

# Philadelphia, Here I Come!



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF BRIAN FRIEL

Brian Friel was born in Northern Ireland in 1929, the son of a primary school principal and a postmistress. Friel's grandparents were illiterate and served as inspiration for the tension between rural and progressive Ireland throughout Friel's work. After an unhappy stint at the National Seminary, Friel attended a teacher's college in Belfast and taught for 10 years. He transitioned to writing full time after publishing multiple short stories in *The New Yorker*. Friel was propelled to international success following the 1964 transfer of his play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* to Broadway. A Northern Irish Catholic Nationalist, Friel participated in an Irish civil rights march in 1972 during which British soldiers infamously shot and killed 14 civilians; the event that became known as Bloody Sunday. Apart from *The Freedom of the City*, however, Friel largely avoided direct reference to politics in his work, choosing instead to focus on a broader sense of isolation and disenfranchisement. In 1980 Friel co-founded the Field Day Theatre Company in Northern Ireland; his play *Translations* was the group's first production. Now considered one of the greatest Irish playwrights and short story writers, Friel earned multiple Tony, Olivier, and Drama Desk nominations and awards during his career, which spanned more than half a century. Friel was intensely private and rarely offered the public glimpses into his private life. He married Anne Morrison in 1954 and had five children—four daughters and one son. Friel died in 2015 in County Donegal at the age of 86.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1793, the Irish philosopher Edmund Burke delivered a speech about the French Revolution and, more specifically, the death of Marie Antoinette, the Queen of France who was beheaded shortly after the end of the French Revolution. Spanning the majority of the 1790s, the French Revolution was a sweeping war in which French citizens challenged the country's system of governance, effectively putting an end to the feudal system and absolute monarchy. For many, Marie Antoinette stood for everything that was wrong about the *ancien régime*, or France's system before the Revolution. For Edmund Burke, though, Marie Antoinette was a symbol of Europe's lost innocence, which is why he publicly exalted her and shamed revolutionaries for executing her, claiming that her death proved that "the age of chivalry" had passed. Gareth O'Donnell frequently references Burke's speech in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, using it to remind himself of how regressive and futile it is to romanticize the past.

## RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Many of Brian Friel's most celebrated plays take place in County Donegal, Ireland, where *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is set. In fact, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, [Translations](#), and *Dancing at Lughnasa* are all set in the County Donegal town of Ballybeg, a fictional town invented by Friel himself (though it's worth noting that there are many small Irish towns and villages that bear the same name). Furthermore, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* is somewhat reminiscent of J. M. Synge's [The Playboy of the Western World](#), since both plays feature young Irishmen trying to flee their homes because of their strained relationships with their fathers. In another way, the play can be compared to Henrik Ibsen's [Ghosts](#), with its interest in the past and its examination of what it means to feel at home. Like *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, Samuel Beckett's [Waiting for Godot](#) is a play penned by an Irish playwright that skyrocketed to international renown. Thematically, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* explores the complexities of a father-son relationship, which is tackled in other novels such as Cormac McCarthy's [The Road](#) and Jamie Ford's [Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet](#). The play also centers on a young Irishman who is planning to immigrate to the U.S., a journey that is similarly undertaken by the protagonist in Colm Tóibín's [Brooklyn](#).

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Philadelphia, Here I Come!
- **When Published:** Premiered on September 28, 1964
- **Literary Period:** Realism, Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Play
- **Setting:** Ballybeg, County Donegal, Ireland
- **Climax:** When S.B. finally lets down his emotional guard, Gar hurries into the next room because he's unable to recognize his father's openness.
- **Antagonist:** Gar and S.B.'s inability to show affection for one another

## EXTRA CREDIT

**The Big Screen.** In 1970, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* was adapted as a movie, which was directed by John Quedstedt and starred Donal McCann and Siobhán McKenna.

**Renaissance Man.** In 1987, Brian Friel joined the Irish Senate (Seanad Éireann), where he served as a senator until 1989.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Gar O'Donnell, a man in his mid-twenties, prepares to leave the small town of Ballybeg, Ireland, where he's spent his entire life. Gar is divided into two characters: Public Gar and Private Gar. Public is the Gar the other characters in the play see and speak to, whereas Private is Gar's internal alter ego, whom only Public can hear and only the audience can see. The night before he's set to fly to the United States to live with his aunt and uncle in Philadelphia, Public goes to his room and packs while having a conversation with Private. As Public prepares for his journey, Private speaks boisterously to him about how great his trip will be, celebrating the idea that Gar will become rich and successful in America. When Gar takes out an old suitcase and finds a newspaper clipping of his parents' wedding announcement, Public and Private pause for a moment to consider it, thinking about Gar's mother, Maire, who died three days after giving birth. Private thinks about what Madge—the housekeeper—has said about Gar's mother, envisioning what the woman was like before her death. Before he can get too wrapped up in the memory, though, he suddenly cuts himself off by reciting an old speech, which begins, "It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the **Queen of France**, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles!" Having diverted himself, Gar begins to sing out loud, chiming, "**Philadelphia, here I come.**"

Later, Gar sits at the kitchen table with his father, S.B. As Madge comes in and out of the room, the two men barely speak, though Gar desperately wants his father to say something meaningful. Gar has spent his entire adult life working in the general store that S.B. runs, and though this means they spend every day in close proximity to one another, their relationship remains unaffectionate and strained. As S.B. periodically gives predictable and boring statements while sitting at the table, Private pleads with him to say something unpredictable. Because S.B. can't hear him, though, he continues to say the things he always says at the end of each day. This thoroughly frustrates Private Gar, who suggests that he would reconsider leaving home if his father would only say one genuine sentence, something surprising that might indicate that he actually cares about whether or not Gar leaves home.

Gar's stilted relationship with his father isn't the only reason he has decided to leave. He also hopes to escape his memories about his relationship with a local woman named Kate. The details of their bond are still fresh in his mind, as he vividly remembers the night he and Kate went to her house to inform her parents of their plans to get married. When they arrived, her father, Senator Doogan, informed her that Francis King had returned to Ballybeg, and he told her to go speak to him in the kitchen. Leaving Gar and Senator Doogan alone, Kate ventured into the house in the hopes that Gar would ask her father for his blessing to marry her. However, as soon as Kate went into the next room, Senator Doogan started speaking to Gar about

Francis, making it clear that he wanted Kate to marry the young man. Humiliated, Gar left the house before Kate could reenter the room. Shortly thereafter, the Doogans announced Kate's engagement to Francis.

As the evening before Gar's departure progresses, Master Boyle—one of Gar's grade school teachers—pays the house a visit. Gar is aware that his mother dated Boyle before she started seeing S.B., and it's quite obvious that Boyle never got over his feelings for her. In fact, Boyle is widely known as an alcoholic, and this is partly because he turned to drinking in the aftermath of his relationship with Maire. Bidding farewell to Gar, he advises him to never look back once he leaves Ireland, saying that he should try to be "one hundred per cent American." He then gives Gar a collection of his own poems, a gesture that touches Gar. When he tells Gar that he'll miss him, Gar begins to get choked up, and Private shouts at him to run into his room so that nobody will see him cry.

Lying on his bed, Gar thinks about his upcoming trip and remembers when his aunt Lizzie (his mother's sister) visited Ballybeg last year. She and her husband, Con, have been living in Philadelphia for years, and though they lead a very happy existence, they've never been able to have children. This, Lizzie implied when she visited, is the only thing missing from their lives, which is why they wanted to come see Gar in Ballybeg. Lizzie is a fiercely unique and hilarious woman who is apparently very similar to Gar's mother. Because of this, Gar relished his time with her when she was in Ireland, and decided to accept her offer to house him if he ever decided to come to the United States. Wooed by the idea of being in such close contact with someone similar to his mother, he made plans to fly to Philadelphia and work in a nearby hotel. Remembering the moment of this decision, Private criticizes him for making this sudden choice simply because of the fact that Lizzie and Con visited on the day of Kate and Francis King's wedding, suggesting that Gar was particularly impressionable when Lizzie invited him to live with them. Not wanting to consider such things, Public Gar tries to drown out Private Gar—first by whistling "Philadelphia, Here I Come," and then by quoting, "It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France..."

Leaving his room, Gar decides to go to the pub to say goodbye to his friends Ned, Tom, and Joe. As he prepares to leave, Private tries to get Public to admit that he doesn't really want to go to the United States, but Public ignores him. Shortly after leaving, he returns with his friends, who were already on their way to his house when he passed them on the road. Sitting down at the table and drinking beer, Ned—the leader of the group—boasts about how badly they're going to beat the next team they play in soccer. As the conversation continues, Gar becomes increasingly annoyed by the fact that Ned and Tom are too busy talking about sports and women to acknowledge that this is his last night in town. Joe, for his part, keeps trying

to bring the conversation back to Gar, but the other two young men sidestep his remarks. When Joe reminds them that Gar will soon be living in Philadelphia, Ned starts talking about Jimmy, another one of their soccer teammates who moved to the States. Reminding his friends how small Jimmy was, Ned launches into a story about going swimming in a collection of caves with Tom, Jimmy, and two women. He says that he and Tom decided to get in the water while Jimmy remained on the banks with the women. The next thing they knew, he claims, they saw Jimmy running naked and yelling for their help while the two women chased him.

As the group laughs, Private Gar internally reflects upon the fact that this story is inaccurate. In reality, Gar and Joe were also there that night, and all of the boys went swimming together, leaving the two women alone on the banks. When they got out, they passed the time by childishly wrestling one another, and then Ned decided it would be funny if they took off Jimmy's pants. And though Jimmy was quite small, he successfully fended them off, at which point the five boys left the caves, leaving the women behind. Instead of pointing out the many inaccuracies of Ned's story, though, Public Gar simply makes a comment about how their soccer team will probably do well the following week.

After sitting around for a while, Ned and Tom decide to go drinking at the local hotel, hoping to flirt with two women they saw in town earlier that day. Just before they leave, Ned turns around and gives Gar his belt as a goodbye present, awkwardly telling him to use its large buckle to fend off any attackers in America. He and Tom then set out for the hotel, leaving Joe to sit with Gar, who tells him to follow them. At first Joe insists upon staying to keep Gar company on his last night, but he soon decides that he'd rather be with the other two men, thinking that they might actually meet some women and have a good time. Just before he leaves, he makes a joke about how Madge should actually give them tea the next time they come, since she was the one to invite them for tea in the first place. As he says this, Gar realizes that his friends didn't come to see him of their own accord, but came because Madge asked them to pay a visit before Gar's departure.

Not long after the boys leave, Kate comes to say farewell to Gar. This catches him off guard, but he manages to invite her in and make small talk while Private inwardly voices his misgivings, excitements, and anxieties about their conversation. At one point, Kate says that Gar's father will miss him, and this sets him off on a long rant about how he is glad to be leaving Ballybeg, since it's nothing but a trap that keeps people from making any kind of progress in life. As he says this, Private pleads with him to stop, observing that these words are hurting Kate's feelings. Nonetheless, Public Gar continues to babble on with these vehement words until Kate tells him she'd better go. When he returns from seeing her to the door, he stands distraught in the kitchen as Private gets lost in the memory of

his relationship with Kate. Overwhelmed, Gar hisses at his father in the next room, imploring him to say something, though his voice isn't loud enough for the old man to hear.

Later, Gar recalls one of his only memories of a time when he and his father were happy and emotionally connected to each other. Gar was a young boy, and he and S.B. were fishing in a rowboat. They weren't saying anything, but it was clear they were both quite content, and S.B. even began to sing. Thinking about this in the middle of the night, Gar gets up and finds his father sitting at the table. S.B. was unable to sleep, so Gar works up his courage and asks him if he remembers that day in the rowboat, feeling as if this is his last chance to relate to his father. At first, S.B. doesn't recall what Gar is talking about, but he slowly begins to piece the memory together. However, Gar is so embarrassed and upset by his father's initial reaction that he appears unable to listen to anything else the old man says. Ending the conversation just as S.B. actually starts to come out of his shell, Gar rushes out of the room.

At this point, Madge enters, having just returned from her own daughter's home. As she and S.B. talk about Gar's imminent departure, he asks if she remembers how Gar used to dress up in a little sailor's suit. Remembering his son's childhood fondly, it becomes clear that he feels a great deal of affection toward the boy. Reminiscing in this way, he walks out of the kitchen, at which point Gar returns and speaks briefly with Madge before watching her leave, too, thinking about how he'll remember this moment for the rest of his life. Once he's alone, Private Gar asks, "God, Boy, why do you have to leave? Why? Why?" Public Gar simply says, "I don't know."



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)** – An Irish man in his mid-twenties, Gar is the protagonist of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Split into two characters, Gar has a "Public" and a "Private" persona, who are played by two separate actors. Public Gar is the version everyone sees and interacts with, the one who actually speaks to others and exists in the real world. However, Public Gar takes cues from Private Gar, often having conversations with him and listening to his suggestions. In this way, both Public Gar and Private Gar make up the entirety of Gar's identity, with Public Gar representing his outward appearances and Private Gar representing his conscience and id. Having said that, Public Gar doesn't always heed Private Gar's advice, since he is more timid and reserved than Private Gar. This is especially the case when it comes to his relationship with his father, S.B. The play takes place on Gar's last night in Ballybeg, Ireland, as he's set to travel to the United States the following day to live with his aunt Lizzy and her husband Con, and though he wants to, he can't bring himself to speak

honestly with his father before leaving. He has decided to leave largely because he's tired of working in his father's general store and spending every day with S.B., who shows no emotion or affection toward him. Because his mother died three days after childbirth, Gar has nobody to turn to for emotional support, and though he's quite frustrated with his father's uncommunicative nature, he mostly ignores Private Gar's attempts to get him to speak openly to S.B. In this regard, he's just as guarded as his father, choosing to run from his emotional troubles instead of being straightforward about how he feels. In keeping with this, he also wants to go to the United States to forget about his past relationship with Kate, who married Dr. Francis King instead of him. Romanticizing the idea of starting anew as a hotel worker in America, then, Public Gar commits himself to following through with his plan to leave home even when Private Gar tries to force him to see that it won't do anything to make him happy.

**Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)** – An Irish man in his mid-twenties, Gar is the protagonist of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Split into two characters, Gar has a “Public” and a “Private” persona, who are played by two separate actors. Private Gar is the version that only Public Gar and the audience can hear, acting as his conscience, id, and alter ego. In this capacity, he has long conversations with Public Gar, often boisterously and humorously saying self-aggrandizing things that boost his self-esteem. At the same time, Private Gar also voices Gar's many misgivings and secret thoughts. This is especially apparent when he addresses his father, S.B., who can only hear Public Gar. As Public Gar and his father struggle through stilted conversations, Private Gar holds forth about how badly he wishes S.B. would say something genuine and unpredictable, wanting to hear the old man express his affection for him. This, Private Gar admits, would inspire him to reconsider his decision to leave Ballybeg. Similarly, Private Gar doesn't let Public Gar ignore the fact that he still loves his former lover, Kate, despite the fact that she married Dr. Francis King instead of him. When Public Gar has his final conversation with Kate and goes on a long rant about how much he hates Ballybeg, Private Gar pleads with him to stop, seeing that he's upsetting her. In this way, it becomes clear that Private Gar is more than an indulgent devil on Public Gar's shoulder. In fact, it becomes gradually apparent throughout the play that Private Gar encompasses the entirety of Gar's internal thoughts and emotions, which is why he's able to recognize in the final scene that Public Gar's decision to leave home is futile and won't lead to true happiness.

