without responsibility, a vocation without a ministry” (343 and 333):

> **GRACE.** *(Eyes closed)*
> Aberarder, Aberayron, Llangranog, Llangurig, Abergorlech, Abergynolwyn, Penllech, Pencader, Llandefeilog, Llanerchymedd… (341)

While Frank argues that he kept repeating those names to himself “just for the mesmerism, the sedation” and intended to release the tension he felt before a performance, this mantra has remained the “most persistent and most agonizing” of all of Grace’s memories (332 and 341). As her husband’s constant reiteration of those words regularly resulted in blotting her out of his life, Grace believes he recited those names in order to exercise his power of hurting her:
GRACE. And then, for him, I didn’t exist. Many, many, many times I didn’t exist for him. But before a performance this exclusion – no, it wasn’t an exclusion, it was an erasion – this erasion was absolute; he obliterated me. Me who tended him, humoured him, nursed him, sustained him – who debauched myself for him. Yes. That’s the most persistent memory. Yes. And when I remember him like that in the back of the van, God how I hate him again –

Kinlochbervie, Inverbervie,
Inverdruie, Invergordon,
Badachroo, Kinlochewe,
Ballantrae, Inverkeithing,
Cawdor, Kirkconnel,
Plaidy, Kirkinner…
(Quietly, almost dreamily) Kinlochbervie’s where the baby’s buried, two miles south of the village, in a field on the left-hand side of the road as you go north. (344)

At the time of her speech, Grace is traumatised by Frank’s death in Ballybeg and the stillbirth she suffered in the tiny village of Kinlochbervie. Although she is said to, physically, be “living in digs” in London now, her monologue reveals that, from a mental standpoint, she inhabits a very private world of her own as her former plights have left her totally paralysed (369). Although Grace refers to Frank’s listing of those Welsh names as her “most persistent and most agonizing” memory, in her monologue she tends to lapse into reciting and mesmerising those places whenever she is completely overwhelmed by her highly emotional memories, just as her husband used to do before his performances. Contrary to the pain and desperation experienced by Frank’s death and her stillbirth, Grace seems familiar with the feelings evoked by the sound of those Welsh names; they are a well-known territory for her and easier to cope with than the deaths of her beloved ones. Moreover, trying to convince herself that she is “getting stronger” and “becoming more controlled,” she is determined to recapture those “restricted memories” (341 and 342). Teddy’s monologue, which directly follows Grace’s account, however, shatters this positive outlook on her future; in fact, he informs the audience that he had “to identify” Grace Hardy when she died “from an overdose of sleeping-tablets” (369).

The atmosphere in Molly Sweeney’s monologues does not differ greatly from the one established by Grace Hardy; after all, Molly Sweeney has also “moved away” from her husband and her friends and has withdrawn into a “borderline country” where she, in her own words, feels “at home,” or at least, “…at ease” (Molly 59 and 67). Nevertheless, contrary to Grace’s speech, there are short instances in Molly’s monologues where she addresses the audience directly despite the rather private behaviour during her entire disclosures. By doing so, she acknowledges that she is aware of their presence and that she is
not just talking to herself trying to come to terms with her current situation. Twice she repeats the phrase: “I can’t tell you [i.e. the audience] the joy I got from swimming” (24). Recalling the night before the operation, she remembers how Frank Sweeney stopped her from inviting Mr Rice to their party. Agreeing with Frank, she resumes: “Imagine the embarrassment that would have been” (30). These instances in which Molly vaguely acknowledges the audience in her speech and in which she indirectly displays a need to make her private truth public, however, have very little in common with the male voices whose monologues are far from accidentally overheard by the audience.

The men’s speeches could be defined as true linguistic performances. Their interactions with the audience show that on the theatrical level “performance is […] understood as the narration/description of events, rather than the acting out of them” (DeVinney 117). Frank Sweeney’s language, representative of the male protagonists in this context, is not only characterised by his chatty tone and an excessive usage of adjectives expressing emotions. In his monologues, he also tries to establish a particularly strong bond with the audience by asking it questions or answering its imagined ones:

