

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!



by

Brian Friel

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NYNEX FAMILY SERIES STUDY GUIDE

Philadelphia, Here I Come!

by
Brian Friel

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may already know. We've provided some of the definitions you may need. The ones that are missing are up to you to look up.

scullery - a small room next to the kitchen, in which dish washing and other kitchen chores are done.

tea - served in the late afternoon as one of the day's full meals

bloody - swear word popular in the British Isles

bugger - a contemptible or disreputable

Ballybeg - the mythical town in which Mr. Friel places many of his plays

curlew - a type of bird

snipe - another type of bird

Aran sweater - heavy cabled sweaters originally knit on the islands of Aran off the west coast of Ireland

pound -

quid -

skinflint - a person who is very cheap

yarning - to tell an entertaining story or series of stories

Nicodemus - one of the men who helped St. John bury Jesus

bagatelle -

Dauphiness -

Mallorca - an island off the east coast of Spain in the west Mediterranean Sea

sore hoke -

aul sod -

aul prestige -

Lough Derg -

tethered - to be tied up or restricted

wee baby - small baby

ocelot - a nocturnal wildcat

maligned - to be spoken of badly

Strabane -

harem -

cascara sagrada -

desist - to stop

Rudolph Valentino - one of the greatest silent movie screen idols

impetuous - impulsive and passionate

niggling - petty, especially in a nagging or annoying way

the pension - welfare in Ireland

the studs -

the pitch -

lorry - truck

scutched - to have separated what is valuable from what is useless

stirk - a cow or bull between one and two years old

furtive - with hidden motives or purposes, shifty

bald pates - bald heads

affinity - a natural attraction or feeling of kinship

thon -

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ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: BRIAN FRIEL

Brian Friel was born in the town of Omagh, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland in 1929. As his father before him, the young Mr. Friel went into teaching and at the age of 25 married Ann Morrisson, a girl he had known since he was 16. In the early 1950's, Mr. Friel began writing short stories for *The New Yorker* and, in the late 50's, radio plays for the BBC. It was not until approximately 1960 that Mr. Friel gave up teaching to become a full-time writer. In 1964 he had his first great success as a playwright with the play **Philadelphia, Here I Come!**

Philadelphia, Here I Come! was written after Brian Friel had lived for six months in Minneapolis in 1953 to observe the creation of the now world famous Guthrie Theatre. Tyrone Guthrie, an Irish friend of Mr. Friel's, had invited the playwright to witness the implementation of Mr. Guthrie's new ideas about how theatre should be presented. Mr. Friel returned to Ireland with his own new and enthusiastic vision of theatre. This vision became **Philadelphia, Here I Come!**. Since then, Mr. Friel has continued to write and find great success with such plays as **The Loves of Cass McGuire, The Freedom of the City, Volunteers, Aristocrats** and **Dancing at Lughnasa**.

Brian Friel is not only considered one of Ireland's greatest living playwrights, he is also considered one of the greatest English-speaking playwrights.

Anne Friel, Mr. Friel's wife, is the first one to see any of her husband's plays. According to Mrs. Friel, the playwright will not change a word for anyone, not even for her. Brian Friel believes that the script for a play is the same as the musical score for a symphony. Would the composer change a musical passage because the flute player was having a problem with it? No! Similarly, a playwright should not be asked to change dialogue because one of the actors finds it difficult. According to Mr. Friel, the actor must find a way to solve his problem without changing the work of the writer.

Brian Friel has lived all of his life within a 50 mile radius of where he was born. He and his wife raised their five children within this area and he cannot imagine living anywhere else. Mr. Friel is a very slow typist and writes all of his plays out by hand, just as writers have done for centuries past. Because the position of the director of a play is a relatively new one (up until 100 years ago there were no directors, only stage managers and actors), Mr. Friel questions the necessity for directors. He feels that if the writer has done his job properly the actors will understand what they must do on stage.