**S.B. O'Donnell (Screwballs)** – S.B. is Gar's father, an older man who owns a store in the small Irish town of Ballybeg and who married Maire (Gar's mother) when he was 40 and she was only 19. A reserved man, he rarely deviates from his daily routine, often saying little more than a handful of repetitive remarks at the end of each work day. This drives Gar crazy, but

S.B. is unaware of his son's pent-up frustration because Gar only expresses his anger to himself in the form of Private Gar's internal rants about the old man, to whom he secretly refers as “Screwballs.” As a result of this secrecy, S.B. says nothing out of the ordinary on Gar's final night in Ballybeg, instead going about his normal routine of commenting on the day's work, drinking a single cup of tea, and playing chess with Canon O'Byrne when he comes to visit. And yet, it soon becomes obvious that S.B. is quite upset that his son is about to leave home, as evidenced by the fact that he's unable to sleep that night. When Gar comes out of his room in the middle of the night to find his father, though, the two men fail once again to articulate their feelings, though Gar does try to connect by asking his father if he remembers the day he took him fishing as a boy. At first, S.B. doesn't remember this day, and so Gar immediately shuts down the conversation without noticing that S.B. has slowly started to recollect the experience. When Gar bolts from the room to hide his emotions, S.B. speaks to Madge—the housekeeper—about what Gar was like as a child, wistfully remembering the relationship he used to have with his son. Despite this show of emotion, though, he never succeeds in actually demonstrating to Gar that he truly cares about him.

**Maire O'Donnell** – Although Maire, Gar's mother, never appears onstage, her presence looms large in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, since Public Gar and Private Gar frequently think about what life would have been like if she hadn't died three days after giving birth to Gar. When Gar thinks about what Madge has told him about his mother, he tries to distract himself from the subject by singing or reciting an old speech about the **Queen of France**. Still, he can't help but imagine her, especially when his aunt Lizzy visits Ballybeg from the United States. Everyone says that Lizzy and Maire were always alike with their boisterous and uproarious personalities and sharp wit. For this reason, Gar is especially enticed by the idea of moving to Philadelphia to live with Lizzy, finally feeling like he'll be able to get a better sense of his mother, since his father never talks about his relationship with Maire. The only person in Gar's everyday life who does talk about her, it seems, is Master Boyle, who had a relationship with her before she married S.B. In fact, the failure of this relationship is what drove Master Boyle to liquor, which is why he's now an alcoholic.

**Madge** – Madge is the O'Donnell's housekeeper who has worked for the family for many years, watching Gar grow from a boy into a man. Unlike S.B., she's talkative and has a kindly disposition, though she resents it when Gar tries to squeeze information out of her regarding his father and mother's relationship. Still, she tells Gar about what Maire was like before she died, providing him with some of the only information he has about his mother. As for her own life, Madge's daughter has just had a child and has promised to name it after her. When Madge finally leaves the O'Donnell residence to see her new grandchild, though, she learns that

her daughter and son-in-law have decided to name the baby Brigid instead. Frustrated but understanding, she returns to the O'Donnell household, where she listens to S.B. finally open up about his fondness for Gar—something that Gar himself unfortunately does not hear. Shortly thereafter, S.B. leaves and Gar enters once more, at which point Madge goes to bed. As she exits the room, Gar watches her go and thinks about how the image of her walking away will remain with him for his entire life, since he'll remember all the emotions he felt on his last night at home.

**Kate Doogan** – Kate Doogan is a young woman who lives in Ballybeg and who used to date Gar. Kate belongs to a wealthy family, as her father, Senator Doogan, is highly successful. When she and Gar originally decided to get married, she brought him to her house so that he could ask for Senator Doogan's blessing. When they arrived, though, Senator Doogan told her that another one of her peers, Dr. Francis King, had just returned to town and was waiting to see her in another room. Surprised, Kate went to see him, leaving Gar to ask for Senator Doogan's permission in privacy. However, Senator Doogan heavily implied that he and his wife wanted Kate to marry Francis, so Gar left before Kate came back. Shortly thereafter, Kate and Francis were engaged to be married. On the day of their wedding, Gar decided to move to the United States, and now, on the eve of his departure, Kate visits to bid him farewell. Although he wants to be calm and kind, he ends up speaking vehemently about how much he hates Ballybeg after she suggests that his father will miss him when he's gone. Upset by this rant, Kate quickly announces that she should leave. Defeated, Gar sees her to the door and says goodbye.

**Dr. Francis King** – Francis King is the man Kate marries instead of Gar. His presence in Ballybeg takes Gar by surprise when Kate and Gar go to her parents' house to inform them of their plans to marry. When they arrive, Senator Doogan informs them that Francis has decided to visit town and that Kate should go see him in the next room. He then tells Gar that Francis will likely get a job at the local dispensary. If this happens, Doogan says, he and his wife want Kate to marry Francis—something that has apparently already been discussed, though Kate has never said anything about it to Gar. This discourages Gar, who leaves the Doogan household before Kate reenters the room. Not long after this, Francis and Kate do indeed get married, leaving Gar crushed.

**Senator Doogan** – Senator Doogan is Kate's father, a man Gar thinks is most likely less respectable in his private life than most people would assume based on his status in the community. When Gar goes to Kate's house to ask Senator Doogan's permission to marry her, Doogan informs him that Francis King has returned to Ballybeg, and sends Kate to talk to Francis in the next room. He also tells Gar that he and his wife want Kate to marry Francis, a statement that sends Gar out of Kate's house before he can even express his desire to wed her.

**Lizzy (Elise) Sweeney** – Lizzy is one of Maire's sisters, and Gar's aunt. Lizzy lives in Philadelphia and is the one who suggested that Gar should move in with her and her husband, Con. A witty and animated woman, everyone says she's very similar to Gar's mother—a fact that appeals to Gar, since he never got to meet Maire but thinks about her often. Lizzy—who goes by Elise in America—has a good life in Philadelphia, where she lives with Con and has a good-natured and close relationship with their American friend, Ben Burton. However, the one thing missing from her life is the fact that she and Con can't have a child, which is why she cares so much about Gar, her only nephew. In fact, she cares about him so much that she travels to Ireland with Con and Ben to visit him, eventually telling him that he's free to come live with them if he ever wants to. Because she makes this offer on the very same day as Kate and Francis's wedding when Gar is feeling emotionally vulnerable, he accepts, and Lizzy is overjoyed, telling him that he'll be very happy and later arranging for him to work in a hotel once he reaches Philadelphia.

**Con Sweeney** – Con Sweeney is Lizzy's husband, who is also Irish. A kind, deferential man, he travels with his wife and their American friend, Ben Burton, from Philadelphia—where they live—to Ballybeg to visit Gar. Because he and Lizzy are unable to have children together, they tell Gar that he's welcome to stay with them in Philadelphia anytime—an offer he accepts.

**Ben Burton** – Ben Burton is an American man who helps Lizzy and Con Sweeney get on their feet when they first come to the United States, letting them live in his apartment and lending them money until Con gets his own job. An easygoing, good-natured man, he now spends quite a bit of time with the Sweeneys, even accompanying them on their trip to Ireland when they invite Gar to live with them in Philadelphia.

**Master Boyle** – One of Gar's former grade school teachers, Master Boyle used to date Gar's mother Maire before she married his father S.B. Many people in the community speculate that the dissolution of Master Boyle and Maire's relationship is what drove Boyle to drinking, since he's now an alcoholic. When he visits the O'Donnell household on Gar's last night in Ballybeg, he tells him that he's had yet another argument with Canon O'Byrne, who runs the school and who wants to fire him. He also claims that he's been offered a prestigious teaching position in Boston, telling Gar that he, too, might be moving to the United States. All grandiose ideas aside, he is one of the few people in Ballybeg to express how much he's going to miss Gar, giving his departure the kind of attention Gar wished he could get from his father. As a parting gift, Boyle gives him a collection of his poetry, asks him to show it to magazine editors in Philadelphia, and tells him not to look back after he's left Ireland.

**Canon Mick O'Byrne** – Canon O'Byrne is the head of the school that Gar used to attend as a child, and Master Boyle's boss. When Boyle visits Gar on the last night before he leaves

for the United States, he tells him that Canon O'Byrne wants to fire him, though he says that the Canon can't do this because the rest of the institution is on Boyle's side. As for the Canon himself, he is good friends with S.B., since he comes over every night to play a calm game of chess, betting small amounts of money that each man knows will continue to bounce back and forth between themselves. When Canon O'Byrne plays chess with S.B. on the night before Gar leaves, Private Gar predicts nearly everything the man says, adding to the sense of unbearable monotony that bothers him so much about living at home.

**Ned** – Ned is the ringleader of Gar's group of friends. A brutish young man obsessed with women and soccer, he visits Gar's house on Gar's last night in Ballybeg. Although the group of boys is supposedly there to celebrate Gar's imminent departure, all Ned can talk about is the soccer team they're all on, speaking extensively about how badly they're going to beat the next team they play and failing to mention that Gar won't even be present for this match. As Ned speaks, Private Gar notes how wildly inaccurate his stories are, since he exaggerates his memories to make himself and his friends seem more impressive, funny, and stereotypically masculine than they actually are. Before long, Ned and Tom decide to leave Gar's house to drink at a nearby hotel in the hopes of connecting with two women they saw in town earlier that day. Just before he departs, though, he turns and gives Gar his belt, saying that Gar can use its large buckle to whip anyone who harasses him in America. With this awkward, stilted show of affection, he sets off into the night.

**Tom** – Tom is on the same soccer team as Gar, and is one of his friends in Ballybeg. With Ned and Joe, Tom visits the O'Donnell household on Gar's last night in Ballybeg, but he doesn't seem to care very much about the fact that his friend is about to leave for the United States. Instead, he focuses on Ned, whom he clearly admires and wants to please or impress. When Ned tells inaccurate stories about their various escapades, for instance, Tom unflinchingly celebrates the tales without bothering to point out their inaccuracies. Similarly, he jumps at the opportunity to leave Gar's house to drink at a nearby hotel, where he and Ned hope to pick up two women they saw earlier that day. When Ned pauses in the doorway and sentimentally (but rather awkwardly) gives Gar a parting gift, Tom makes fun of him, failing to pay his own respects to Gar before leaving.

**Joe** – The meekest boy in Gar's group of friends, Joe is the only one who actually wants to talk about the fact that Gar is about to leave Ballybeg. On the night before Gar's journey, he, Ned, and Tom come to the O'Donnell household to have one last night together, but nobody except Joe is interested in celebrating Gar. Instead, Ned and Tom—both of whom Joe admires—talk about soccer and women, and every time Joe tries to bring the conversation back around to Gar, they brush him off. Finally, Ned and Tom decide to leave to go drink

elsewhere, but Joe stays behind because he doesn't want Gar to be all alone on his final night in Ireland. Because Gar can sense how badly Joe wants to follow his other two friends, though, he insists that he should leave, too. Joe, for his part, hesitates at first to do this, but then becomes excited about the idea of having a wild night with Ned and Tom, so he jumps up to leave. Before doing so, he gives Gar a heartfelt goodbye in which he inadvertently makes it known that Madge invited the boys to the house, meaning that they wouldn't even have come to say goodbye if she hadn't urged them to do so.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Jimmy** – A small young man who used to be the goalie on Gar's soccer team before moving to the United States. Although Gar's decision to move doesn't seem to have anything to do with him, Jimmy moved to Philadelphia just like Gar intends to do.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### COMMUNICATION AND AFFECTION

In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, a play about Gareth "Gar" O'Donnell's decision to leave his home in Ireland for the United States, Brian Friel demonstrates the difficulty of trying to convey emotions to loved ones without open communication. A young man in his mid-twenties, Gar wants to leave home largely because of his stilted relationship with his father, S.B. Although they spend the majority of their time together, they're unable to truly connect. In fact, their conversations are so predictable that Gar's alter ego—a separate character called "Private" Gar whom only Gar and the audience hears—can anticipate everything S.B. says, bemoaning his father's inability to speak meaningfully to him. This strained dynamic becomes especially upsetting to Gar as his departure from Ireland draws near, since he desperately wants his father to express his affection for him. And though it becomes clear that S.B. and Gar do share nonverbal affection and that S.B. truly *is* sad his son is leaving, his inability to communicate effectively gives Gar the impression that he doesn't care about their relationship. In this way, Friel indicates that although affection can take many forms, a lack of direct communication can tragically estrange people from one another.

Gar views his father's inability to speak openly as the reason their relationship is so strained. Sitting at the table with S.B.

after a day of work, he yearns for his father to say something unpredictable, since this would prove that the old man wants to converse with him. Instead, though, S.B. only repeats the same phrases he says at the end of each day, prompting Private Gar to launch into a monologue about how he's leaving home because he and his father can't engage in a legitimate conversation. In keeping with this, he says that he and S.B. would embarrass each other if either one of them were ever to say something genuine about the other, such as, "You're looking tired," or, "That's a bad cough you have." This suggests that both men are so unused to relating to one another that they would be completely disarmed to discover that they think about each other. And yet, this kind of connection is precisely what Gar yearns for, as he privately declares that he might stay home if S.B. uttered just one honest remark instead of the idle pleasantries he uses to fill the silence. This, Private Gar says, would make him reconsider their entire relationship, causing him to wonder if he was wrong to assume that S.B. has no feelings. In turn, the audience sees just how much importance Gar places on the act of communication, and how deeply his father's disinclination toward verbal engagement affects him.

Interestingly enough, though, Gar only voices these thoughts to himself, letting Private Gar (whom Friel describes in his stage notes as Gar's "conscience" or "alter ego") articulate the way he truly feels. That S.B. can't hear Private Gar is worth noting, since it indicates that Gar is just as inept as his father when it comes to openly communicating. Rather than actually talking to S.B. about why he's leaving home, he privately reflects upon how badly he wants his father to reach out to him. As a result, he fails to give voice to his feelings, despite his desire to engage with S.B. before he leaves.

Although Gar wants his father to speak openly with him, he also recognizes on a certain level that communication isn't the only way for two people to relate or show affection. Gar articulates this when he recalls a peaceful day that he and S.B. spent fishing together. "[...]It was a great, great happiness, and active, bubbling joy," he thinks, "although nothing was being said—just the two of us fishing on a lake on a showery day." This memory remains in Gar's mind because it was one of the few times in his life that he felt a shared sense of happiness with his father. Even though they weren't saying anything to each other, it's clear that they both occupied the same headspace in that moment, relishing their time together. This, it's easy to see, is much more emotionally rewarding than passing rote, mindless pleasantries back and forth at the end of the day in a sad imitation of verbal connection. By spotlighting this dynamic, Friel intimates that there are multiple ways for people to engage on an emotional level, not all of which depend upon language or conversation.

