

*Brian Friel's Invocation
of Edmund Burke
in Philadelphia, Here I Come!*



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Brian Friel's breakthrough play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964), is set in the fictional town of Ballybeg, County Donegal, on the eve of main character Gar O'Donnell's possible emigration to the United States. The twenty-five-year-old Gar leads a relatively lonely existence in Ballybeg: he works in his father's shop and lives in the adjoining accommodation, and his strongest relationship is arguably with Madge, the O'Donnells' sixty-something-year-old housekeeper. Gar has been offered the chance of a new life in Philadelphia, where he has a job waiting for him in a hotel and where he can live rent-free with his Aunt Lizzy. Despite the possibility of a more exciting—and perhaps prosperous—existence away from Ballybeg, Gar poignantly wonders in the play's closing moments if he really needs to leave the town where he was born and raised.

As anyone who watches or reads the play will note, its most remarkable feature is Friel's splitting of the main character into two different parts: Public Gar and Private Gar. One actor plays the Gar that everyone sees and hears; a second actor plays Gar's "*alter ego*," moving around the set unseen by the other characters and articulating the young man's

secret—and often comically outrageous or bitterly cynical—thoughts.¹ While audience members quickly adjust to this theatrical conceit, they may be more confused as to why, in times of psychological distress, the split protagonist begins to recite the famous passage about Marie Antoinette from the Dublin-born Edmund Burke's 1790 treatise, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Critics have long debated what purpose this recitation serves in Friel's play. Some have rightly noted that someone of Gar's age would have been familiar with the passage, because at the time it was a set text for Irish students sitting the Leaving Certificate examinations; however, they have still struggled to explain why Friel—whose work is often characterized as “too Nationalist”²—chose a passage from a writer frequently depicted as “an apologist for Empire” and the “father of modern Conservatism.” (Richard Pine expresses the perplexity shared by many when he calls the play's allusion to Burke “cryptic.”)³ This essay demonstrates that Friel uses the passage to give us a deeper sense of Gar's haunted and psychologically scarred mind; what's more, he specifically chose a passage from Burke's *Reflections* because he believed that many of that book's critiques of dysfunctional societies applied to the two countries that Gar must choose between: Ireland and the United States.

The beautiful passage by Burke, which the Gars Public and Private begin to recite on ten different occasions, runs—in full—as follows:

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she had just begun to move in, glittering like the morning star full of life and splendor and joy.

1 Brian Friel, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* in *Plays 1: Philadelphia, Here I Come!/The Freedom of the City/Living Quarters/Aristocrats/Faith Healer/Translations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 27 (emphasis in original). According to the stage directions, “even Public Gar, although he talks to Private Gar occasionally, never sees him and *never looks at him*. One cannot look at one's *alter ego*.” (Friel, *Philadelphia*, 27, [emphasis in original].)

2 Hiram Morgan, “Playing the Early: Brian Friel's *Making History*,” *History Ireland*, vol. 15, no. 4 (July/August 2007): 63.

3 Richard Pine, *The Diviner: The Art of Brian Friel* (Dublin: UCD Press, 1999), 104.

Oh, what a revolution! and what a heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream, when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her, in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour, and of cavaliers! I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards, to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.

But the age of chivalry is gone; that of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded, and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.⁴

This passage gives us deeper insight into Gar's psychological state of mind at this critical juncture in his young life, because, as Eimear Andrews has rightly suggested, he recites the passage "as a kind of talismanic release from his own thoughts or memories when they threaten to overwhelm him."⁵ Andrews neglects to mention, however, that it is actually specific "thoughts or memories" that trigger the recitation: Gar recites the passage whenever he is reminded of his mother, who died three days after his birth, or whenever he desires the comfort and affection of a maternal figure—or, at least, of an idealized, inaccessible female. Anthony Roche, Neil Corcoran, and Christopher Murray have rightly, if briefly, contended that the Burke quotation is somehow connected to Gar's deceased mother, and Tony Corbett has less tentatively suggested that one of the triggers for the recitation is "the memory of [Gar's] mother's unhappiness."⁶ While (*contra* Corbett) Gar's mother's

4 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin, 1986), 169–170.