Given all of this information it is interesting to note that almost all of Mr. Friel's plays are concerned with breaking away from traditions and daily routines. Mr. Friel's entire life has been steeped in tradition and yet his plays often denounce these stifling patterns. He has also written

about the loss of tradition and how that loss destroys the structure that supports life.

Mr. Friel's plays are concerned with the nature of being in exile. Characters find themselves set apart from the world in which they grew up -- by time, by outlook, by ambition, by disappointment. These characters will sometimes further banish themselves by traveling far away to Philadelphia, or even to Africa.

Mr. Friel feels that exile can take place on both an emotional and physical level. Although he has never moved far from Ireland, he understands how supportive one's culture can be in getting through the day without wondering what the next step is going to be. We are all comforted by familiarity, but at the same time we may also want to escape daily routines.

Perhaps this is why Mr. Friel's writing has become so popular in Europe and America. Although he writes almost exclusively about a small mythical town called Ballybeg, the human dilemmas Mr. Friel dramatizes are universal. (Situating not far from where he grew up, Ballybeg, or in the original Gaelic, the native language of Ireland, "baile beag" means small town.) Mr. Friel clearly writes about the characters and issues of *Small Town, Anywhere-You-Come-From*, even if it is a small town in a big city.

While watching the Public and Private sides struggle within *Gar*, we recognize the protagonist's transition

from dependent adolescence to independent adulthood.

But Mr. Friel's vision transcends the mere depiction of his protagonists' growing pains. His plays inspire audiences to consider the larger social issues reflected in this rite of passage. He offers a compassionate picture of the generations who have accepted the traditional way of doing things and the painful silence in which they have suffered. He shows us the lack of opportunity found in a society that has stagnated and refused to make room for new ways. Without opportunity, Mr. Friel demonstrates that younger generations can either destroy themselves by accepting their inability to achieve anything or that they can detach themselves from their traditional world.

Audiences at a Brian Friel play can observe and consider the gap between individuals who must remain in the old world and those who must depart. This gap usually arises from an inability to communicate. This certainly is a universal problem that often exists between generations.

Despite great successes in the world of the theatre, Mr. Friel refuses to allow his plays to be made into movies. He distrusts film-makers almost as much as politicians. This is the basis for two other contradictions in Mr. Friel's life. In 1987 Mr. Friel was appointed and agreed to serve in the Irish Senate. But according to a colleague he attended sessions rarely and spoke almost not at all. And despite his refusal to film his

plays he did allow one play to be adapted to the screen because he admired the work of the director.

In 1980 Mr. Friel, along with Stephen Rea (an Irish actor who has become world famous for his roles in movies), founded a small theatre called Field Day. It is at this theatre that all of Mr. Friel's plays have had their first performances. Field Day tours the plays to small towns all over Northern and Southern of Ireland. In addition, Field Day publishes the work of writers from all over the world on subjects having to do with modern day problems and conflicts.

When asked what the theatre means to him Mr. Friel has replied, "What has the theatre meant to me? I see the theatre as a neighborhood pub where the truth can be spoken." For those of us who live in the United States "neighborhood pub" might be translated to mean our local "club house," where we feel comfortable and important. It should be a place where we feel confident about our thoughts and ideas. We hope that you can feel this way about the Roundabout.

SOME BACKGROUND

Philadelphia, Here I Come! was first produced at the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin as part of a festival of new plays in 1964. Brian Friel wrote the play after he and his family had lived in Minneapolis for six months. During his visit to the United States, he watched Tyrone Guthrie start one of the country's most famous and successful regional theaters, the

Guthrie Theatre. The experience inspired Mr. Friel to explore a whole new type of playwrighting.

Philadelphia, Here I Come! proved to be a groundbreaking experience for Mr. Friel and also for Irish drama. After it moved to London and then New York this play made Brian Friel an international success. The play was written at a time of tremendous political upheaval, and so it appropriately portrays the turbulence of a young man's life. It also utilizes a new dramatic structure.