At the same time, though, Friel implies that knowing how to communicate effectively is a vital skill when it comes to showing affection. Although it's *possible* to silently share

meaningful moments like the one Gar and S.B. had while fishing, these moments are rare, which is why verbal engagement is so important when it comes to maintaining relationships. For instance, the audience learns that S.B. truly does feel strongly for his son when he talks to Madge (the housekeeper) about how fond he has always been of the boy. Unfortunately, he has never articulated this to Gar himself, which is why Gar feels so estranged. However, S.B. isn't the only ineffective communicator, as evidenced by the fact that Gar himself literally runs out of the room at the first sign that his father might actually say something meaningful. This happens when Gar finally works up the courage to ask if his father remembers a tender moment from his childhood. Because S.B. doesn't recall the specifics of this day, Gar shuts down and is so focused on hiding his disappointment that he fails to notice as his father slowly recollects the day, making it clear that he actually does remember. This failure to connect, in turn, illustrates how difficult it is to communicate openly after failing to do so for so long. With this, Friel stresses the importance of using frequent communication to establish a relational foundation—without this basis of openness, the play warns, people cannot effectively connect when they want to show affection.



## NEW BEGINNINGS AND EMOTIONAL ESCAPISM

Brian Friel uses *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* to examine and even challenge the idea that change inherently leads to happiness. Determined to leave the small Irish town of Ballybeg in which he has spent his entire life, Gar fixates on fulfilling the American dream by moving to Philadelphia. Planning to work at a hotel, he invests himself in the grandiose notion that relocating will bring him money and a higher social status. Moreover, his decision to move imbues him with a sense of progress and forward momentum that his life otherwise lacks. As the play progresses, though, it becomes clear that moving to Philadelphia will do little to improve Gar's life, since what he truly wants is love and happiness, not money and success. And though the play ends before Gar makes his journey to the United States, it's apparent that his life abroad will be no better than his life in Ireland. By highlighting Gar's futile attempt to run away from his problems, Friel suggests that people often romanticize the idea of new beginnings without actually addressing the emotions making them unhappy in the first place. As a result, the changes they make to their lives are abstract and largely meaningless.

At the beginning of the play, Gar is nothing but excited about his journey to the United States, which he will remark on the following morning. In fact, his excitement is hardly containable, as his internal voice, Private Gar, indulges various fantasies about living the American dream. As Public Gar packs, "Private" Gar enthusiastically pretends to be the president of the hotel where he'll be working. As the two Gars act out this

conversation, Private Gar says (in the voice of the president of the hotel chain where Gar will be working), “I hope you’ll be happy with us and work hard and one day maybe you’ll be president of the biggest chain of biggest hotels in the world.” Private Gar’s repetition of the word “biggest” is worth mentioning, since it underscores the extent to which he has idealized his future in the United States. Indeed, he’s obviously quite impressed by the mere idea of living in America, where everything seems to him larger and flashier than his relatively simple existence in Ballybeg. With this mindset, he fantasizes about the prospect of his job leading to rapid success, even though his future position as a hotel worker isn’t necessarily much of a step up from his role as a shop worker in his father’s store. Nonetheless, he overstates the potential for him to attain upward mobility, ultimately convincing himself that this is a good reason to move the United States.

One of the reasons Gar fixates on the idea of finding success is because he doesn’t want to consider the real reasons driving him to leave Ireland, which are strictly emotional. In reality, the American dream isn’t what has inspired him to go abroad—rather, it’s the fact that Kate, the love of his life, has married another man. Although Gar and Kate used to be in a relationship, she ended up marrying a rich young man instead of Gar because she wanted to please her parents. Unable to bear living in the same town as Kate, then, Gar decides to leave for America, where he hopes to forget about their relationship. Furthermore, Gar wants to leave Ballybeg because he’s fed up with his father’s inability to show affection. Both of these motivating factors become apparent when Kate comes to visit him on his last night in town. As he brags about how rich he’s going to become, she listens sympathetically before pointing out that his father will miss him. At the mention of his father, Gar goes on a long and impassioned rant about how he doesn’t care about Ballybeg, insisting that the town is miserable and means absolutely nothing to him, adding, “If you’re not happy and content in a place—then—then—then you’re not happy and content in a place! It’s as simple as that. I’ve stuck around this hole far too long, I’m telling you: it’s a bloody quagmire, a backwater, a dead-end!” By framing Ballybeg as a swamp capable of sucking people in and holding them back in life, Gar acts as if his hunger for progress is what’s driving him away. In truth, though, his overly-emotional response indicates that he’s simply trying to escape heartache.

By the end of the play, Gar is less sure about his decision to leave Ballybeg. This is perhaps because he knows that moving to the United States won’t actually bring him happiness. After all, it’s obvious that he doesn’t truly care about becoming rich and successful, but simply wants to put his past behind him—something he likely won’t be able to do, since he’ll still be the same person and will therefore still struggle with his relationship with his father and his disappointment surrounding his breakup with Kate. Nevertheless, he believes

he must keep moving forward, thinking that any kind of change will help him combat his emotions. “Get up and keep active!” Private Gar instructs him at one point. “The devil makes work for idle hands!” It is this fear that stasis will lead to emotional misery that fuels Gar’s determination to leave Ballybeg, and even though he seems to realize at the end of the play that it will be more difficult to outrun his feelings than he’d like to think, he doesn’t let go of his plan to leave home. In turn, Friel creates a portrait of a man so unwilling to confront painful feelings that he idealizes change for the sake of change, refusing to fully accept that new horizons won’t magically solve his emotional troubles.



## MEMORY, NOSTALGIA, AND THE PAST

Throughout *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, Brian Friel explores the way people conceive of their own memories, illustrating how they often manipulate or distort their conceptions of the past in order to trick themselves into feeling happy. Gar recognizes this tendency amongst his peers in Ireland as he prepares to travel to the United States. Unlike his friends, he appears unwilling to shine an unrealistically positive light on his past. Cognizant that neither he nor anyone else will ever be able to change what has already happened, he becomes critical of the ways in which everyone around him exalts bygone days and invests themselves in memories that exist as abstractions fixed in an inaccessible past. At the same time, though, he also romanticizes the future by hoping to escape troubling emotions by moving to United States. By mining this contradictory dynamic, then, Friel uses *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* to issue a warning not only about using change to avoid emotional hardship, but also about idealizing certain memories to ignore the true nature of one’s past.

Gar has already realized at the outset of the play that he’ll never be able to recapture the happiness of his past. This is because the time period he most yearns to return to actually doesn’t belong to *his* past, since it took place before he was born, when his mother was still alive. Because she died three days after giving birth to him, he never got to meet her, but he often thinks about what her life must have been like. While packing the night before his journey to the United States, he opens an old suitcase and finds a newspaper clipping of his parents’ wedding announcement, causing him and his internal self or alter ego, Private Gar, to reminisce about what Madge (the housekeeper) has told them about their mother. As Private Gar considers her memory, though, he suddenly cuts himself off by quoting a speech delivered by the 18th-century philosopher Edmund Burke, in which Burke bemoaned the bygone peaceful days of France before the French Revolution. By repeating Burke’s overtly nostalgic words about how beautiful Marie Antoinette (**the Queen of France**) was before she was decapitated, Private Gar reminds himself that it’s

unproductive to fixate on what can't be changed. In keeping with this, Public Gar belts out, "**Philadelphia, here I come,**" clearly wanting to turn his attention to the present and the future instead of letting the memory of his late mother consume his life.

Unlike Gar, the people around him are very attached to the past. This is especially apparent when his friend Ned speaks boisterously about a night he and several pals had together. Although Gar was present, Ned tells him what happened, saying that he, Tom, and another friend named Jimmy went into a set of caves to go swimming with two women. According to Ned, he and Tom decided to go for a swim while Jimmy remained with the women. Shortly thereafter, he claims, they saw Jimmy running away naked, yelling, "Save me, boys, save me!" while the two women chased him. After Ned finishes this story, everyone laughs and celebrates the humorous memory, but Gar privately recalls that he was also there that night. Ned, he knows, has altered the story—in reality, they all went swimming in front of the girls, and then they decided to try to take Jimmy's pants off as a joke. When they approached him, though, Jimmy managed to fend all of them off, wrestling them to the ground before they finally decided to head home, leaving the two women in the cave. Needless to say, this story isn't quite as humorous as Ned's version, which made the night sound wild and hilarious when it was actually quite unremarkable and perhaps a bit pathetic (insofar as the boys behaved childishly in front of the women). Gar's recognition of Ned's fabrication is important to note, since it shows that he's sensitive to the ways people refigure the past to make it sound more appealing in the moment.

Like Ned, Gar's father, S.B., also exhibits a certain kind of unfounded nostalgia about the past. In a conversation with Madge, he speaks extensively about a sailor suit Gar used to wear as a young boy, fondly remembering how cute and loving the boy used to be. And though this might not be an inaccurate memory, his emotional recollection is out of step with the fact that he failed, even when Gar was a boy, to foster a sense of connection between himself and his son. Nonetheless, he chooses to focus only on this tender memory, not recalling the reality of his relationship with Gar during that period. Private Gar comments on this myopic view of the past when he periodically quotes Edmund Burke's wistful speech about the days before the French Revolution. After all, Burke is right that the French Revolution was a ghastly and bloody affair, but there's no denying that the revolution changed the course of history for the better, largely putting an end to feudalism and absolute monarchy and giving rise to more egalitarian modes of governance. By irreverently referencing Burke's nostalgia about Europe before the French Revolution, then, Private Gar critiques the human tendency to become overly sentimental about the past in a way that blinds people to the necessity of change. And though Friel also uses Gar's obsession with

moving to the United States to caution against the pitfalls of using change as a means of emotional escape, he intimates that nostalgia is often regressive and emotionally unproductive.



## PUBLIC LIFE, PRIVATE LIFE, AND IDENTITY

In *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, Friel draws a stark distinction between a person's internal and external worlds by splitting the play's protagonist, Gar, into two separate characters: "Private" Gar and "Public" Gar, each one played by a different actor. Public Gar, the playwright explains, is the Gar who everyone else in the play sees, but Private Gar is "the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the alter ego, the secret thoughts, the id." In this capacity, Private is more straightforward and assertive than Public, indulging Gar's wildest fantasies about getting rich or becoming important. However, egging Public on isn't Private's only role, as one might expect from a character playing a person's id, the part of the psyche that is driven by primal desires. Rather, Private exhibits the ability to exercise prudence and restraint, as is the case when he urges Public to stop speaking so angrily to his former lover, Kate. As a result, Private is more than just a devil on Public's shoulder, but a representation of Public's entire internal world. Furthermore, the fact that Public sometimes fails to follow Private's advice is a sign that it's often difficult for people to bridge the gap between their inner feelings and their outward behavior. In keeping with this, Friel's study of the intersection between a person's private and public lives highlights the complex and variable nature of identity, ultimately proving that people contain multitudes.

At the beginning of the play, Friel introduces Private with a stage note that frames him as the side of Gar's personality that knows no restraint. He refers to him as Gar's "id," meaning that Private is the part of Gar that is instinctual and unbound by extraneous concerns about how to behave. This makes sense, considering that he is the *private* side of Gar, so he can act however he wants without having to worry about what other people think. As such, he is bold and shamelessly confident, waxing poetic about how triumphant Gar's imminent journey to the United States will be. Moreover, he urges Gar to brazenly forget about people like his father, telling him he should stick his head out of the plane window the following day and "spit down on the lot of them." By indulging these self-aggrandizing fantasies, Private tries to get Gar to embrace what he wants for the future without paying attention to anything else.

Although Private initially seems like the embodiment of Gar's unchecked desires, it's worth observing that he's actually more complicated and three-dimensional than he first appears. Friel's stage note describes Private with words that build an image of him as confident and mischievous, associating him with "the alter ego, the secret thoughts, the id." However, the playwright also defines Private as Gar's conscience. This suggests that he

is the voice or force that guides Gar by telling him the best way to act, constantly gauging what is right and what is wrong. Needless to say, this tendency toward measured evaluation contradicts with the other half of Friel's description. In fact, it also conflicts with the manner in which Private conducts himself during the first scene, when he boldly invites Gar to think self-aggrandizing thoughts. But this contradiction, it seems, is integral to the nature of Gar's internal voice, which encompasses an entire range of emotion and temperament.

It would be easy to assume that the distinction between Public and Private Gar is clean and simple, since the mere fact that Friel makes a distinction between the two suggests that each side of Gar's personality must be the other's polar opposite. This, in turn, creates the impression that Private is on one end of a spectrum while Public is on the other, but this isn't necessarily the case. For instance, Private sometimes tries to urge Gar to act with care and prudence, like when he tells him to stop talking to Kate about how much he hates Ireland. Listening to Public ramble on in an angry tone about how Ballybeg is a terrible place, Private realizes that he's upsetting Kate and offending her, since she herself has no plans to leave Ballybeg, so he pleads with Public Gar to change the subject, demonstrating that he has more social intelligence than one would normally attribute to a person's id. Accordingly, Friel's decision to separate Gar into two characters hints at his belief that people aren't always what their outward appearances suggest. To that end, the nuanced and wide-ranging nature of Gar's internal identity is a testament to the fact that people can't be reduced to just one personality, as Gar's multifaceted identity demonstrates that people often harbor entire worlds of emotion and temperament beneath their public persona.

often finds himself pining for the past, wishing he could either recapture the happiness he had when he was still with Kate or somehow experience what it would have been like to meet his mother. However, he's also aware that it's impossible to change what has already happened, which is why he recites Burke's speech about the Queen of France, holding it up as an example of what it might look like to dwell in vain on the past.



### “PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME”

“Philadelphia, Here I Come,” the play's titular song, represents Gar's hope that a fresh start will help him escape his sorrows. At the beginning of the play, he sings this song simply because he's excited to be leaving for the United States the following day. Before long, though, he starts to use it as a way of distracting himself from troubling thoughts, bursting into song as soon as Private Gar brings up his stilted relationship S.B., his failed romance with Kate, or his mother's death. What he fails to realize, though, is that even this song hints at the fact that he won't be able to outrun his emotional demons, since its lyrics read: “Philadelphia, here I come, right back where I started from.” The second half of this line suggests that, although Gar is headed to a new and foreign city, he will end up “right back where [he] started.” Since he has never been to Philadelphia, this must mean that he's destined to return not to a physical place, but to a certain state of mind. As it becomes clear that Gar is only moving to America to get away from his emotional problems, then, the song “Philadelphia, Here I Come” becomes a manifestation of the unfortunate fact that he'll never be happy until he learns to actually confront his sorrows, rather than trying to ignore or escape from them.



### SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### THE QUEEN OF FRANCE

Throughout the play, Gar frequently uses the 18th-century philosopher Edmund Burke's nostalgic speech about the Queen of France to keep himself from romanticizing the past. As a result, Burke's overly sentimental words about Marie Antoinette (the Queen of France) come to stand for the ways in which people often idealize the past. Delivered shortly after Marie Antoinette was beheaded during the French Revolution, Burke's speech praises a bygone era, using the Queen's beauty as a young woman to represent an age of innocence that Burke thinks Europe has forever lost because of the Revolution. By fixating on this idea, he ignores the cultural and political necessity of the French Revolution, failing to recognize the many benefits of the war. Similarly, Gar



### QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Faber & Faber edition of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* published in 1994.