5 Eimear Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel: Neither Dream nor Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 89.

6 Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994), 93, 97; Neil Corcoran, "The Penalties of Retrospect: Continuities in Brian Friel," in *The Achievement of Brian Friel*, ed. Alan Peacock (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), 18–19; Christopher Murray, *The Theatre of Brian Friel* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), 27. Tony Corbett, *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2002), 37.

unhappiness only directly triggers the recitation on one occasion, Gar's desire for a mother figure is—I would contend—the inspiration for *all* of his recitations of Burke.⁷

When Gar is aching for his Aunt Lizzy to be a surrogate mother for him (just after an assembled party of friends and relations has discussed Gar's mother at length), he recites it.⁸ Likewise, when the housekeeper Madge, Gar's other surrogate mother in the play, strongly hints to Gar's emotionally distant father that he should talk to his son in advance of his departure for Philadelphia, Gar (presumably appreciative but also feeling vulnerable) recites the passage again.⁹ On four other occasions, Gar recites it when discussing, or ineffectively trying to bond with, his father, which suggests that Gar believes that a mother would be much more emotionally available and comforting to him on his last night in Ballybeg.¹⁰

The three remaining occasions when he recites the passage each occur when he is thinking about the fact that he lost his beloved, Katie Doogan, to a wealthier suitor, Dr. Francis King.¹¹ This is significant for two reasons: first, Gar is subconsciously linking one inaccessible female (his deceased mother) to another (his now-married ex-girlfriend), but second—and crucially—his linking of these women suggests that he was hoping that the more mature Katie would be a substitute mother figure in his life.

Any passage about a beautiful and inaccessible woman could arguably have served this same purpose in the play. In choosing a passage from Burke, Friel was certainly defying expectations, because he often was quite negative about the Irishness of people from Irish Protestant backgrounds—a bias which is likely related to Friel's upbringing in a strongly Nationalist household in Northern Ireland. The best example of Friel's Corkery-esque "Irish-Ireland"¹² tendencies is his often expressed view that:

7 Friel, *Philadelphia*, 38.

8 *Ibid.*, 67.

9 *Ibid.*, 50.

10 *Ibid.*, 36, 91, 92, 94.

11 *Ibid.*, 56, 78, 80. Murray has also suggested (if cautiously) that, on occasion, the Burke passage "seems to identify Katie with the 'delightful vision' of Marie Antoinette." (Murray, *The Theatre of Brian Friel*, 27.)

12 Cork writer Daniel Corkery felt that Catholicism was a cornerstone of Irish identity. His sectarian views are arguably best summed up by a passage in his 1931 study, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, in which he states that he hates referring to the great London-based Irish Protestant writers as "expatriates," because they were

It is time we dropped from the calendar of Irish dramatic saints all those playwrights from Farquhar to Shaw—and that includes Steele, Sheridan, Goldsmith, and Wilde—who no more belong to Irish drama than John Field belongs to Irish music or Francis Bacon to Irish painting. Fine dramatists they were, each assured of at least a generous footnote in the history of English drama. But if we take as our definition of Irish drama plays written in Irish or English on Irish subjects and performed by Irishmen, we must scrap all those men who wrote within the English tradition, for the English stage and for the English people, and we can go no further back than 1899, to the ... opening of the Irish Literary Theatre.¹³

Graham Price has compellingly argued that Friel's distancing of himself from Irish Protestant writers like Wilde and Shaw is due to what Harold Bloom has called the "anxiety of influence"—that is, the tendency of authors to disown writers they fear have had too big an influence on their work.¹⁴ This may well be right: over the past two decades critics have firmly established Friel's significant debt to the Anglo-Irish dramatic tradition. For example, Price has found strong Wildean echoes in the Friel plays *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, *Faith Healer* (1979), *The Communication Cord* (1982), and *Making History* (1988).¹⁵ In the case of Shaw, Richard Pine has detected the influence of *Arms and the Man* (1894) on Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973), the influence of *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) on Friel's *Translations* (1980), and the probable impact of Shaw on Friel's bending of historical fact to enhance a history play's dramatic appeal.¹⁶ More recently, Anthony Roche has

writers "for whom Ireland was never a *patria* in any sense." (Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* [Cork: Cork University Press, 1931], 3.)