In order to depict the inner conflict boiling within the young hero Garth O'Donnell, Mr. Friel created two dramatic characters played by two separate actors. Although this device had been used before, it had not been employed usefully or successfully. While everyone else in the play is only portrayed by his or her public self, the audience is privy to every conflict and self-recrimination that runs through Gar's head. The result is a roller coaster of internal dramatic action. This dramatic device and the focus on the young man's turmoil spoke directly to international audiences who were living through similar conflicts.

After the play was produced in Dublin, it moved to London where the original cast of Irish actors experienced an initially cool response. Then, in 1964, **Philadelphia, Here I Come!** opened on Broadway. The play was a hit. Donnell Donnelly, the actor who originated the role of the Private gar, said that the warmth and

enthusiasm of American audiences were a much needed support to the Irish cast. In the years since, this play has become a favorite all across the United States, as well in Europe, and even in England.

During its first run here in New York, the producers took an entire page to quote all the rave reviews. It is fascinating to know that every single quote, and there were quite a few, mentioned the brilliance of the play. Today good reviews don't often focus on the writer; they focus on how the play makes the audience feel. Brian Friel deserves the credit. He is indeed a creator of dramatic literature as well as of theatrical and dramatic scenarios.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE: TWO ACTORS PLAY ONE CHARACTER

How different are your public actions from your private thoughts? Usually our public and private selves are very different. Our private judgments are often harsher and more rash than we would ever dare to admit in public. Brian Friel focuses on the dramatic counterpoint between the Public and Private selves of Gareth O'Donnell by allowing two actors to personify each self independently.

Writing the Public words and the conflicting Private words of Gareth must have been a challenge for Mr. Friel. It must have been like being asked to describe what is happening in front of you and behind you at the very same instant. Such an assignment can be followed only by constant whirling back and forth between the two opposing sides of

the same point. It might give a playwright quite a headache.

If writing the parts for Gareth's two selves was difficult, playing these two parts must be even harder. It is normal for an actor to struggle to get inside the thoughts and motivations of his character. Usually the actor must go through this struggle alone, with only the words of the playwright and the guidance of the director to help him find the right path. To a large extent, the actor must struggle alone. In order to meet the challenge of creating a character, each actor depends on the work of the other actors in the cast and yet it remains his own lonely responsibility to master his role.

Public and Private Gar present a peculiar challenge to the actor. Dividing one character into two, forces two actors to coordinate their interpretation of the character. Together they must attempt to meet the challenge of creating the character of Gareth. While this might eliminate the loneliness of creative work, it can also slow down the process, much in the way a three-legged race slows down two people who have one leg tied together. Two people, with different personalities and ways of looking at the world, and perhaps even different interpretations of Gar, must cooperate so perfectly as to appear unified.

In this case, the actor playing Private Gar is deprived of direct contact with any of the other actors who are on the stage with him. Mr. Friel clearly states in his stage directions that no

one in the play (including Public Gar) ever looks or talks directly to Private Gar. At the same time, the actor playing Public Gar must appear silently involved in the ongoing action.

The two actors in the current Roundabout production of **Philadelphia, Here I Come!**, Jim True (Public) and Robert Sean Leonard (Private), have worked hard to create a Gareth whom the audience can see as a finely tuned, though conflicted young man. Both actors started work on their parts long before rehearsals began, by reading other plays by Mr. Friel, reading about life in Ireland and also by reading various novels about young men in conflict. Often, an actor will find inspiration in a piece of writing that may seem to have nothing to do with his role. Once in rehearsal this "homework", coupled with long discussions with the director, blossoms into the performance you will see when you attend the production.

It will be interesting to discuss your reaction to the two Gar's. While you are watching the play you might try comparing the way this character reacts to the world with your responses to the older characters in the play and your opinions of what Gar is doing with his life. If you are able to do all of this, the discussion after the show will be fantastic!