One of the most fascinating discoveries I made when I was in the cheese business – well, perhaps not fascinating, but interesting, definitely interesting – one of the more interesting discoveries I made – this was long before I met Molly – for three and a half years I had a small goat farm on the island of Inis Beag off the Mayo coast – no, no, not a farm for small goats – a farm for ordinary goats – well, extraordinary goats as a matter of fact because I imported two piebald Iranian goats – and I can’t tell you how complicated and expensive that whole process was […] – they couldn’t endure the Mayo winters with the result that I had to keep them indoors and feed them for six months of the year – in Mayo the winter lasts for six months for God’s sake – at least it did on Inis Beag. And of course that threw my whole financial planning into disarray. As you can imagine. […] But I was telling you about – what? The interesting discovery! Yes! Well, perhaps not an interesting discovery in any general sense but certainly of great interest to anybody who hopes to make cheese from the milk of imported Iranian goats […]. So what, you may ask. (Molly 18–19, my emphasis)

Engaging in a conversation with the audience reveals Frank’s emotional need to overcome the prevailing atmosphere of the above-mentioned “existential isolation” among the characters on stage (FitzGibbon 79). At the same time, Frank Sweeney stages himself as an easily excitable, energetic, passionate fellow who is always fiercely committed to a current project at its outset as Mr Rice indeed indicates when he describes him in his first monologue. Frank considers himself exceptionally experienced as a result of having read numerous theories and magazine articles as well as having executed a number of outlandish schemes such as keeping Iranian goats on Inis Beag or enduring “three winters in Norway to ensure the well-being of whales” (Molly 16). In
O’Brien’s eyes, “Frank is a self-appointed provider of alternative brave new worlds” as his “nature is that of the man with the plan. His past projects reveal erratic enthusiasms, and have the contradictory consistency of causing dislocation by attempting to do good” (“The Late Plays” 94). Having engaged in and later abandoned, what Roche calls, a variety of “get-rich-quick schemes, most of which are as implausible as they are unlikely to succeed” (Theatre 194), Frank is completely unable to channel his energy and abilities. In fact, he is fully aware of his failure according to public standards: “Middle-aged. No skill. No job. No prospect of a job. Two rooms above Kelly’s cake-shop. And not exactly Rudolf Valentino” (Molly 36). Presenting himself as a man of action to the audience, however, allows Frank Sweeney to cope with his inferiority complex. In fact, he seems to hope that by being associated with these strange and unusual projects his life, of which “Molly is his grandest scheme to date” (Roche, Theatre 194), he himself will gain meaning and his environment will regard him as “interesting” or “fascinating” (Molly 18). His linguistic performance on stage, therefore, takes on an identity-building function, as it symbolises his longing for attention and recognition, both of which he feels have been denied to him so far. Form and content – dramaturgical device and plot – merge again.

In Friel’s play *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* the exposition and the end of the play are set in a sanatorium, where the main protagonist Tom Connolly visits his daughter Bridget, who is afflicted with some “nervous trouble” (40). According to Roche, “[t]he two scenes between father and daughter that frame the play” closely resemble the dramaturgical setup in *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney* and “also provide the most powerful sub-text to everything that occurs in between” (Theatre 200). “[F]lailing about and roaring like a stuck bull,” the young woman actually had to be moved to the dark and soundproof basement one hour before her father’s arrival (*Give* 15). When Tom first enters, he therefore “gazes at his daughter for a long time, his face without expression” (11). Meanwhile, Bridget is said to be sitting on

*an iron bed with an uncovered mattress; no sheets, blankets, pillows. [...] Her arms are wrapped around her knees. She is wearing an institutional nightdress and dressing-gown. Her mouth is open and her eyes are wide and she stares vacantly in front of her. Slowly and ceaselessly she rocks herself backwards and forwards.* (11)

Having studied her for a while, Tom composes himself and addresses Bridget “with almost excessive enthusiasm” (11):

**TOM.** Well! Who is this elegant young woman? What entrancing creature is this ‘with forehead of ivory and amethyst eyes and cold, immortal hands’? It’s not Miss Bridget Connelly, is it? It most certainly is my Bridget
Connelly, beautiful and mysterious as ever. And what’s this? Her auburn hair swept back over her left ear? Now, that’s new! And just a little bit saucy! And very, very, becoming! The new night-nurse did it? Well, the new night-nurse has style! We’ll make her your official hairdresser from now on. How are you, my darling? Give your father a big kiss. (11, original emphasis)

Although Tom tries to have an intimate conversation with Bridget once “[n]obody can hear a word [they] say,” his speech is, in reality, a monologue in which he discloses private knowledge and shares some secrets with her (12). As Bridget never responds to his speech, Tom is forced to envisage her comments and answer the questions she might ask if she were able to. By giving Bridget an update of what is going on at home, Tom – indirectly – also informs the audience who finds itself in the same position as Bridget; rather than being present when the actions take place, they all depend on Tom’s narrative. Thus, excluded from the crucial moments and decisions in Tom’s life, Bridget and the audience are at a disadvantage without his explanations. To be involved and to be able to understand what is happening, he needs to inform both parties.