## Episode I Quotes

Private: You are full conscious of all the consequences of your decision?

Public: Yessir.

Private: Of leaving the country of your birth, the land of the curlew and the snipe, the Aran sweater and the Irish Sweepstakes?

Public: *(with fitting hesitation)* I-I-I-I have considered all these. Sir.

Private: Of going to a profane, irreligious, pagan country of gross materialism?

Public: I am fully sensitive to this. Sir.

**Related Characters:** Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 5

### Explanation and Analysis

In this conversation, Private Gar humorously interrogates Public Gar about his decision to leave Ireland to live in the United States. Asking him if he's "full conscious" of the implications of his decision to leave home, he jokingly reminds Gar of Ireland's benefits, including "the Aran sweater and the Irish Sweepstakes." In this tongue-in-cheek way, he makes fun of the very idea that anyone would ever prefer to live in Ireland instead of the United States. At the same time, though, he also frames America as a "profane, irreligious, pagan country of gross materialism," playing into the stereotype of the country as an immoral place where only money and success matter. In doing so, Private Gar reduces both his home and his future country to cartoonish representations of what they actually are, thereby underlining the fact that people can find things to critique about any place they go. Consequently, his joke actually bears hints of seriousness, as he subtly warns Public Gar that his attempt to escape his emotional troubles by moving to a new country won't guarantee him happiness. Under this interpretation, he invites Public Gar to consider the notion that change doesn't automatically bring contentment, though he doesn't say this outright, so the entire point comes off as nothing more than a good-natured joke.

Public: Whether he says good-bye to me or not, or whether he slips me a few miserable quid or not, it's a matter of total indifference to me, Madge.

Madge: Aye, so. Your tea's on the table—but that's a matter of total indifference to me.

Public: Give me time to wash, will you?

Madge: And another thing: just because he doesn't say much doesn't mean that he hasn't feelings like the rest of us.

Public: Say much? He's said nothing!

Madge: He said nothing either when your mother died.

**Related Characters:** Maire O'Donnell, S.B. O'Donnell (Screwballs), Madge, Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 6

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Public Gar talks to Madge about the fact that his father has yet to say anything to him about his imminent journey to the United States. Although he claims to feel a sense of "total indifference" regarding whether or not S.B. acknowledges his departure, it's rather clear that Gar desperately wants his father to say something meaningful to him before he leaves. After all, he wouldn't bring the matter up if it wasn't bothering him. Nonetheless, he tries to convince Madge—and himself—that he doesn't care about whether or not S.B. talks to him, thereby trying to protect himself from the possibility that the old man won't say anything. In this moment, it becomes clear that Gar is desperate to engage in open communication with his father, since he believes that this is the only way they'll be able to connect with each another. However, Madge points out that S.B. is capable of feeling emotion even though he rarely expresses himself, indicating that Gar shouldn't fixate on whether or not his father says something to him about his departure. According to this mindset, Gar should simply assure himself that his father cares about him. Because S.B. has never said anything to make this clear, though, this is a rather difficult outlook to embrace, which is why he obsesses over S.B.'s silence, interpreting it as a total lack of emotion.

Private: Yeah. You mentioned that your father was a businessman. What's his line?

Public: Well, Sir, he has—what you would call—his finger in many pies—retail mostly—general dry goods—assorted patent drugs—hardware—ah—ah—dehydrated fish—men's king-size hose—snuffs from the exotic East . . . of Donegal—a confection for gourmets, known as Peggy's Leg—weedkiller—*(Suddenly breaking off: in his normal accent: rolling on the bed.)* Yahoooooo! It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles—

Private: Let's git packin', boy.

**Related Characters:** S.B. O'Donnell (Screwballs), Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis

During this exchange, Private Gar pretends to be the president of the American hotel chain where Public Gar will be working when he reaches the United States. In a mock interview, the president asks him questions about his background. When he asks about the nature of S.B.'s work, Public Gar finds himself trying to make his father sound impressive and respectable. He does this by listing the various things S.B. sells in the general store, attempting to frame his job as complicated and remarkably entrepreneurial. Of course, he could simply say that S.B. is a store owner, but he has already given the president of the hotel chain the impression that his father is a "businessman" with a more complex role, which is why he goes into great detail about S.B.'s rather mundane job. Although Public Gar is leaving Ballybeg to escape his father's influence, then, he finds himself leaning heavily on S.B.'s life, needing to make it sound admirable when in reality he'd rather disparage the old man, whom he's trying to escape by leaving home.

It is perhaps because Gar realizes this that he suddenly cuts himself off and says, "It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France," unexpectedly quoting a speech by the 18th-century philosopher Edmund Burke about what Europe was like before the French Revolution. This is the first time in the play that this reference appears, and it signals Gar's belief that it's futile to romanticize the past. Edmund Burke's speech about pre-Revolution Europe is nostalgic, ignoring or failing to see the many benefits of the French Revolution. Similarly, Public Gar's exaggeration

of S.B.'s career provides what he clearly believes is an inaccurate depiction of his life in Ireland, which he's trying to put behind him. For this reason, he cuts himself off and focuses on packing his bags, thereby investing himself in the future instead of the past.

Private: *(quietly, rapidly insisting)* Are you going to take her photograph to the States with you? When are you going to say good-bye to her? Will you write to her? Will you send her cards and photographs? You loved her once, old rooster; you wanted so much to marry her that it was a bloody sickness. Tell me, randy boy; tell me the truth: have you got over that sickness? Do you still love her? Do you still lust after her? Well, do you? Do you? Do you?

Public: Bugger! *(Public suddenly stops dancing, switches—almost knocks—off the record-player, pulls a wallet out of his hip pocket and produces a snap. He sits and looks at it.)*

**Related Characters:** Kate Doogan, Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Private Gar puts a damper on Public Gar's jovial attitude by bringing up his failed relationship with Kate Doogan, the love of his life. While Public Gar dances around the room and fantasizes about what it will be like to live in Philadelphia, Private Gar suddenly forces him to remember his relationship with Kate, reminding him that they almost got married and that he hasn't yet said farewell to her. This is one of the first times in the play that the audience witnesses a noticeable divide between Public and Private Gar, as each one acts independently of the other. Whereas Public Gar wants to maintain his positive attitude, Private Gar wants to brood over the past. This is somewhat strange, since at other times throughout the play Private Gar urges Public Gar to keep busy in order to *avoid* such melancholy memories. For the first time, then, the audience sees that Private Gar is a somewhat unstable character, vacillating between several emotional extremes. This, of course, has to do with the fact that he is not a real person, but a representation of Gar's internal world, meaning that he's nothing but an amalgamation of Gar's messy and wide-ranging emotions. In turn, Friel illustrates that a person's internal and external personas aren't always in step with one another.

Private: (*warily*) Mrs Doctor Francis King. September 8th.  
In harvest sunshine. [...] By God, Gar, aul sod, it was a sore hoke on the aul prestige, eh? Between ourselves, aul son, in the privacy of the bedroom, between you and me and the wall, as the fella says, has it left a deep scar on the aul skitter of a soul, eh? What I mean to say like, you took it sort of bad, between you and me and the wall, as the fella says—

Public: (*sings*)

'Philadelphia, here I come, right back—'

Private: But then there's more fish in the sea, as the fella says [...].

**Related Characters:** Dr. Francis King, Kate Doogan, Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 22

### Explanation and Analysis

During this exchange, Private Gar reminds Public Gar of the day Kate Doogan married Dr. Francis King. Although Gar and Kate had plans to start a life together, Gar ended up leaving her because he saw that her father wanted her to wed Francis, which is exactly what happened. In this moment, Private Gar forces Public Gar to relive the memory of that day, effectively dashing his high spirits and excitement regarding his upcoming journey to the United States. Instead of letting him focus on the future, Private Gar urges Public Gar to admit to himself that his heartache has “left a deep scar” inside of him. By saying this, he refuses to let Public Gar fully repress his emotions, even as Public Gar tries desperately to drown him out by singing “Philadelphia, here I come,” a song he uses to focus on the future. It's worth noting, though, that the end of this line is, “right back where I started from”—an indication that his decision to go to the United States to outrun his emotions will be completely ineffective, since moving doesn't do anything to address the heartache of the past.

Screwballs, we've eaten together like this for the past twenty-odd years, and never once in all that time have you made as much as one unpredictable remark. Now, even though you refuse to acknowledge the fact, Screwballs, I'm leaving you for ever. I'm going to Philadelphia, to work in an hotel. And you know why I'm going. Screwballs, don't you. Because I'm twenty-five, and you treat me as if I were five—I can't order even a dozen loaves without getting your permission. Because you pay me less than you pay Madge. But worse, far worse than that Screwballs, because—*we embarrass one another*. If one of us were to say, 'You're looking tired' or 'That's a bad cough you have', the other would fall over backwards with embarrassment.

**Related Characters:** Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell) (speaker), Madge, Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), S.B. O'Donnell (Screwballs)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 28

### Explanation and Analysis

Private Gar speaks these words as Public Gar sits quietly with S.B. after a day's work. Neither S.B. nor Public Gar are talkative with one another, and the only phrases S.B. utters are vapid and pointless observations about the day—statements that don't invite any kind of genuine conversation or establish a connection with his son. Meanwhile, Private Gar rants at S.B., telling him everything he truly feels. He tells him that he's leaving Ireland to get away from him, frustrated that his father doesn't treat him like an adult. More importantly, though, Private Gar hates that he and his father can't even talk to one another, noting that they would “embarrass” each other if they were to make even the simplest remarks about one another. If Gar were to note that S.B. looks tired, both men would be humiliated because they never truly interact, instead refining their conversations to little remarks that don't actually help them communicate their feelings. And though Gar is painfully aware of his father's inability to speak openly, he only articulates his frustration about this via Private Gar, meaning that nothing he says actually makes its way into actual conversation. Indeed, S.B. can't hear Private Gar, so none of what he says makes any difference whatsoever. Consequently, the audience sees that Gar is just as inept as his father when it comes to expressing his feelings.

●● So tonight d'you know what I want you to do? I want you to make one unpredictable remark, and even though I'll still be on that plane tomorrow morning, I'll have doubts: Maybe I should have stuck it out; maybe the old codger did have feelings; maybe I have maligned the old bastard.

**Related Characters:** Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell) (speaker), Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), S.B. O'Donnell (Screwballs)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 28

### Explanation and Analysis

Private Gar says this while Public Gar sits at the table with S.B. Gar and his father hardly speak to each another, but Private Gar goes on at length about how much S.B.'s silence frustrates him. In keeping with this, he tells his father (without actually telling him, since S.B. can't hear Private Gar) that he will reconsider his feelings toward him if only he says something unforeseen. At the end of each day, S.B. always says, "Another day over." This drives Private Gar crazy, partly because it emphasizes the monotony of his life in Ireland, but also because there's very little that a person can say in response to this. In fact, this remark is nothing but a useless and obvious declarative sentence, not a true attempt to spark conversation. In this manner, S.B. uses language without actually trying to relate to his son, simply filling the silences with words that do nothing to build rapport between the two men. This is why Private Gar wants his father to say something unpredictable, since this might actually give him an opportunity to respond and, in turn, start a conversation. As it stands, though, S.B. remains stuck in a state of unrelatability, ultimately driving his son away.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 49

### Explanation and Analysis

This conversation takes place between Lizzy and Ben when they come (along with Con) to visit Gar in Ireland. Telling Gar about the many luxuries of living in the United States, Lizzy asks Ben to help her frame America as an incredible place to live. Although she hasn't fully revealed this yet, she wants to make Philadelphia sound like an amazing place because she hopes Gar will come to live with her and Con, since they've always yearned to have a child but are unable to conceive. However, Ben makes an interesting point when says that America is "just another place to live." By saying this, he subtly challenges the idea that moving to a new country will automatically bring a person happiness. Although change is often positive, Ben understands that it doesn't in and of itself make a person content, which is why he says that there's no true difference between Ireland and America. When he says this, he means that Gar will most likely find that there's no *emotional* difference between staying at home and coming to Philadelphia. After all, he will still be the same person with the same problems—the only difference will be that he lives in a foreign country. In turn, Friel helps the audience see that Gar's eventual attempt to outrun his emotional troubles will be futile, since moving to America will only provide him with "another place to live," not a magical remedy for his sorrows.

## Episode II Quotes

●● Lizzy: (*to Public*) And that's why I say to you: America's Gawd's own country. Ben?

Ben: Don't ask me. I was born there.

Lizzy: What d'ya mean—"Don't ask me"? I am asking you. He should come out or he should not—which is it?

Ben: It's just another place to live, Elise. Ireland—America—what's the difference?

**Related Characters:** Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), Con Sweeney, Ben Burton, Lizzy (Elise) Sweeney

☛ They open the door. Ned hesitates and begins taking off the broad leather belt with the huge brass buckle that supports his trousers.

Ned: (*shyly, awkwardly*) By the way. Gar, since I'll not see you again before you go –

Tom: Hi! What are you at? At least wait till you're sure of the women!

Ned: (*impatiently to Tom*) Agh, shut up! (*to Public*) If any of them Yankee scuts try to beat you up some dark night, you can... (*Now he is very confused and flings the belt across the room to Public.*) You know... there's a bloody big buckle on it... manys a get I scutched with it...

[...]

Ned: You'll make out all right over there...have a...

Tom: I know that look in his eyes!

*Ned wheels rapidly on Tom, gives him a more than playful punch, and says savagely:*

Ned: Christ, if there's one get I hate, it's you!

**Related Characters:** Tom, Ned, Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 64

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ned makes a painfully self-conscious attempt to bid Gar a heartfelt farewell. He and Tom have just decided to leave Gar's house to go to the local hotel, where they hope to pick up two women they saw in town earlier that day. Although he hasn't shown any emotion regarding the fact that his good friend Gar is about to leave for the United States, Ned suddenly tries to express his feelings. However, he does so in a strange way, deciding to give Gar his belt as a gift. This, it seems, is an attempt to avoid having to actually say anything meaningful about his friend's departure. More importantly, the gift itself represents his desire to maintain a stereotypically masculine air, as he explains that Gar can use the buckle to fend off attackers in America. In turn, the belt enables Ned to express his fondness for Gar while simultaneously keeping up his macho persona, since it gives him the opportunity to brag about how many people he's beat up with the buckle. This is a perfect representation of the stilted relational dynamic that exists between the majority of the men in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Somewhat tragically, Ned's attempt to show affection is further inhibited by Tom's idiotic interruptions, as Tom focuses solely on the

prospect of sleeping with women rather than on Gar's final night in Ballybeg. In this regard, then, the audience sees the various ways in which men in this play make it even harder for each other to show their emotions, ultimately holding each other back from freely expressing the way they feel.

☛ Joe and Tom and big, thick, generous Ned . . . No one will ever know or understand the fun there was; for there was fun and there was laughing—foolish, silly fun and foolish, silly laughing; but what it was all about you can't remember, can you? Just the memory of it—that's all you have now—just the memory; and even now, even so soon, it is being distilled of all its coarseness; and what's left is going to be precious, precious gold...