13 Brian Friel, *Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964–1999*, ed. Christopher Murray (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 51. This quote is from the essay "Plays Peasant and Unpeasant," which originally appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 17 March 1972. For other examples of this type of statement from Friel, see *Ibid.*, 51, 81, 93. These quotes are from 1972, 1980 and 1981.

14 Graham Price, "An Accurate Description of What Has Never Occurred: Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and Wildean Intertextuality," *Irish University Review*, vol. 41, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2011): 94–95.

15 *Ibid.*, 93–111.

16 Pine, *The Diviner*, 116, 140–141, 208–209.

discussed the impact of *Pygmalion* (1913) on Friel's *Molly Sweeney* (1994) and of the Shavian discussion play on Friel's *Making History*.¹⁷

While the "anxiety of influence" may have led Friel to conceal the extent of his debt to Anglo-Irish drama, it is noteworthy that those Irish Protestant writers that he did openly acknowledge often possess a Gaelic Catholic component to their backgrounds—arguably another indication of Friel's Nationalist bias. For example, in 1990, Friel, having previously suggested that no Irish drama existed before 1899, decided to adapt Charles Macklin's 1762 play, *The True-Born Irishman*. Although Macklin was an Irish Anglican, based primarily in London during his adult life, he was actually born Cathal MacLochlainn into a Catholic family on the Inishowen peninsula in County Donegal, where Friel lived for over forty years. Likewise—as regards the subject of this essay—both of Edmund Burke's parents were born Catholic, with his father reportedly conforming to the established church seven years before Edmund's birth and his mother remaining Catholic. What's more, Burke was partially educated at a hedge school in the Blackwater Valley of North Cork,¹⁸ and his extensive exposure to Irish Gaelic Catholics during his formative years led him to be a fierce advocate for Catholic Emancipation and the rights of the Irish tenantry throughout his life. When these Gaelic Catholic aspects of Burke's upbringing are taken into consideration, Friel's attraction to Burke's work, as demonstrated by his use of the Marie Antoinette passage, is much less surprising than it at first appears.

Seamus Deane has long been an insightful critic of Brian Friel's plays, and he has done more than most to establish that Edmund Burke's defence of tradition in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is not inherently conservative and that it does not contradict his support for the rights of Irish Catholics and for Indians suffering under rapacious English imperialists like Warren Hastings. In fact, Deane has convincingly shown that a dislike of "upstarts" and ignorant interlopers disrupting an established, organically-grown tradition is central to all of Burke's writings. Given the

17 Anthony Roche, *Brian Friel: Theatre and Politics* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 195; Anthony Roche, *The Irish Dramatic Revival 1899–1939* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), 80.

18 This aspect of Burke's background would have been particularly appreciated by Friel, the future writer of *Translations*—a play set in a hedge school in County Donegal.

depth of Deane's knowledge of Burke and Friel, and his defenses of the "Irish" Burke, it is quite surprising to find that his reading of Friel's use of Burke in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is relatively rudimentary. Deane has written that, "Friel uses Burke [in the play], at some risk, to display the fact that the Ballybeg that Gar O'Donnell is trying to leave is ... the remnant of a past civilization and that the new world, however vulgar it may seem, is that of Philadelphia and the Irish Americans."¹⁹

Deane is right to suggest that Friel is using Burke to defend tradition and "ancestral feeling" (as symbolized by Ireland) against "the shallow cosmopolitanism of the modern world" (as symbolized by the United States).²⁰ However, Friel's interactions with Burke's *Reflections* go much deeper than that in the play. Indeed, I would suggest that Burke's *Reflections* are a significant intertextual presence in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, adding depth to Friel's criticisms of America and Ireland, and even contributing to Friel's construction of key characters.