Since Tom’s relation to Bridget is characterised by confidentiality and love, the members of the audience, who overhear the way he addresses his daughter, are indirectly treated as if they belonged to the family; in this dark and cool room where, as Roche highlights, “the writer can go to create” and “secrets can be disclosed,” I would argue that intimate and private knowledge is, indeed, readily shared (Theatre 200). Apart from beholding Bridget’s situation, the audience is introduced to “totally transformed” and slightly odd grandparents who have appeared “out of the blue” and are planning on staying with Bridget’s parents over night (Give 13 and 12). However, the fantastical elements which Tom weaves into the descriptions of Bridget’s grandparents so that they resemble “an elaborate children’s story” slightly undermine his position as a reliable narrator (Roche, Theatre 200). Tom’s news about Bridget’s talented mother, who is occasionally “off in some private world of her own,” as well as his serious difficulties in writing and selling his novels prove much more trustworthy and realistic (Give 13). Thus, long before any dialogue between Tom and his wife, Bridget’s grandparents or Tom’s friends occurs, an atmosphere of privateness and a strong sense of intimacy have been established in the play.

Throughout his speech, Tom’s pain at having no access to the world of his daughter and his uncertainty whether he, a professional writer, is succeeding in reaching her with his narratives are revealed by his words. O’Brien rightly concludes that “[i]t’s not alone his work or his archive that he [i.e. Tom]’s faithful to, it is also Bridget, who in her inability to respond to his imagination calls its value into question” (“The Late Plays” 97). In this context, Bridget
might well be one reason for Tom’s struggle to finish the book he has been writing for five years.

At the very end of the play, Tom returns to Bridget on his “weekly duty” (Give 29). In fact, he is the only character in this play who regularly summons the courage to face up to his daughter’s deplorable situation and to bravely confront the “silent realm beyond language (and logic) and so beyond description” which Bridget represents and in which “[t]he unsayable is not said but […] is nevertheless manifest” (Friel, “Extracts” 167). Apart from mentioning that her auburn hair is “swept back over her right ear” this time, Tom uses the exact same words to open the conversation with Bridget as when he first visited her in Act One (Give 82, original emphasis). He then proceeds to tell her – and the audience – how the financial and personal problems, which the play centred round and which had partly arisen because of Bridget’s severe illness, have meanwhile been solved (81–84). Using the same phrases as before could be seen to symbolise that even a professional writer is at a loss for words when he has to come to terms with his daughter’s serious mental condition (22). However, from a more positive standpoint, it could also be argued that Tom has actually managed to turn these meetings with his daughter into a ritual, thereby seeking some familiarity and intimacy in spite of her aloofness and her being in a state “beyond knowing” (79).

Still, as both the audience and Bridget occupy recipient positions in Give Me Your Answer, Do! the situation in which they find themselves is ambivalent. Since Tom is emotionally drawn towards his daughter, there is, on the one hand, a sense of involvement. On the other hand, there is also a sense of exclusion because the audience and Bridget are not present when important decisions are taken. Consequently, both parties need to be informed afterwards and therefore entirely depend on Tom’s point of view. However, depending on one view exclusively – due to the dramaturgical constellation in a play – has frequently been shown to serve as a source of uneasiness in this chapter as it tends to provide the audience with more doubts and questions than with definite answers.

Thus, having discussed different dramaturgical techniques which Friel experiments with in his oeuvre, I would, in conclusion, claim that all of those approaches serve to illustrate the playwright’s great discomfort with absolute

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25 In their essay “‘Singing of Human Unsuccess’: Brian Friel’s Portraits of the Artist” Bertha and Morse paint a most loving picture of Tom as a father and artist indicating that Bridget “is the most difficult because the most unresponsive of any of Tom’s ‘readers’” (28). Nevertheless, I agree with their statement that Tom, by taking on this special challenge and by “persistently trying, against all odds, to awaken the human within his daughter, becomes one of Friel’s most arresting images of the true artist who must employ his talent even when he knows there is no rational possibility of change – that the situation is truly hopeless” (28).