**Related Characters:** Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell) (speaker), Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), Joe, Tom, Ned

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 66

### Explanation and Analysis

Private Gar says this to Public Gar shortly after Ned, Tom, and Joe leave his house. Headed to the local hotel in the hopes of meeting women, the three boys have demonstrated to Gar that they care more about having a good time than about showing him that they're sad he's about to leave. And though this upsets him, Private Gar speaks sympathetically about the times he's had with these friends, remembering the “foolish, silly fun” they've had together. This thought leads him to consider the nature of memory, realizing that it's often difficult to remember things accurately. In fact, he acknowledges that he will likely look back on his time with his friends with great nostalgia, since the memory of these experiences is “being distilled of all its coarseness.” This idea implies that the passage of time causes people to forget what something was really like in the present, which is why it's easy to be wistful and nostalgic about something that was—in reality—never all that great to begin with. By recognizing this, Private Gar simultaneously commemorates his time with his friends and cynically warns himself about getting swept up in the past.

☞ Listen, if someone were to come along to me tonight and say, ‘Ballybeg’s yours—lock, stock, and barrel,’ it wouldn’t make that (*cracks his fingers*) much difference to me. If you’re not happy and content in a place— then—then—then you’re not happy and content in a place! It’s as simple as that. I’ve stuck around this hole far too long. I’m telling you: it’s a bloody quagmire, a backwater, a dead-end! And everybody in it goes crazy sooner or later! Everybody!

**Related Characters:** Public Gar (Gareth O’Donnell) (speaker), S.B. O’Donnell (Screwballs), Kate Doogan, Private Gar (Gareth O’Donnell)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 69

### Explanation and Analysis

Public Gar says this to Kate when she comes to his house to say goodbye on his final night in Ireland. At first, he’s caught off guard by her presence and can hardly speak. However, when she suggests that his father will miss him dearly when he leaves, he flies into a lengthy and enraged monologue about how little he cares about Ballybeg. In the beginning of their conversation, he tells her that he has grand plans to become rich in the United States, and they both joke that he’ll someday come back and purchase all of Ballybeg. Now, though, he rejects this idea, insisting that he wouldn’t even take Ballybeg if it were offered to him for free. As he goes on this rant, he says something interesting about the relationship between happiness and where a person lives, stating, “If you’re not happy and content in a place—then—then—then you’re not happy and content in a place! It’s as simple as that.” This is a somewhat ironic thing for him to say, since he has invested himself so thoroughly in the idea that moving to the United States will solve all of his emotional problems and help him outrun his heartache. What he means is this moment is that there’s nothing a person can do if he or she is discontent in a certain place. However, his statement can also be applied to the idea that happiness is ultimately uninfluenced by where a person is, meaning that moving will do nothing to solve Gar’s problems. If he’s unhappy, then he’s simply unhappy, and going somewhere new won’t change that. Choosing to ignore this, though, he commits himself to the idea that staying in Ballybeg is what’s dragging him down, unable to draw a connection between Kate’s mention of his father (one of the main reasons he’s leaving) and his sudden anger.

## Episode III, Part One Quotes

☞ And you had the rod in your left hand—I can see the cork nibbled away from the butt of the rod—and maybe we had been chatting—I don’t remember—it doesn’t matter—but between us at that moment there was this great happiness, this great joy—you must have felt it too—it was so much richer than a content—it was a great, great happiness, and active, bubbling joy—although nothing was being said—just the two of us fishing on a lake on a showery day—and young as I was I felt, I knew, that this was precious, and your hat was soft on the top of my ears—I can feel it—and I shrank down into your coat—and then, then for no reason at all except that you were happy too, you began to sing [...].

**Related Characters:** Private Gar (Gareth O’Donnell) (speaker), Public Gar (Gareth O’Donnell), S.B. O’Donnell (Screwballs)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 74

### Explanation and Analysis

Private Gar says this to S.B. while they have dinner together on his final night in Ballybeg. Although his father can’t hear him, Private Gar recalls one of his fondest memories of their time together, remembering a day they went fishing and felt a mutual sense of happiness and contentment. It’s worth mentioning that this memory contains no dialogue—S.B. and Gar didn’t talk to one another during this fishing trip, or if they did, their conversation doesn’t stand out to Private Gar as a significant part of the memory. Rather, Private Gar recalls the fact that both he and his father were experiencing a “great happiness” without even speaking. This is an important detail, since Private Gar has spent the majority of the play fixating on his and his father’s inability to communicate with one another. In this moment, it becomes clear that what Gar really yearns for is to connect with his father—something that doesn’t necessarily need to happen through the use of language. And yet, it’s also the case that Gar and S.B. are so estranged from one another that it seems rather impossible that they would be able to recapture this mutual sense of connection *without* the use of language. Consequently, their relationship is doomed because they have no means by which to relate to one another.

☛ [...] there's an affinity between Screwballs and me that no one, literally, no one could understand—except you, Canon (*deadly serious*), because you're warm and kind and soft and sympathetic—all things to all men—because you could translate all this loneliness, this groping, this dreadful bloody buffoonery into Christian terms that will make life bearable for us all. And yet you don't say a word.

**Related Characters:** Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell) (speaker), Canon Mick O'Byrne, Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), S.B. O'Donnell (Screwballs)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 82

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Private Gar addresses Canon O'Byrne as he plays chess with S.B. Although he speaks sarcastically about how Canon is the only person who could understand the “affinity” between S.B. and Gar, it's likely that he's actually serious about his bond with his father and Canon's ability to grasp it. Given that he has already made it clear that he and his father were once capable of being happy together (as evidenced by the bond they established while fishing one day when Gar was a child), it's clear that he truly does think there's an “affinity” between his father and himself. However, he recognizes that he's unable to access this affinity, since neither man is capable of expressing their affection for the other. This is why Private Gar turns his attention to Canon O'Byrne, who's accustomed to taking human emotion and translating it into religious terms. Thinking of it as Canon O'Byrne's job to help people embrace their emotions in a spiritual setting, Private Gar believes that Christianity might help people overcome their loneliness. Indeed, because his relationship with his father is so negatively impacted by their mutual inability to express themselves, Private Gar wants Canon O'Byrne to help them form a bond by providing them with a religious discourse, which would help them speak about the human condition without actually having to address their specific feelings head-on. However, Canon O'Byrne is too similar to S.B., simply focusing on playing chess instead of engaging in thoughtful conversation. As a result, Gar remains at an emotional remove from his father.

## Episode III, Part Two Quotes

☛ S.B.: (*justly, reasonably*) There was a brown one belonging to the doctor, and before that there was a wee flat-bottom—but it was green—or was it white? I'll tell you, you wouldn't be thinking of a punt—it could have been blue—one that the curate had down at the pier last summer—

*Private's mocking laughter increases. Public rushes quickly into the shop. Private, still mocking, follows.*

—a fine sturdy wee punt it was, too, and it could well have been the...

*He sees that he is alone and tails off.*

**Related Characters:** Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), S.B. O'Donnell (Screwballs)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 92

### Explanation and Analysis

When Public Gar asks his father if he remembers the blue rowboat in which they once spent a beautiful day fishing, S.B. has trouble recalling the specific boat. Because this memory is so important to Gar, he quickly tries to remove himself from the conversation, feeling hurt that his father doesn't remember the one moment that sticks in his own mind as a symbol of their enduring connection. However, his dismay actually keeps him from realizing that S.B. is slowly putting the memory together. In this passage, S.B. reconstructs that day, wondering if Gar has confused the blue rowboat with a small “punt” that used to belong to a curate. Even though he says that this could very well have been the boat Gar is referring to, both Public and Private Gar have already stopped listening, deciding to remove themselves from the room. In doing so, Gar effectively short-circuits the one opportunity he has to connect with his father before he leaves for the United States. As a result, the audience sees why it's so important that people learn how to communicate openly with their loved ones, since Gar drives himself to misery without even recognizing that his father is trying to relate to him.

●● I can see him, with his shoulders back, and the wee head up straight, and the mouth, aw, man, as set, and says he this morning, I can hear him saying it, says he, 'I'm not going to school. I'm going into my daddy's business'—you know—all important—and, d'you mind, you tried to coax him to go to school, and not a move you could get out of him, and him as manly looking, and this wee sailor suit as smart looking on him, and—and—and at the heel of the hunt I had to go with him myself, the two of us, hand in hand, as happy as larks—we were that happy, Madge—and him dancing and chatting beside me—mind?—you couldn't get a word in edge-ways with all the chatting he used to go through...

**Related Characters:** S.B. O'Donnell (Screwballs) (speaker), Madge, Private Gar (Gareth O'Donnell), Public Gar (Gareth O'Donnell)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 93

**Explanation and Analysis**

S.B. speaks these words to Madge after failing to connect with Gar on the young man's last night in Ballybeg. Gar has just run out of the room without realizing that his father is trying to engage with him, leaving S.B. to sentimentally recall what his son was like as a young boy. As he tells Madge about the sailor suit Gar used to wear, it becomes clear that he feels very strongly for his son, wistfully remembering how happy they were together. Furthermore, his story underscores the fact that he and Gar used to be quite close, since Gar refused to go to school because he wanted to be with S.B. In fact, the only way S.B. and Madge could convince him to attend school was if S.B. walked him there himself. This affectionate relationship starkly contrasts the cold way they interact with each other now that Gar is an adult. More importantly, the fact that S.B. goes out of his way to think about this memory suggests that he isn't as unemotional as Gar thinks, once again highlighting the discrepancy that often exists between a person's internal and external personas.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## EPISODE I

Gareth O'Donnell enters the kitchen of his home in Ballybeg in County Donegal, Ireland, where he has lived his entire life. Having finished his day's work as an employee in his father S.B.'s general store (which is attached to their house), he comes into the kitchen for tea, singing, "**Philadelphia, here I come,** right back where I started from" and dancing with the housekeeper, Madge, who good-naturedly tells him to leave her alone. When he stops, he asks if she'll miss him when he leaves the following morning, but she refuses to answer, concentrating on setting the table. Changing the subject, Gar complains that his father made him work 10 minutes late on his last night in Ireland, chastising himself for failing to tell S.B. off when he asked him to do one final chore.

Gar retreats into his bedroom. Throwing himself on the bed, he thinks about his upcoming trip to Philadelphia. As he does so, his alter ego emerges onstage. Gar is split into two versions of himself—Public Gar and Private Gar. Public Gar is the Gar everyone sees and interacts with, whereas Private Gar is his internal voice, acting as his "id" and "conscience." As Public Gar lies on the bed, Private Gar approaches and talks about how a new chapter of his life is about to begin, waxing poetic about what it'll be like to fly over Ireland in an airplane. This excites Public Gar, who joins in by adding sound effects to Private Gar's fantasies about looking down from the plane to see himself as a player in a professional soccer game. In this manner, the two versions of Gar get lost in a cartoonish fantasy.

Switching tracks, Private Gar addresses Public Gar in an officious voice, asking if he's fully aware of what he's doing by leaving Ireland. In a tongue-in-cheek way, he asks if he's ready to leave Ballybeg to go to a "profane, irreligious, pagan country of gross materialism." In response, Public Gar enthusiastically says that he is indeed prepared to travel to America. As he continues this charade, Madge enters and gives him an old suitcase to take abroad. She also asks if S.B. has said anything to him about his imminent departure, and Public Gar says that he hasn't. In fact, he hasn't even given him his week's pay. Hearing this, Madge assures him that S.B. will surely say something more to him before he leaves, insisting that the old man will probably even give him a little extra money.

*From the very beginning of the play, Brian Friel presents Gar as someone who is eager to get on with his life. Excitedly singing about Philadelphia, it's clear that he looks forward to the future. It also emerges right away that he has a strained relationship with his father, since he complains about S.B. instead of speaking sadly about the fact that he'll soon be leaving him behind. In this way, then, the audience senses just how eager Gar is to launch into a new chapter of his life.*



*The distinction between Public Gar and Private Gar demonstrates Friel's interest in human interiority, or the idea that people often have entire personalities that are hidden from the rest of the world. Because Private Gar speaks so enthusiastically to Public Gar, the audience comes to see him as a rowdy and somewhat childish figure, or the part of Gar's identity that refuses to restrain itself. Interestingly enough, though, both Public and Private Gar seem to feel the same way about their imminent departure, seeing it as an exciting next step. In fact, the extent to which they fantasize about the upcoming journey hints that they want to drown out any misgivings they might have about leaving home, focusing solely on how great it will be to secure a new life.*



*Although Private Gar's question about whether or not Public Gar is prepared to start anew in the United States sounds humorous, the fact that he asks this question in the first place suggests that he's perhaps less sure of the plan than he seemed at first. This sudden pivot might seem surprising, but Private Gar is a representation of Gar's inner emotions and thoughts—neither of which are predictable. On another note, Madge's question about S.B. once again highlights the strained nature of Gar's relationship with his father, though she appears to be optimistic that S.B. will overcome this stiltedness before Gar leaves. Lastly, it's worth mentioning for clarity's sake that nobody but the audience can see Private Gar, though Public Gar can hear him.*



Public Gar claims he doesn't care whether or not his father says farewell to him or gives him travel money. This prompts Madge to point out that S.B. does indeed have feelings like everyone else, despite the fact that he doesn't talk very much. Public Gar scoffs at this, reminding Madge that S.B. has said nothing at all about his departure. This, Madge says, is in keeping with the old man's personality. After all, he didn't even say anything when Gar's mother died. In response, Public Gar curses his father, stating that S.B. can come find him if he wants to say goodbye. Gar, for his part, isn't going to be the first to say anything.

When Madge returns to the kitchen, Private Gar once again addresses Public Gar, telling him that he shouldn't waste his time thinking about S.B., whom he refers to as "Screwballs." In fact, he says Public Gar should stick his head out of the plane window the following morning and spit on everyone still in Ballybeg. Just as he says this, S.B. enters from the shop door and calls Gar's name, and though Private Gar says that Public Gar should let him keep yelling, Public Gar quickly opens his bedroom door and answers him.

S.B. asks Public Gar a question about where he put certain supplies for the store, and Public Gar has a hard time remembering until Private Gar helps him recollect. As he considers the matter, though, Private Gar declares that such things don't matter anymore and once again fantasizes excitedly about the journey to the United States. Going back into his room, Public Gar lays out his travel clothes while Private Gar talks to him, imitating the voice of his future boss in the Philadelphia hotel where he'll be working. Pretending that he is the president of "the biggest chain of biggest hotels in the world," Private Gar says that he hopes Gar will be happy and perhaps become the next president of the hotel chain.