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Madge: a woman in her sixties who keeps house for S.B. O'Donnell and his son Gareth. She is extremely

energetic, efficient and loving. Although she has never been married, she loves children and has raised Gareth whose mother died days after he was born. Despite the drudgery of her life, Madge remains a steadfast and strong woman.

Gareth O'Donnell-Public: a young man of 25 who is insecure and intimidated by the rigid values of his small town of Ballybeg. He works for his father's dry goods store and his wages are lower than those of Madge the housekeeper. While he loves his father, he is totally unable to communicate with him. This inability makes him so angry that he ends up believing that he hates his father.

Private: This is Gareth's private self. Unlike the public Gareth, Private is very talkative and sure of himself. Private Gareth is given to telling everyone off, including himself. He is extremely critical of people. Private Gareth spends a great deal of time questioning himself. Private Gareth also tries to bridge the distance between himself and his father. He is afraid of going and afraid of staying.

S.B. O'Donnell: Gareth's sixty-something dad. S.B. married Gareth's mother when he was 43 and she was only 19. He worshipped her and loves his son. S.B. is a man of habit. Age has taken the spark and flexibility out of his character. He follows his routine because he knows no other way, not because he lacks heart. He doesn't understand why Gareth is so distant and cold

and he is frightened of trying to run his store without his son.

Kate Doogan: the young girl with whom Gareth is in love. He and Kate hoped to get married but Gareth never had the courage to ask Senator Doogan for Kate's hand. Kate loves Gareth but her parents expect her to marry Frances King, a young doctor whose social and financial position is much greater than Gareth's.

Senator Doogan: a man in his forties who has been successful within the social system of the small town of Ballybeg. He is a gentle sort of snob who means to be "one of the people" but who carefully steers his daughter away from marrying anyone not in the "upper class."

Master Boyle: the town School Master. Also in his sixties, Master Boyle has been completely defeated by a life of failed dreams and small minds. A man of intelligence and a bit of a snob, Master Boyle refuses to admit his defeat. He hides from himself by drinking and by telling lies about fantastic job offers from universities abroad. No one believes his lies, but no one contradicts him either. He is always broke and always borrows money that he cannot pay back.

Lizzy Sweeney: a woman between fifty-five and sixty in age. Lizzy Sweeney is one of Gareth's mother's sisters. She is his aunt and the relative who has made it out of Ballybeg by moving with her husband to Philadelphia. Lizzy is a warm, loving woman who talks too much and behaves hysterically. Her

life is quite lonely. Although she fled Ballybeg's lack of opportunity, she also separated herself from her whole family. She is completely frustrated by her inability to bear children. Now she is desperate for Gareth to come to Philadelphia so she can take care of him.

Con Sweeney: Lizzy's husband. A patient man who lets Lizzy do most of the talking.

Ben Burton: is the only friend Lizzy and Con have made in Philadelphia. He travels with them when they return to Ballybeg to visit Gareth. It was Ben Burton who helped Lizzy and Con get settled in the "new world." He seems to be a decent sort of fellow.

Ned, Tom, Joe: these are Gareth's friends. They are a group of boys in their mid-twenties who have neither a future nor a direction. Although they constantly brag about their sexual exploits, everyone knows that nothing they say is true. In a way, they are similar to Master Boyle. While they have potential, they are drinking it away and someday they will wander around the town like ghosts, just as Master Boyle does now.

Canon Mick O'Byrne: the Canon is a man of the church. He is a contemporary of S.B.'s and an old friend. They are so accustomed to one another that their visits have evolved into an unavoidable routine. They play checkers every night, sometimes for a small amount of money. But every night the

conversation and the activity remain the same.

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR: JOE DOWLING

Joe Dowling, who grew up in Ireland, saw **Philadelphia, Here I Come!** when he was just sixteen during its first run at the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin. In a short chat before rehearsal, Mr. Dowling discussed the impact the play has had on him as well as on the Irish theatre.