One of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*'s great merits is its fairness in capturing the strengths and weaknesses of both Ireland and the United States. As various critics have noted, Friel gained new perspective regarding both countries when he spent four to five months in Minnesota in the spring and summer of 1963, just prior to writing *Philadelphia*. Friel was acting as an "observer" at the Guthrie Theater, learning all he could about stage craft from the celebrated head of the theater, the Anglo-Irishman Tyrone Guthrie. (It is possible that this rich and rewarding experience softened Friel up regarding Irish Protestants in advance of writing the play, also contributing to his interest in and openness to the work of an Irish Protestant like Burke.) While scholars have written extensively about the fact that being away from Ireland gave Friel a more mature understanding of his home country and that first-hand exposure to the United States gave him a more realistic perspective on the "American Dream," they have failed to recognize that, in *Philadelphia*, the playwright grounds his critiques of both countries in points made by Edmund Burke in the *Reflections*.

19 Seamus Deane, "Preface" in *Plays 1: Philadelphia, Here I Come!/The Freedom of the City/Living Quarters/Aristocrats/Faith Healer/Translations*, by Brian Friel (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 14.

20 *Ibid.*, 14.

In his celebrated treatise, Burke laments the emergence of societies which promote the “true moral equality of mankind”—“that monstrous fiction” which inspires “false ideas and vain expectations into men destined to travel the obscure walk of laborious life.”²¹ In the play, Friel suggests that America is just such a society. Not everyone will succeed in the United States and gain wealth or positions of distinction, and yet the American Dream encourages people to entertain what Burke calls “vain expectations”—hopes which, in the case of most immigrants (and, indeed, most American-born citizens) will probably be dashed.

Another criticism of America in the play that echoes Burke is the idea that the United States, with its glorification of the “rags to riches” story, might overly prize “low” birth and the subsequent gaining of social status through mere material acquisition. Likewise, America’s stressing of the social equality of all might lead people to be ashamed of learning, since displays of knowledge will likely lead to accusations of snobbery. As Burke writes in the *Reflections*, “Woe to that country ... [that] considers a low education, a mean contracted view of things, a sordid mercenary occupation, as a preferable title to command.”²² In his play, Friel suggests that, by living in America for a number of years, Gar’s Aunt Lizzy has gotten “dumbed down” and crassly materialistic; Private Gar acidly notes “her [poor] grammar” and “her vulgarity.”²³

Friel also expresses support in his play for Burke’s contention that the love of mankind must be grounded in “affection” for the “little platoon” within which we were raised.²⁴ Burke writes: “We begin our public affections in our families.... We pass on to our neighbourhoods, and our habitual provincial connections.”²⁵ “We proceed to a love to our country and to mankind.”²⁶ As Gar prepares to emigrate, he is often rudely dismissive of Ballybeg and of Ireland generally (especially in his last conversation with Katie). Friel makes clear, however, that Gar’s vehement rejection of his hometown and his native country is excessive and forced. Likewise, when Gar and his old schoolmaster Boyle praise America as

21 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 124.

22 Ibid., 139.

23 Friel, *Philadelphia*, 66, 67.

24 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 135.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

a place where people can be totally free of personal ties and the past, discerning audience members will note that the two people doing the praising are two of the most immature characters in the play. Despite Gar's rude remarks about Ballybeg and Ireland and despite his praise for American "rootlessness," he knows deep down that his hometown and his native country mean more to him than he admits and that he does not actually want to erase his Irish past: at the end of the play, when he admits that he will replay the scenes of his last night in Ballybeg over and over again, he shows that he recognizes how important one's "little platoon" actually is and how ultimately hollow a lonely, American "rugged individualism" must be. In a passage which echoes some of Friel's key points in *Philadelphia*, Burke warns that a country without due respect for shared, "settled principle[s]" and "steady education" will inevitably "crumble away ... into the dust and powder of *individuality*."²⁷