*In this moment, Friel clarifies the relational dynamic that exists between Gar and S.B., insinuating that the two men are incapable of communicating or connecting with one another. This, it seems, has to do with S.B.'s stern and uncommunicative manner. And though this is apparently what bothers Public Gar so much about his father, it's hard to deny that his own refusal to make an effort only makes it harder for the two men to connect.*



*Private Gar's suggestion that Public Gar should spit on everyone in Ballybeg when he's flying away illustrates just how excited he is to be leaving his life in Ireland behind. However, the audience sees in this moment that Public and Private Gar aren't always on the same page, as is the case when Public Gar obediently answers his father despite Private Gar's advice to remain silent. When he does this, he demonstrates not only that his external identity differs from his internal urges, but that he can't resist trying to make his father happy.*



*Once more, both Public and Private Gar can hardly contain their excitement to be leaving Ballybeg, thereby showing just how invested they are in the idea that moving to the United States will provide an attractive new way of life. To that end, Private Gar's repetition of the word "biggest" illustrate his belief that everything in America will be larger and more appealing than it is in Ballybeg. In turn, the audience sees that he has romanticized the idea of change, thinking of it as something that will inevitably lead to great success and happiness when. In reality, he's merely excited because he's running from the various discontents of his current day-to-day life.*



Still pretending to be the president of the hotel chain where Gar will be working in America, Private Gar asks why he left academia, and Public Gar explains that he stopped going to college in order to work with his father. When Private Gar (as the hotel president) asks what S.B. does for a living, Public Gar tries to make his father's profession as a store owner sound impressive, listing the many aspects of his job until finally cutting himself off by saying, "It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw **the Queen of France**, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles—"

*In order to make himself sound like a competitive job candidate, Public Gar finds himself extolling the virtues of his father. This is hypocritical, given that he's leaving Ballybeg precisely because he no longer wants to be around S.B. or his general store. As he considers the many respectable aspects of S.B.'s job, though, he cuts himself off by quoting a speech delivered by 18th-century philosophe Edmund Burke, who once spoke nostalgically about how beautiful Marie Antoinette (the Queen of France) was before she was beheaded in the French Revolution. This speech sings the praises of the past, lamenting the fact that the French Revolution has ruined Europe and ignoring the many positive results of the Revolution. In this regard, it sets forth a rather regressive message, one that overly romanticizes the past. When Public Gar says this, then, he critiques himself for making his father's life seem more impressive than it ever actually was.*



Public and Private Gar focus on packing, but they soon become distracted when they find a newspaper clipping in the old suitcase. The clipping is of Gar's parents' wedding announcement. Studying it, both Private and Public Gar think about their mother, Maire, who died three days after giving birth. Private Gar recalls what Madge has said about Maire, remembering that she was 19 when she married S.B., who was 40 at the time. Imagining his mother, Private Gar spins off into a vision of the past before yanking himself out of these reveries by quoting, "It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw **the Queen of France**, then the Dauphiness, at Versailles!" Following suit, Public Gar launches into song, belting out, "**Philadelphia, here I come.**"

*Once again, Gar tries to stop himself from spiraling nostalgically into the past. This time, Private Gar is the one to get wrapped up in a rosy image of history. Since he can't change the fact that his mother is dead, though, he cuts himself off by quoting Edmund Burke's speech about the Queen of France, thereby reminding himself not to be overly nostalgic about that which he cannot change. In keeping with this, Public Gar starts singing about his upcoming life in Philadelphia, effectively helping Private Gar focus not on the past, but on the future. In doing so, though, he inadvertently stops himself from romanticizing the past by romanticizing the future.*



Private Gar imitates an American accent and tells Public Gar to keep talking to himself because the moment he stops he'll surely begin to think "kinda crazy things." He and Public then begin to sing along to a lively record, though Private suddenly stops and reminds him that the song they're listening to was his former lover's favorite song. He then tells Public Gar not to pretend to have forgotten about Kate.

*During this exchange, Private Gar demonstrates that he can be very unpredictable. He does this by telling Public Gar to keep himself distracted from his emotions and then immediately forcing him to think about his feelings. In turn, Friel reminds the audience that Private Gar is nothing but a representation of Public Gar's internal world, which is emotionally erratic and wide-ranging. Rather than following rational thought, Private Gar acts in accordance with Public Gar's feelings, which is why he contradicts himself so frequently.*



Public Gar tries to drown out Private Gar by singing louder, but Private Gar keeps talking about his failed relationship with Kate Doogan, asking if he's planning on saying farewell to her. He points out that Public Gar had plans to marry Kate, and then he asks if he still loves her, prompting Public Gar to shut off the record player and sit down while looking at a picture of Kate that he pulls from his wallet. Sadly, he repeats her name while Private Gar calls her snobby and insults her parents.

Private Gar rehashes an evening that Public Gar spent with Kate when they were still together. As he does so, Public Gar and Kate herself (though in actuality this is only Gar's mental image of Kate) stroll about the room in a reenactment of the night. They tell each other how much they love each other and make plans to get married as soon as possible, but Kate is somewhat hesitant because Gar doesn't make enough money. She tells him they won't be able to live on the wages he earns from working in S.B.'s store, so he promises that he'll soon get a raise, though he's not particularly sure when this will happen. He also tells her that he has a secret way of making extra money by buying eggs directly from farmers and selling them at the local hotel instead of stocking them at S.B.'s store.

Kissing Gar, Kate tells him that they should get married right away, despite her previous financial reservations. Accordingly, they set off for her parents' house with the idea that Gar will ask for Senator Doogan's permission to marry Kate. This makes Gar quite nervous, since he's not dressed well and is intimidated by her parents, but he agrees to go through with the plan. As they enter the house, Kate tells him to lie about how much money he makes, but he doesn't even reach this part of the conversation because Senator Doogan informs Kate that her old friend, Dr. Francis King, has come to Ballybeg to see her. Catching her off guard, Mr. Doogan says that Francis is waiting to see her in the next room and that she should go speak to him. With a meaningful look, she leaves Gar alone with her father.

*When he tries to block out Private Gar's words about Kate, Public Gar attempts to repress his emotions, hoping he can avoid thinking about his failed relationship if only he sets his mind to it. The problem with this tactic, though, is that Private Gar refuses to let him off the hook. By forcing Public Gar to consider what happened between him and Kate, Private Gar makes it impossible for Public Gar to ignore the ways in which his past has affected him—an indication that it's nearly impossible to sidestep one's own feelings.*



*When the audience witnesses Gar's history with Kate, it becomes clear that he has been trying to improve his life for a long time. In the same way that he now hopes to find happiness and prosperity by moving to the United States, he also made optimistic plans about the future with Kate when they were still dating. By observing this dynamic, the audience sees once again the extent to which Gar romanticizes change and the future even when his prospects aren't as promising as he'd like to think. (As is the case when he insists upon marrying Kate even though he doesn't have enough money to support both of them.)*



*Gar's overly optimistic view of the future has evidently rubbed off on Kate, considering that his plan to support her based on petty egg sales somehow convinces her to marry him on the spot. This suggests that Gar is capable of convincing others to join him in his reveries of the future. And if he can convince other people to believe in the promise of new beginnings, it's obvious that he must be able to convince himself, too. This, it seems, is exactly what he has done by deciding to move to the United States to start anew.*



After making small talk with Gar, Senator Doogan says that Francis King will likely secure a job at the local pharmacy. If this happens, he intimates, he and his wife want Kate to marry Francis. Worst of all, he says, “Didn’t she tell you?” implying that Kate already knew of these plans. As Public Gar tries to think of something to say, Private Gar yells at him, calling Kate distasteful names and telling him to get out of the Doogan household as soon as he can, so Public Gar informs Senator Doogan that he has to get back to the general store. Before he leaves, Senator Doogan calls his name and tells him that all he cares about is Kate’s happiness, adding that whatever she decides will be her own decision. Hearing this, Public Gar quickly excuses himself and leaves before Kate comes back into the room.

After reenacting his and Kate’s final evening together, Public Gar puts her photograph away and once more sets himself to the task of preparing to leave. While he does this, Private Gar remembers that Kate married Francis on September 8th. Recalling that day, he asks Public Gar if he has ever gotten over his heartache. Speaking bluntly, he points out that Public Gar had a very hard time with what happened, but Public Gar tries to ignore him by singing, “**Philadelphia, here I come.**” Becoming more optimistic himself, Private Gar insists that Public Gar will find other women, and he even suggests that it’s for the best that he doesn’t have to associate with Senator Doogan, whom he suspects is less morally upstanding and respectable than everyone thinks.

Interrupting Private Gar and Public Gar’s unheard conversation, Madge tells Gar to come out of his room for tea. When he does, she says that her daughter has just had another child, adding that her daughter promised to name the little girl after Madge, though Madge herself doesn’t quite believe her daughter will actually follow through with this promise. At this point, S.B. enters the kitchen and sits down at the table as Private Gar delivers a tongue-in-cheek monologue about the old man, pretending to find him illustrious and entertaining even though he’s only going through the same mindless routine he follows day in and day out. As he takes off his hat, says grace, and replaces his hat, Private Gar predicts every action. He also accurately predicts that S.B. will say, “Another day over.”

*Before Gar even gets to experience his new life with Kate, his plans crumble all around him. As a result, the audience can infer that his tendency to invest himself in the promise of the future often leads to heartache and disappointment. Furthermore, it’s worth noting that this entire episode (with Kate and Senator Doogan) is actually a reenactment, demonstrating that Gar is unable to extricate himself from the memory of his failed relationship.*



*When Private Gar forces Public Gar to consider how thoroughly his relationship with Kate affected him, he fights against Public’s tendency to suppress emotion. However, Public Gar competently steers himself away from this topic by singing “Philadelphia, Here I Come,” thereby devoting himself once more to the promise of a fresh new start. In response, Private Gar goes along with his escapist impulse, trying to make him feel better about what happened with Kate by suggesting that Senator Doogan doesn’t deserve the respect he receives—an idea that underlines the fact that there’s a difference between a person’s public and private personas.*



*S.B.’s predictability frustrates Private Gar, who can’t wait to break out of his monotonous life to start a new existence abroad. Furthermore, he most likely finds S.B.’s rote actions frustrating because S.B. uses them to avoid actually having to relate to his son. Rather than saying something genuine to Gar, he mutters useless comments like, “Another day over”—a declarative sentence that does nothing but state the obvious. In this way, S.B. fails to actually communicate with his son, instead using tired old phrases to fill the silence in a way that doesn’t help the two men actually relate to one another.*



After Public Gar and S.B. hobble through an uncommunicative, unlively conversation, Private Gar goes on a rant about how badly he wishes S.B. would say just one unpredictable thing. He admits that he's leaving home because he has been eating with S.B. for over 20 years but has never heard the old man say something out of the ordinary. In keeping with this, he says that he would reconsider his decision to leave Ballybeg if S.B. would muster just one unexpected remark. This, he says, might suggest that he was wrong to assume S.B. has no feelings. As he waits for S.B. to speak, he hopes he'll ask him to stay. Because S.B. can't hear Private Gar, though, he says nothing of the sort.

While S.B. and Public Gar sit awkwardly at the table, Madge comes in and out of the room and makes sarcastic comments about how they're so talkative. Meanwhile, Private Gar goes on at length, jokingly admitting that he's a sex addict and saying that S.B. doesn't need to worry, since Gar simply needs to talk about the problem with someone. This, he claims, is what people suggest, so he hopes to vent his hidden feelings to his father. Before he can finish this joke, though, he's interrupted by Master Boyle, who has come to bid farewell to Gar before he leaves.

One of Gar's former teachers, Master Boyle stops by to speak with Public Gar while S.B. returns to the general store to put a few things in order. Talking about the young man's upcoming trip, Boyle considers the United States, saying that he sees it as a place where nobody cares about the past, which is exactly how he thinks things should be. He then talks to Gar about his own life, saying that his boss at the school, Canon O'Byrne, wants to fire him but doesn't have enough support from other people at the school to do so. Going on, he says that he, too, might be traveling to the United States, claiming that he's been offered an impressive position at a university in Boston. Private Gar inwardly reflects upon how unlikely this is, but Public Gar doesn't say anything to challenge Boyle.

*Private Gar's monologue makes it overwhelmingly apparent that Gar is unhappy with his relationship with his father, especially calling attention to S.B.'s inability to actually relate to him. All it would take to make him stay, Private Gar insists, is his father saying just one genuine sentence, thereby giving him something to relate to, something that might build an actual conversation. Despite his anger, though, Gar doesn't voice any of these misgivings out loud. Indeed, only Private Gar talks about his feelings, but he only exists as part of Gar's internal world. As a result, S.B. doesn't hear him, meaning that Public Gar himself is just as uncommunicative as his father, ultimately perpetuating the stilted dynamic between him and his father that he apparently hates so much.*



*Private Gar's joke about sex addiction reminds the audience that he is a representation of Gar's id, or the part of his consciousness that is unrestrained and impulse-oriented. Of course, Private Gar is only joking, but his off-color humor serves as a reminder of his willingness to express whatever comes to mind with no filter. As a result, his boldness creates a stark contrast when compared to Public Gar's quiet reserve—yet another sign that a person's internal and external identities often differ greatly.*



*When Master Boyle calls the United States a place that doesn't care about the past, it becomes even clearer why Gar wants to live there. After all, he wants to escape the disappointments of his past by forging a new beginning for himself, so it makes sense that he would go to America, a place where people think exclusively about the future (at least according to Boyle). Similarly, Master Boyle wants to leave his life behind but is apparently too stuck in his current existence to do so, which is why Private Gar thinks the man will never actually go to the United States. As a result, Boyle represents to Gar what his life might look like if he doesn't seek a new existence.*



Master Boyle asks where Gar will be staying in the U.S., and Public Gar tells him that he'll be living with his aunt Lizzy. When Master Boyle indicates that he knew Lizzy growing up, Private Gar remembers that Boyle used to date his mother, Maire. Armed with this knowledge, he urges Public Gar to ask Boyle about Maire, but Public can't bring himself to do so. Before Public Gar can say anything about his mother, Boyle starts talking about Canon O'Byrne once more, saying that he finds himself oddly attached to the man because he thinks about him so often.

Changing the subject once more, Master Boyle gives Public Gar a self-printed volume of his poems as a farewell gift. He then advises him to never look back once he leaves Ireland, telling him to become as American as possible. Public Gar thanks him for the book and for this advice, and though Private Gar predicts that Master Boyle—who is a heavy drinker—stopped in primarily to ask for money to use at the pub, Public Gar unhesitatingly gives him cash when he asks for it a moment later. Before leaving, Boyle repeats the fact that he knew Lizzy and all of her sisters, listing the many siblings and saying Maire's name twice. Turning his attention to the pub, he bids a final goodbye to Gar, who is suddenly overcome with emotion.