Since the age of six, Mr. Dowling knew that all he wanted to do was to work in the theatre as a director. He attended the theatre with his parents until about the age of 14 and then he started going on his own. By the time he was 16 he was an experienced theatre-goer. But he said that he had never seen a play like Brian Friel's **Philadelphia, Here I Come!** Written from the perspective of a young man, the play spoke directly to Mr. Dowling, who at that time was just coming into young manhood and experiencing many of the same conflicts portrayed by the character of Gareth O'Donnell.

The play's dramatic structure and the portrayal of the frustration felt by Irish youth made this a revelatory dramatic experience for the young Mr. Dowling.

Today, Mr. Dowling maintains his special relationship with the play and with the playwright. In a moving description of **Philadelphia**, Mr.

Dowling spoke of the image of frustrated youth supplied by the playwright (who was also young when he wrote the play). But Mr. Dowling also noted the strength and compassion drawn into the older characters. Indeed the sadness and the vulnerability created by Mr. Friel in the characters of Gareth's father, Master Boyle and Madge and Lizzy, stops the audience from blaming any one person for the breakdown in relationships and in opportunity for the young. Mr. Dowling stresses the magnitude of Mr. Friel's ability to offer the audience such a complete vision of a culture and of a group of characters stifled by their societal values.

Mr. Dowling also clearly points out that Gareth's choice to travel to Philadelphia is not an improvement on his life in Ballybeg. After all, Lizzy is far from happy away from Ireland. For someone like Gareth, who grew up in a small provincial Irish town, the United States represents "impermanence and anonymity." And impermanence and anonymity are frightening concepts. Facing these two forces, Gareth risks losing himself completely. But this is a chance that he will have to take.

Mr. Dowling is happy to be working on this play for contemporary audiences. Although he feels that it speaks profoundly for the Ireland of his youth, the director recognizes that the greatness of the play lies in its ability to speak to the frustrations of people all over the world and of all ages. Certainly, this means that it will be relevant to both young and

older audiences coming to the Roundabout this fall.

WHAT DOES THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DO?

Very often audience members look at the credits in the program and don't have a clear idea of what this or that person does, or why this or that person is even needed. For this particular production we thought we would do a short interview with Anahita Mehta, the Assistant to the Director. Anahita regularly works at the Roundabout and has served as Assistant to the Director on a number of recent productions.

During our talk, Anahita got right to the point. Different directors need different kinds of assistance. Some directors like to discuss all of their decisions with their assistant, while others ask that the assistant simply observe rehearsal and keep track of the work the actors do to create their characters. Sometimes the Assistant to the Director will help with the audition process as well as with the actual casting of the play. However, sometimes the job simply requires making telephone calls and helping to keep the director's schedule straight.

Anahita stressed that it is her responsibility to make the director's job easier. There is so much to take care of, to coordinate and to communicate that it simply cannot be done by one person. The director must keep in contact with all the actors, the designers, the technicians, the theatre staff, the

press and the miscellaneous assortment of coaches (i.e., dialect and movement). The Assistant to the Director makes sure that the Director's vision and decisions get to all the people they are supposed to get on time.

In some situations the Assistant to the Director will help to set up the rehearsals and do special work with individual actors. It is also possible that the Assistant to the Director will be asked to travel with the production if it moves to another city. The Assistant to the Director will help to make the transition to a different space smooth and seamless.

There is no way for an Assistant to know what the job will be like until it is almost over. Then if the Assistant gets to work with that Director again, a working relationship has already been established and the Assistant has a running jump on knowing how to make things smooth for this Director.

Anahita observed that her job requires patience and hard work. It is a necessary and important position and an excellent way to study the craft of directing. It is a first rate path toward working as a director and someday having an assistant of one's own.

GLOSSARY OF WORDS

It's always interesting to see how many of these words one recognizes and how many require some explanation. Try looking down the list of words without reading the definitions and count how many you