While these Burke-based criticisms of America might sound harsh, Friel is also highly critical of the Republic of Ireland, and, once again, his criticisms centre on Burke's critiques of dysfunctional societies in the *Reflections*. As much as Friel would presumably like to see Gar embrace his native Ireland and to acknowledge how important it is to him (and always will be), he certainly understands why Gar—and other emigrants—find Ireland wanting. In the *Reflections*, Burke writes that "There ought to be a system of manners in every nation which a well-formed mind would be disposed to relish. To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely."²⁸ The country of Ireland, as symbolized by the fictional "everytown" Ballybeg (the town's name is an Anglicization of the Irish Gaelic for "small town," *Baile Beag*), is anything but "lovely," and it is certainly lacking in "manners." For example, none of the male characters appropriately acknowledge Gar's last night in Ireland. Even the two males that do confront Gar's departure most directly (Boyle and Gar's young friend, Joe) still do an appalling job of showing him love and respect as he undertakes such a big life change: Boyle insults Gar's intelligence and borrows money from him, and Joe needs little prompting to run off with their mutual friends, Ned and Tom.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 194 (emphasis added).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

In the *Reflections*, Burke criticizes what the French revolutionaries and their English sympathizers regard as the “rights of man” and provides us with his own list of “the *real* rights of men.”²⁹ Chief among these is “a right to the fruits of [one’s] industry; and to the means of making [one’s] industry fruitful.”³⁰ Gar’s father pays him less than he pays the housekeeper, and this, combined with his disrespect for the great work that Gar does in the shop, certainly contributes to Gar’s inability to marry Katie and, later, to his emigration. Even if Gar were to leave his father’s shop, the lack of opportunities in the country generally hangs like a specter over the play. Young people of Gar’s generation were emigrating in such numbers (and are, sadly, once again), because of mismanagement of the country’s affairs by successive governments.

In the early 1960s, the lack of Irish economic opportunities would have attracted Friel’s ire, but so would censorship. A year after *Philadelphia* premiered in a Gate Theatre production as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, John McGahern’s excellent second novel, *The Dark*, was banned—joining a long list of books of high literary merit banned by the Irish censors in the four and a half decades following independence.³¹ In writing a play that critiqued the financially shaky and aesthetically conservative Republic, Friel was inspired by the *Reflections*—a work in which Burke writes “if commerce and the arts should be lost in an experiment to try how well a state may stand without these old fundamental principles ... [it will lead to] a nation of gross, stupid, ferocious, and at the same time, poor and sordid barbarians, destitute of religion, honour, or manly pride, possessing nothing at present, and hoping for nothing hereafter.”³² At the time of the play’s writing, a chink of light was entering the nation’s financial outlook thanks to some of Seán Lemass’s economic reforms, but, in the short term, Gar O’Donnell “possess[ed] nothing” and also had little to hope for—at least until his father retired, and the implication at the play’s end is that his father’s business is contracting year by year. Little wonder that America beckoned for the young man.

29 Ibid., 149 (original emphasis).

30 Ibid., 149.

31 For more on this, see Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1990).

32 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 174.

While it is clear that Friel was thinking about the concepts in Burke's *Reflections* as he wrote *Philadelphia*, many might take issue with my suggestion that the *Reflections* are an intertextual presence in the play. There are clear examples, however, of the *Reflections* influencing choices made by Friel, as he created the characters and the dialogue. The most obvious examples relate to Katie's father, Senator Doogan, who Friel chose to make a lawyer by profession. Burke criticizes lawyers at great length in the *Reflections*.³³ He does so in various other works, as well. Although Burke briefly studied law at the behest of his lawyer father, Seán Patrick Donlan has demonstrated that attempts by contemporary lawyers to claim Burke as one of their own are undermined by the fact that "the Irishman's opinion of English jurisprudence [was] ... complex and not wholly complimentary." Injustices in Ireland, India, and America had taught Burke how "insular" and "perverse" English law could be, and he was often "critical of ... the more Draconian aspects of contemporary criminal law" (he was particularly worried about the injustices that might arise from basing judgements solely on "legal precedent" and inflexible "'precepts' and 'rules'"). What's more, contrary to what is often suggested, Burke repeatedly "insisted that Parliament rather than courts should be at the centre of legal change."³⁴ Finally, as Donlan also wisely observes, Burke's experiences at Middle Temple—far from making him a proud lawyer for life—directly contributed to his "deep reservations about the narrowness of the legal training of the day and the quality of the public men it produced."³⁵

Burke's conviction that studying the law often made men *less* valuable as public servants inspired some of his angriest denunciations of lawyers in the *Reflections*. He is particularly scornful of lawyers who wield great power over the lives of others despite coming from obscure origins. Burke was, of course, not completely against self-made men—

33 Ibid., 129–131.

34 Seán Patrick Donlan, "The law touches us but here and there, and now and then': Edmund Burke, Law, and Legal Theory," *Sartoniana*, vol. 25 (2012): 44, 44; 49, 52, 55, 55, 60. Donlan also notes that Burke's "use—or misuse—of the language of law" was not a sign of his devotion to the profession but "a rhetorical strategy that served as a critique of the thin legalism of revolutionary sloganeering" and which must be contextualised within his "wider understanding of morals, manners, and history." Ibid., 60, 60, 45.