When Master Boyle departs, Public Gar hides his tears because Madge has just reentered the room. "Quick! Into your room!" Private Gar yells at him, and he escapes into the privacy of his bedroom. After closing the door, Private Gar tells him to forget about Master Boyle and to focus on his upcoming trip, urging him to stop being sentimental. Still, Public Gar can't stop thinking about what Boyle said, repeating the moment when Boyle uttered his mother's name twice. He then starts thinking about Kate again, so Private sings and refuses to stop until Public joins him, intoning, "**Philadelphia, here I come.**"

*Yet again, both parts of Gar struggle with the simultaneous desire to excavate the past and move unthinkingly into the future. Despite the fact that he wants to leave his life behind to start anew, Gar can't help but think about his mother, which is why Private Gar wants Public Gar to ask Master Boyle about her. On another note, it's worth keeping in mind the idea that Boyle is attached to Canon O'Byrne despite how much he dislikes him, since this dynamic can be applied to Gar's relationship with his father. After all, he's fed up with S.B.'s inability to connect with him, but he's also constantly thinking about him, meaning that he most likely cares deeply about their relationship.*



*Although Master Boyle perhaps has ulterior motives for visiting Gar on his final night, he still goes out of his way to say goodbye. This is significant, since even S.B. hasn't yet said anything about his son's departure. For this reason, Public Gar is struck by his old teacher's gesture, finding it hard to hide his emotion when the man leaves.*



*Once more, both Public and Private Gar try to forget about the past and their troubling emotions by looking toward the future. When Private Gar tells Public Gar to run into his room, the audience sees how uncomfortable Gar is with letting others see his feelings. Trying desperately to hide his vulnerability from both other people and himself, he mindlessly sings about Philadelphia, trying to distract himself even though it's clear he'll never be able to outrun his thoughts about his mother or his feelings about Kate.*



## EPISODE II

Still in his bedroom, Public Gar lies on the bed and sings for a moment before trailing off into silence, at which point Private Gar admonishes him, saying that he has to keep active because “the devil makes work for idle hands.” In keeping with this, he starts telling joke after joke before jumping into yet another fantasy, this time imagining that Public Gar will become President of the United States, though both he and Public soon remember he can’t do this because he wasn’t born there. Still, this doesn’t keep them from expounding upon other farfetched fantasies until they hear a sound in the kitchen and hope that Gar’s friends have come to say goodbye. Pausing for a moment, Public Gar determines that it’s only Madge, so he flops into an armchair and stares absently at nothing in particular.

Watching Public Gar sit morosely in the armchair, Private Gar says that he’s only making himself miserable by “collecting memories and images and impressions” that will make him sad later. This, Private suggests, is exactly what Public Gar wants—to be sad. Unable to argue with this, Public agrees to continue keeping himself occupied, jumping up and reviewing everything he’s already packed. This includes the sponsorship papers he needs to live in the United States, which have been signed by his aunt Lizzy and her husband, Con. Public Gar decides to reread the letter Lizzy sent along with the papers, in which she tells him that he’ll have his own room with air conditioning and television, and a private bathroom. She also informs him in this letter that he’ll be working at the Emperor Hotel—a job that she and Con secured for him.

After reading Lizzy’s letter, Public Gar and Private Gar rehash her most recent visit, which took place on September 8th. She, Con, and their American friend named Ben visited Ballybeg while S.B. was at Kate and Francis King’s wedding. When Public Gar recalls this last detail, Private Gar tells him to stop thinking about Kate and tries to distract him by getting him to focus on his interactions with Lizzy.

*When Private Gar says that “the devil makes work for idle hands,” he expresses his belief that people can use forward momentum to outrun their problems. Rather than recognizing that Gar will never be able to stop thinking about his relationship with his father, his dead mother, or his failed romance with Kate, he convinces Public Gar that the only thing to do is repress his feelings. However, the fact that this current attempt to forget his misgivings only lasts several minutes suggests that it’s not quite as easy to repress emotion as one might hope.*



*In order to take his mind off of the memories that will undoubtedly make him sad to leave Ballybeg, Public Gar reminds himself of his promising future by rereading Lizzy’s letter. In this letter, she speaks lavishly about what his life will be like in the United States, helping him recapture the excitement that will help him ignore the way he truly feels about leaving home.*



*Yet again, Private Gar tries to help Public Gar by distracting him from his emotions. Interestingly enough, though, Private Gar has—at other times throughout the play—reminded Public Gar of the way he truly feels. He is therefore a rather unstable character, representing not just one aspect of Gar’s personality, but the entire emotional range of his internal identity.*



Lizzy, Con, and Ben appear in a reenactment of their visit. Sitting in the kitchen, Public Gar listens to Lizzy tell a story about S.B. and Maire's wedding day. They've all been drinking, but Lizzy is the only one who seems affected by the alcohol. As she tells her story, she frequently interrupts herself, and her good friend, Ben, helps her remember what she was saying each time she gets off-track. Grateful for his help, she tells Gar that Ben gave her and Con money and a place to stay when they first came to the United States. At this point, Con tells Gar to consider coming to live with them in America, assuring him that he would have a good job and that they'd be happy to have him. When Gar says he'll think about it, Lizzy asks him what he's waiting for.

Con tells Lizzy not to be so overbearing about the idea of Gar coming to the United States, but she dismisses him by claiming that she simply wants her only nephew to live with her. Reminding her that she was telling a story about Maire's wedding day, Ben and Con try to get Lizzy back on topic, but she starts crying because the story is about her multiple sisters, all of whom have died. Returning once again to the topic of Gar moving to the United States, she asks Ben what he thinks of America. However, instead of extolling the country's virtues as she clearly wanted him to do, he says he can't answer the question because he was born in the United States. When she asks what he means, he says that America is merely another place to live. "Ireland—America—what's the difference?" he asks.

Lizzy tells Gar about her and Con's nice apartment, their color television, their record collection, and their substantial savings. As she lists their many luxuries, Con tries to get her to stop, but she pushes on until breaking into tears once more because she and Con have no children. She then explains that they're unable to have kids, which is why she wanted to come to Ireland to tell Gar that everything they have could be his, too. After she says this, Con insists that they should be getting back to their hotel in town, and Lizzy admonishes herself by saying that she talks too much, adding that this was her family's way, unlike the O'Donnells' characteristic frigidity. Before they leave, Public Gar jumps up and says that he wants to come to the United States, though Private Gar urges him not to do this.

*This flashback takes the audience back to the moment Gar realized he might be able to run from his current circumstances (and his past) by moving to the United States. It's important to remember that the conversation he has with Lizzy and Con takes place on the same day as Kate's wedding, making him all the more likely to want to leave Ireland once and for all. In addition, it's worth noting that Lizzy tells a story about Maire, thereby showing Gar—however inadvertently—that she can tell him things about his mother that nobody else will tell him. Consequently, Gar's eventual decision to leave Ireland is both an attempt to secure a fresh start and an attempt to recapture something in his past that he never truly had in the first place—an understanding of what his mother's life was like.*



*Unlike Gar, Ben is cognizant of the fact that simply moving to a new country won't necessarily address a person's unhappiness. In other words, moving to the United States might alter the way Gar feels in a superficial way, but it won't automatically bring him contentment, since all of his emotional problems will still exist.*



*It's noteworthy that Private Gar doesn't want Public Gar to go to the United States when the idea first arises. Although Private Gar has shown excitement about the idea throughout the play, he has also exhibited an occasional sense of hesitation, like when he asked Gar in the first scene if he really wanted to leave home. These reservations, it seems, can be traced back to this initial reaction, as he tries to convince Public Gar that it's a bad idea to try to outrun his unhappiness.*



Overjoyed, Lizzy embraces Public Gar while Private Gar goes on about how he doesn't want her to touch him. Because she can't hear this, though, she continues to hug him, calling him her son and repeating his name over and over.

Returning to the bedroom, Private Gar and Public Gar stop their reenactment of the day Lizzy, Con, and Ben visited Ireland. Solemnly addressing Public Gar, Private Gar now asks if he doubts or regrets his decision to leave home. When Public insists that he has no reservations, Private says that Lizzy was able to convince him because she happened to visit on the day of Kate's wedding—that, and the fact that she suggested that the O'Donnells are cold, reserved people. When he says this, though, Public interjects by quoting, "It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw **the Queen of France**—" As he tries to recite this speech, Private periodically interrupts him, eventually calling him an orphan before trying to get him to admit that he doesn't really want to go to the United States. Hearing this, Public quickly rushes out of the room.

Coming upon Madge in the kitchen, Public Gar asks her to help him find his coat because he's going to go out, wanting to spend a final night with his friends. Madge, for her part, scoffs at the mention of this group, whom she calls "the boys." Angry that they couldn't even come to the house to say farewell, Madge shakes her head at the idea of Gar going out to find the boys, telling him not to come home drunk. When he leaves, she turns her attention to S.B., who enters from the shop and sits down at the table to read. Criticizing him for simply sitting and reading the newspaper every night without ever saying anything, she begins to cry. Through her tears, she says that S.B. shouldn't take out his dentures in front of her, then leaves him in a state of confusion.

When Madge leaves the room, S.B. looks around in perplexity before returning to his newspaper, which is upside down. He then glances at Gar's room and lets out a heavy sigh before standing up and returning to the shop.

*In this moment, Private Gar voices his discomfort with the prospect of being touched—physically or emotionally—by another person. Although he yearns for human connection, he's quite uncomfortable when he actually receives it, a sign that it's difficult for people to embrace affection if they're used to living without it.*



*Again, Public Gar tries to avoid his emotions, this time trying to distract himself by once again talking about the Queen of France. When he quotes this speech by Edmund Burke, he once more implies that it's foolish to dwell on the past—something that he and Private Gar have been doing for the majority of this scene, as they remembered Lizzy's visit to Ballybeg. Rather than focusing on whether or not he made the right choice by accepting Lizzy's offer, Public Gar would prefer to charge full-steam ahead, launching himself into his new American life without considering anything else.*



*In this scene, it becomes evident that Madge feels very strongly for Gar and isn't afraid to show it. After all, she doesn't hesitate to criticize his friends in front of him by saying that they should have come to see him of their own accord. In keeping with this, she also seems to be angry with S.B. for failing to show his son any affection, though she directs her anger at his decision to take out his dentures in front of her. The fact that he's dumbfounded by these remarks only emphasizes the extent to which he's inept at navigating the ins and outs of other people's emotions.*



*S.B.'s nonverbal actions indicate that he's sad about Gar's imminent departure. When he looks wistfully at his son's room, it becomes clear that he actually does feel emotional about the fact that he's about to leave. The problem, though, is that he has failed time and again to communicate his feelings for the boy.*



Gar comes home with his friends, Ned, Tom, and Joe, who were apparently already on their way to see him. Ned is the group's ringleader, and he speaks boisterously as Tom backs up everything he says in an attempt to please him. Joe, for his part, feels a divided loyalty between Ned and Tom, though he's more sensitive than them and is the only one who's sad about Gar's imminent departure. Speaking loudly, they drink beer in the kitchen, though their rowdy confidence appears fake, as if they feel they must constantly retain a boastful, masculine energy. In this manner, they talk about the soccer team to which they all belong, speculating about their upcoming victory in their next match. All the while, Ned brags about how triumphant he will be, and Tom celebrates this idea while Joe periodically makes unsuccessful attempts to bring the conversation back to Gar's departure.

When they're not talking about soccer, Ned and Tom speak chauvinistically about two women they saw in town that day. They then tell stories about women they've slept with in the past, bragging about their various sexual conquests. Finally, Public Gar reminds them that he's leaving the next day, but this just prompts Ned and Tom to start talking about Jimmy, one of their other friends who recently moved to Philadelphia. Jimmy was a small young man who played goalie on their soccer team, and Ned recalls a night that he, Tom, and Jimmy went swimming in some caves with two women from Dublin. When they reached the caves, Ned and Tom went swimming while Jimmy stayed on the banks with the women. The next thing they saw, Ned claims, was the women chasing a naked Jimmy while he yelled for their help.

The group of friends laugh at Ned's story, but Private Gar reflects upon the fact that Ned has distorted this memory. In reality, all of them were there the night they went swimming with Jimmy and the two women from Dublin. What really happened was that all of the boys—including Jimmy—went swimming while the women remained on land. When they got out, they passed the time by wrestling one another to the ground, and then they decided to take off Jimmy's pants just to prove their masculinity. However, little Jimmy somehow managed to fend them off, fighting them so they couldn't get him naked. At this point, they all went home, leaving the women alone in the caves. Instead of telling the true story, though, Public Gar simply changes the subject, once more saying that Ned and the rest of them will surely win their next soccer match.

*Although Gar's friends have come to see him, it's painfully obvious that they don't care very much about him. This, at least, is the impression they give him when they fail to acknowledge that he's leaving the following day. However, because Philadelphia, Here I Come! is a play about the ways in which people—and especially men—fail to express their emotions, it's quite possible that both Ned and Tom simply don't know how to tell Gar that they're going to miss him.*



*Ned and Tom's lack of emotion when Gar mentions his departure undoubtedly hurts his feelings, since their indifference only adds to the idea that nobody—including his own father—cares that he's leaving. Although Gar wants to start a new life in the United States, he also wants the people around him in Ireland to acknowledge him and express their affection for him—something they're apparently unwilling to do, since Ned and Tom are more interested in rehashing their vapid antics than celebrating their friend's last night in Ballybeg.*



*Private Gar is all too aware of the ways in which people twist their memories to their own benefit. Whereas the real story about swimming in the caves makes Ned and his friends look childish and silly, the version he tells in the moment is funny and jovial. In this way, Friel demonstrates that people often allow nostalgia to obscure the true nature of the past. This, it seems, is why both Private and Public Gar have decided to leave Ireland, wanting to forget about the past—which cannot be changed in any real sense—in favor of starting anew.*



Joe proposes one last toast to Gar, but this only prompts Ned to ask the time, realizing there's still enough of the night left to go drinking at the local hotel in the hopes of finding the two women he and Tom spotted in town earlier that day. Even Tom is hesitant at first to join in on this idea, since he knows the two women in question and doesn't think they would entertain the idea of spending a rowdy night with the boys. Nonetheless, Ned convinces him that going to the hotel would be fun, so they jump up to leave. On their way out the door, Ned turns to Gar, takes off his belt, and gives it to him, mumbling something about how he can use its large buckle to defend himself if anyone tries to attack him in America.

When Ned tries to bid Gar a proper farewell, Tom interrupts him, causing him to whirl around and punch him in the arm before setting off into the night. Excited, Tom quickly follows without saying goodbye. This leaves Joe and Gar alone in the kitchen, and though Joe wants to give his friend a proper send-off, Gar can tell that he also wants to follow Ned and Tom. Telling him that he needs to get to bed early anyway, he insists that Joe should follow them, and Joe eventually admits that he's eager to do so, saying that Ned and Tom just might get lucky for once with their plans to pick up women at the bar. Moving toward the door, he wishes Gar good luck in the United States.

On his way out, Joe good naturedly says that Madge should actually make good on her offer next time she invites the boys over for tea. Confused, Gar asks what he means, and Joe accidentally reveals that he and the boys weren't planning to visit Gar until Madge asked them to come over for tea—which she never served them. Having said this, Joe chases after Ned and Tom while Private Gar bemoans the fact that only friends didn't even care enough about his departure to come of their own accord to say farewell. Becoming vindictive, Private tells Public Gar not to worry about them, saying that they will inevitably have an unremarkable, predictable night at the hotel.

Despite his frustration, Private Gar begins to speak fondly about the times he's had with the boys, saying he's had quite a bit of fun with them, though all that's left now is the memory of these times. Indeed, he's well aware that his memory of his shenanigans with Ned, Tom, and Joe is "being distilled of all its coarseness," so that the only thing left will soon be nothing but "precious, precious gold."

*Even though Ned is apparently unwilling to celebrate Gar on his last night before leaving, he does try to show his friend some affection by giving him his belt. This strange display of fondness is in keeping with the stilted ways in which men interact in Philadelphia, Here I Come! Unable to freely communicate the fact that he'll miss Gar, Ned frames his affection as a mere concern for Gar's safety, which is why he tells him that he should use the belt to defend himself against attackers. By saying this, he attempts to connect with his friend without actually having to articulate the way he feels.*



*Unlike Ned and Tom, Joe is capable of expressing his affection for Gar. However, his kindness doesn't stop him from abandoning his friend, suggesting that even he isn't truly considering Gar's emotions. Having said that, though, the fact that he gives Gar a genuine farewell stands in stark contrast to Ned's awkward goodbye and Tom's complete failure to say anything about Gar's departure. Consequently, this moment between Joe and Gar is one of the only times in the entire play that two people (and especially two men) allow themselves to show their fondness of each other.*



*Just when Joe finally gives Gar the kind of friendly attention he craves, he inadvertently renders it meaningless by revealing that he wouldn't have even come to say goodbye if Madge hadn't asked him to. Once again, then, Gar finds himself at an emotional remove from everyone in his life (except, perhaps, Madge). As a result, Private Gar tries to make Public Gar feel better by reminding him how predictable life is in Ballybeg.*



*When Private Gar says that his memories of spending time with Ned and the boys is "being distilled of all its coarseness" so that it'll soon be "precious gold," he suggests that nostalgia can make even the most unremarkable experiences seem wonderful and priceless. By saying this, he reminds Public Gar that thinking too much about the past is futile, since doing so ultimately skews memories and takes a person's mind off of the future.*



As Public Gar sits in the kitchen, Kate appears at the door to wish him goodbye. Shocked, he invites her in while Private Gar urges him to say something interesting, though Public Gar remains stilted and terse. When Kate asks if he was going to say farewell to her, he claims that he'd forgotten. Meanwhile, Private Gar reminds him that Kate is married, but he's too busy listening to Kate to pay attention. When she asks what he's going to do in Philadelphia, he claims that he'll most likely go to night school and study to be a lawyer or a doctor, and they both joke that he'll someday return to Ireland to buy Ballybeg. Shifting gears, Public Gar asks after Kate's family, including Francis. When Kate says that Francis is doing well, Private says, "Then the Dauphiness of Versailles [...]."

Kate notes that S.B. will surely miss Gar, and this sparks something inside of him. Unable to stop himself, Public Gar speaks angrily about how little he cares about Ireland, saying that he's stayed in Ballybeg for far too long, comparing it to a swamp in which people get mired and stuck. All the while, Private Gar pleads with him to stop speaking so vehemently, recognizing that his words have offended Kate. When she suggests that Ballybeg isn't all that bad, Public Gar claims that she only thinks this because she's stuck in the town, adding that she'll die here while he lives a life of freedom. Shortly after he says this, Kate gets up to go, saying that Francis is expecting her. Finally backing off, he bids her a sheepish farewell and watches her go.

When Kate leaves, Public Gar stands shocked in the kitchen. Devastated by what he's said, he tries to light a cigarette while Private Gar nervously intones, "Oh my God, steady man, steady—it is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw **the Queen of France** [...]." Going on, he begins to repeat various phrases that have stuck in his memory, including what Kate said on the night they decided to get married. He also remembers Master Boyle's advice to never look back once he leaves Ireland, along with Kate's recent assertion that Ballybeg isn't as bad as Gar has made it seem. Overcome by these circulating memories, Public Gar lets out a small yelp, imploring his father to say something, though S.B. is in the shop and doesn't hear this request.

*The audience has already seen that very few people have expressed their regrets about the fact that Gar is about to leave. Now, though, Kate comes to bid him farewell, clearly disorienting him because she's one of the primary reasons he's leaving in the first place. When Private Gar reminds him that she's married, he does so because her attention in this moment might encourage Public Gar to entertain the idea of staying. Not wanting him to think he still has a chance with Kate, then, Private Gar recites Edmund Burke's overly nostalgic passage about the Queen of England, once more emphasizing that it's foolish to dwell on the past.*



*The divide between Public Gar and Private Gar becomes quite pronounced in this moment, as Public Gar ignores his conscience and speaks disparagingly about Ballybeg. He does this because he's overwhelmed by emotion, since Kate is one of the primary reasons he has decided to leave. When she mentions his father, the other reason he's leaving, he finds himself unable to heed Private Gar's advice and goes on a rant about his new life, claiming that he'll be free while Kate remains tethered to her pathetic existence in Ballybeg. As he says this, the audience witnesses his emotions—his heartache and desire to be loved—take the form of anger. Furthermore, the fact that he erupts like this makes sense, since he has been bottling up his emotions for the entirety of the play. Unable to express himself when he needs to, he has repressed his feelings, all of which come bubbling up during this conversation.*



*In the aftermath of Public Gar's emotional eruption, Private Gar is no longer able to keep his misgivings at bay. As a result, all of the memories he's tried to distract himself from come pouring out, engulfing him in a sea of his own regrets and insecurities. The fact that Public Gar responds to this by asking his father to say something underlines how desperate he is for someone to connect to, someone who might help him handle his emotions. After all, although he's spoken to Private Gar at length about his problems, Private Gar isn't an actual person—he's part of Gar himself. Consequently, Gar has nobody to turn to in this moment of extreme emotional turmoil.*



## EPISODE III, PART ONE

Later that night, Public Gar, S.B., and Madge say the rosary before eating. As they do so, Private Gar talks about how Public Gar will soon be gone, once more fantasizing about what it will be like to live in Philadelphia. Eventually, he turns his attention to S.B., asking him if he ever thinks about the past or about Maire's death. He even speculates that S.B. might experience emotion behind his unfeeling facial expressions. Wondering if he's been wrong to assume that his father doesn't think about the past, he himself remembers the last time he and S.B. connected. Gar was just a young boy, and the two of them were sitting in a rowboat and fishing. And though neither of them said anything, they both experienced a sense of great happiness. They didn't need to talk to know that they were content, and S.B. even began to sing.

After saying the rosary, S.B. and Public Gar sit down to dinner. As they make innocuous comments about the time and the weather, Private Gar urges Public Gar to ask him if he remembers the happy day they spent in the blue rowboat. Right when Public brings this up, though, Canon O'Byrne enters, arriving for his nightly chess match with S.B. This enrages Private Gar, who predicts everything Canon O'Byrne says as the two older men begin to play chess.

Having lost the opportunity to speak openly with his father about the past, Public Gar resigns himself to watching S.B. and Canon O'Byrne play chess. He then tells Madge that he'll clean up the dinner plates so she can go to her daughter's house to see the new baby. After a brief exchange about the fact that Madge's daughter is going to name her new baby after her, Public Gar asks Madge why Maire married S.B. instead of Master Boyle, but she doesn't give him a good answer, telling him to ask his father instead of her. With this, she sets off to visit her daughter.

*For the entirety of Philadelphia, Here I Come!, both Private Gar and Public Gar have fixated on the idea of having a genuine conversation with S.B. Now, though, it emerges that Public Gar was once able to connect with his father without speaking at all. The fact that S.B. and Gar shared a beautiful moment in silence suggests that language isn't the only way that they might be able to show affection to one another. This, in turn, gives the audience hope that the two men might be able to relate to each other before Gar leaves for the United States.*



*Unfortunately for Public Gar, the only way to rekindle the connection he had with his father in the rowboat is to talk to him about the memory. Because they are so out of the habit of speaking openly with each other, this is a difficult task, especially since the very environment in which they exist is ill-suited for conversation—as is evident when Canon O'Byrne arrives to play chess, a game largely played in silence.*



*No matter what Gar does, he can't seem to obtain the information about his mother that he so desperately craves. This is why the idea of moving in with Lizzy is so appealing, since she will be able to tell him anything he wants to know about Maire.*



Public Gar retreats to his bedroom while Private Gar watches S.B. and Canon O'Byrne play chess. Addressing O'Byrne, he considers the fact that the Canon is capable of understanding the connection that he (Gar) and his father have, since O'Byrne can put their unexpressed emotions about one another into "Christian terms" that make such feelings easier to bear and understand. However, he also points out that Canon O'Byrne doesn't actually do this, chastising him for failing to do his job, which he believes is to translate people's feelings into a religious framework. Private Gar then starts talking about the memory of fishing with his father, saying that that day haunts him because he can't determine whether or not it really happened, worrying that he fabricated the entire memory because he and S.B. are now incapable of connection. Exasperated, he says, "To hell with all strong silent men!"

*Private Gar's frustration with his father's (and his own) inability to effectively communicate comes to the forefront of the play in this moment, as he criticizes Canon O'Byrne for failing to use a religious framework to help people like S.B. address emotions that will otherwise go unarticulated. This is an interesting idea, since it suggests that what Private Gar wants more than anything is a way to talk about his concerns without actually having to address his specific emotions. Because he can't do this, though, he curses "strong silent men," implying that the particular type of masculinity which he and his father embody makes it especially hard to speak openly, since people like S.B. associate being a "strong" man with a lack of emotion. Under this interpretation, then, Gar and S.B.'s relationship is doomed because their idea of masculinity precludes them from showing affection.*



## EPISODE III, PART TWO

In the early hours of the next morning, S.B. finds himself unable to sleep. Making his way into the kitchen, he finds Gar's suitcase, which he touches thoughtfully for a moment before sitting at the table. When he coughs, Public and Private Gar jump awake and emerge from the bedroom, surprised to find S.B. waiting there. The two men tell each other that they can't sleep, and Public goes into the store for a moment to get some aspirin to nurse the slight hangover he has from drinking with the boys. While he does this, Private follows him and insists that this is his last opportunity to ask his father about the day in the rowboat. Putting this off, Public returns to the kitchen and reminds S.B. what he needs to do to keep the shop running.

*Yet again, Public Gar finds himself unable to talk to his father about what he really feels. While Private Gar urges him to be forthcoming about his emotions, he simply talks about logistical matters with his father, thereby illustrating once more that a person's external and internal personas are often at odds with one another, though nobody would know this from the outside.*



Knowing that Public Gar is working up his courage to ask S.B. about the blue rowboat, Private Gar praises him for keeping up a steady stream of conversation, reminding him that silence is his enemy. Finally, Public asks S.B. if he remembers the rowboat, but S.B. has trouble recollecting it, saying that he recalls a *brown* rowboat but not a blue one. Public Gar then asks if he remembers fishing one day in May during light rain showers, when S.B. lent him his hat and started singing "All Round My Hat I'll Wear a Green Coloured Ribbono." This detail surprises S.B., who has trouble imagining himself singing that song. For this reason, he says he doesn't remember the day, and Public Gar immediately tries to dismiss the matter.

*It's worth pointing out that just because S.B. doesn't remember a specific day doesn't mean he doesn't care about Gar. Of course, S.B. remembers the fact that he and his son used to go fishing, but Gar is so fixated on this single moment that he sees it as a personal affront that this father doesn't recall the day he sang a song in the blue rowboat. Unfortunately, Gar has put an inordinate amount of importance on this single memory, choosing to use it as a barometer of sorts to gauge whether or not his father cares about him.*



As Public Gar attempts to move past the conversation about the rowboat, S.B. slowly begins to piece the day together. He says that he remembers a brown rowboat and suggests that he was probably singing “The Flower of Sweet Strabane,” not “All Round My Hat.” As he continues to think about it, though, he slowly recalls yet another boat that may actually have been blue. However, both Public Gar and Private Gar have set themselves to the task of putting this conversation behind them, so Public Gar runs out of the room without noticing that S.B. has started piecing together the memory.

When S.B. is alone in the kitchen, Madge returns from visiting her daughter. Greeting him, she tells him that the new baby’s name is Brigid. Hardly paying attention, S.B. thinks aloud about how he’ll get by without Gar, clearly worrying about the prospect of managing the store on his own. He then speaks wistfully about what Gar was like as a child, remembering a sailor suit that Gar used to wear. Although Madge doesn’t remember this suit, S.B. can still vividly picture it, and he recalls how cute and loving Gar was. He also reflects upon the fact that Gar used to be extremely talkative, and then he wonders what happened to their relationship, worrying that their strained dynamic has to do with the fact that he was too old to have a son. Sad and nostalgic, S.B. leaves the kitchen while muttering to himself about Gar’s old sailor suit.

Looking at Gar’s suitcase, Madge thinks aloud about how heartbroken S.B. will be when Gar leaves. She wonders about the life he’ll lead in the United States and assures herself that Lizzy will take good care of him. She then remembers that S.B. was just like Gar when he was in his twenties—a peppy, boisterous young man who never stopped talking. Like his father, Madge predicts, Gar will also slip into silence as he grows older. She knows she won’t be around to witness this, but is sure that Gar will have learned nothing from his relationship with his father and will therefore be exactly like him.

*Tragically, Gar—both internally and externally—is so unused to connecting with his father that he fails to recognize the fact that S.B. is opening up to him. When it seemed as if S.B. didn’t remember the memory of singing in the rowboat, Gar completely shut down, which caused him to overlook the fact that his father actually does remember that day. When he runs out of the room, Friel provides a perfect representation of Gar and S.B.’s fraught dynamic, highlighting the fact that these two men are incapable of relating to one another. This is largely because they have spent so many years never speaking openly with each other. So although it’s true that it’s possible for people to relate without using verbal communication, this moment illustrates why it’s so important to know how to use language to reach out to loved ones, since S.B. and Gar would perhaps know how to connect during this conversation if only they had more practice speaking openly to each other about their emotions.*



*The fact that Madge’s daughter didn’t end up naming her daughter after Madge even though she promised to do so is a reminder that it’s impossible to control what other people do and, for that matter, what will happen in the future. This relates to Gar’s desire to leave home, since he not only hopes that doing so will help him begin a new life, but also that his departure will force people like his father to finally express their feelings for him. Ironically enough, this plan actually works, but Gar isn’t present to witness S.B.’s wistful monologue about his son. In this moment, the audience sees that S.B. truly does care about his son, but S.B. and Gar’s inability to speak openly with one another has driven Gar from the room, causing him to miss his only chance to connect with his father before he leaves.*



*Philadelphia, Here I Come! lacks a sense of real resolution. In this play, the characters don’t have any epiphanies or learn from their mistakes. Rather, Gar remains unable to show emotion while simultaneously judging his father for being the exact same way. Consequently, it becomes clear that he will lead the same cold, withdrawn life as S.B., rendering him miserable no matter where he goes.*



Public Gar and Private Gar come back into the kitchen. Surprised to see Madge, Public Gar asks her about her new granddaughter. "Madge Mulhern," he says. "Are you proud?" Rather than telling him that the baby wasn't named for her after all, Madge changes the subject by saying that she's tired. Before she leaves to go to bed, Public Gar stops her and asks her to send word to him if S.B. falls ill while he's gone. Agreeing to do this, she says goodnight and walks out of the kitchen. As she leaves, Private Gar tells Public Gar to watch her carefully because this image is going to stay with him forever, burned into his mind as the final moment of his last night at home. "God, Boy, why do you have to leave?" Private suddenly asks Public. "Why? Why?" In response, Public merely says, "I don't know."

*Understanding that he will hold on to the memory of his last night in Ballybeg for the rest of his life, Private Gar wonders why Public Gar wants to leave. After all, he knows that moving won't erase his emotional past, nor will it solve his problems. And yet, Public Gar appears determined to follow through with his plan, even if he doesn't know why he's so compelled to leave. Once again, then, Friel underscores the extent to which people can be at odds with themselves, acting against their best interests even when they know perfectly well that they're making a mistake.*





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