35 Ibid., 46.

he was one himself—but he thought that they should acquit themselves with humility and dignity, since their lack of knowledge regarding aspects of life to which they had never had any exposure might lead them into errors and vulgarities. Having noted “that upstart insolence almost inevitably adhering to and disgracing those who are the first acquirers of distinction,” Burke goes on to particularly lament the way that self-made lawyers, “snatched from the humblest rank of subordination,” become “intoxicated with their unprepared greatness.”³⁶ In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, Senator Doogan recalls the lawyers denounced by Burke in that he has risen from humble origins. When he is first mentioned to Aunt Lizzy, she replies: “Never heard of him. Some Johnny-hop-up,”³⁷ which alerts us to the fact that Doogan is a self-made man, a “first acquirer ... of distinction.” This self-made lawyer also recalls those targeted by Burke in that he wields power over the lives of others. By subtly pressuring Katie to marry the more financially secure Dr. King, Doogan foils Gar’s best chance of married happiness in Ballybeg. In retaliation, Public and Private Gar repeatedly (and comically) mock the lawyer when—alone in Gar’s bedroom—they act out their extravagant fantasies of a bright, prosperous, and glamorous American future.

As Tony Corbett has noted, these bedroom fantasies (including the childish “retaliations” against Doogan) and Gar’s occasional “posturing” as a “pseudo-sophisticate” betray the young man’s “stunted ... emotional development.”³⁸ Additional indications of Gar’s emotional immaturity—clearly related to the early loss of his mother and to his father being emotionally “cold”—are the impracticality of his plans for marriage with Katie and his unrealistic expectations of American success.³⁹ A final indicator relates directly to the work of Edmund Burke. In the *Reflections*, Burke claims that the desire for radical, vivid change on the part of the revolutionaries (complete with “magnificent stage effect” and “grand spectacle”) shows a “juvenile” cast of mind.⁴⁰ Burke believed that a mature person would be reconciled to the considered and carefully managed reform that, however slow in coming, is longer-lasting and

36 Burke, *Reflections*, 121, 130.

37 Friel, *Philadelphia*, 62.

38 Corbett, *Brian Friel: Decoding the Language of the Tribe*, 37.

39 Friel, *Philadelphia*, 65.

40 Burke, *Reflections*, 156.

less prone to rash errors in judgement or reinvention of the wheel. Similarly, Friel, in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, suggests that part of Gar's immaturity is the fact that he believes he needs the radical change that a move to America will bring, when, in fact, he may simply need to remain in Ballybeg, learning to make better emotional connections and being more courageous in his professional life.

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* profoundly influenced the writing of Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, just as George Steiner's *After Babel* (1975) and J. H. Andrew's *A Paper Landscape* (1975) heavily informed the creation of Friel's *Translations* years later. Gar's psychological obsession with the *aisling* figure in the Marie Antoinette apostrophe—often the sole focus of critical attention—is only one, relatively small, facet of Burke's influence on this classic play. As we have seen, Friel drew upon Burke's *Reflections* when conceiving the play's critiques of Ireland and America and when creating the characters of Gar and Senator Doogan. Today, as young Irish people emigrate in significant numbers once again—mainly to the “New Worlds” of Australia and North America—*Philadelphia, Here I Come!* feels surprisingly contemporary and relevant. This renewed relevance extends to Friel's engagement with Burke in the play, because contemplating Friel's handling of Burke's ideas can help us to understand what today's new migrants might be gaining—and losing—by trading life among their “little platoon” for life in a more prosperous, “rootless” society.