

Philadelphia, Here I Come!

Key Scenes to understand the 'world of the play' in a meaningful way?

This text will be your **ANCHOR** text. In other words, the text with which you will need to be most familiar. In a **'split'** question (30 & 40 marks), you will use it to answer the 30-Mark Q.

Everyone who appears on stage, whether as a visitor to the house or as one of Gar's flashbacks, represents and illustrates one or more aspects of contemporary Irish society. Each character helps us to understand the play's Cultural Context.

Shouldn't we be wary of making such a strong claim about the structure of the play?

Many of Friel's plays carry an overtly political message, but use a series of 'dramatic devices' to convey those ideas to the audience. If you were exploring this play in terms of "genre", this would become a central concern. However, those same dramatic devices also give the playwright a chance to present the audience with a commentary on the world of the play in a manner that was very innovative for its time.

As poet and critics Seamus Deane has argued, *"This is profoundly political [theatre], precisely because it is so totally committed to the major theatrical medium of words."* By this, Deane partly means that the words chosen by the characters on stage are very deliberate. Nothing here is accidental. It is specifically designed to deal with key political themes that Friel recognized to be central to Irish life in the 60s.

We are encouraged to examine the play as being broadly representational, where the objects on stage stand for more than they seem. The frequent use of the setting of 'Ballybeg' (literally "small town" in Irish) shows us that the play is speaking about a broader Irish context than might have been immediately evident to a novice reader.

In trying to frame this play in terms of other elements of the LC English syllabus, you could do worse than keeping Durcan's *Cáit Killann* from *"The Girl with the Keys to Pearse's Cottage"* in mind. When thinking about female characters, imagine the world described by Boland in some of her poems, particularly the place of women in that Ireland of the 60s & 70s.

A brief summary helps to present the relatively direct way in which the *'interlocutors'* into Gar's world influence the plot of the play. The whole play is set in the home of County Councillor S.B. O'Donnell, father of the protagonist Gar (whose presence on stage is bifurcated – split in two – into the **Public Gar**, seen by all and his **alter ego Private Gar**, seen only by the audience). This provides us insight into both the character's **action** and his **motivations**.

Episode 1

On the eve of his emigration, Gar prepares for his departure for America, where he is to join his Aunt Lizzy in Philadelphia working in a nearby hotel. After finishing work, Gar engages in light-hearted banter with Madge, the housekeeper, before retiring to his bedroom.

In the first 'flashback' sequence, he recalls the intensity of his relationship with Kate Doogan, and his failed attempt at asking her father, Senator Doogan, for her hand in marriage.

Gar eats dinner with his father, just as he has done every night. Private Gar mimics his father's predictable habits. Their relationship is stale and uncommunicative, with no discussion of any substance, despite unanswered Qs.

Gar is visited by his old teacher, Master Boyle, an alcoholic, borrows money from Gar before giving him a copy of his own poetry as a gift for Gar. The pair discuss the conflict between Boyle and the Canon, the past, but also Gar's future in America. After Boyle's departure Gar is torn about staying or going to the US.

Episode 2

Later that same day, Gar continues his preparations for his departure, but gets carried away by a flashback about the day he decided to go to America, at the instigation of his Aunt Lizzy, who visited Ballybeg with her husband Con and their American friend Ben Burton. Lizzy becomes emotional with drink and embraces Gar (who is uncomfortable) after he decides that he'll live with them in America.

Unbeknownst to Gar, Madge has invited 'the boys' (Ned, Tom, & Joe) to visit for a cup of tea to say farewell. The boys recount (highly exaggerated) tales of their sexual exploits and plan a night out with Gar, though Gar doesn't end up going out. In a symbolic gesture, *"big thick generous"* Ned gives Gar his belt as a memento and as a form of defence.

The episode closes with a short, awkward visit from Kate Doogan. She calls to say goodbye (Gar didn't do it!). Gar rejects the *"sentimental rubbish about 'homeland' and 'birthplace' – yap, Bloody yap!"*, and alienates the one person he had loved.

Episode 3 (Part 1)

That evening, after the Angelus, S.B. is visited by Canon Mick O'Byrne. They continue their nightly ritual of playing draughts. Private Gar engages in a protracted interaction with S.B. and the Canon (while Gar broods in his room) where he outlines the failings of the Church and the *"arid"* Canon. Private also bemoans the lack of communication between Gar and his father. Gar's emotional turmoil is acted out on stage for the audience.

Episode 3 (Part 2)

The early hours of the morning. Neither S.B. nor Gar can sleep. They talk briefly of the blue boat on Lough na Cloc Cor and the song Gar remembered his father singing. S.B. doesn't share the memory. Madge returns to her visit to the new baby, disappointed it won't be named after her. Gar soaks up his last few moments in Ballybeg. The play closes with the eternal question (that has absorbed the whole play really) *"Why do you have to leave? Why? Why? – 'I don't know. I – I – I – don't know."*

Cultural Context: Thinking about 'Chain Migration'

One of the fundamental elements in PHIC is the idea of Chain Migration, a longstanding practice in Irish human geography. The term is used by scholars to refer to the social process by which migrants from a particular town, clan, or family group follow others from that town to a particular destination. Apart from the practice of sending home 'remittances' (cash or good sent home to sustain aging parents or an extended family), chain migration allows a migrant (in this case Gar) to avail of capital (money) to finance the transatlantic journey, which they otherwise might not be able to afford. Think of the Giant Elephant for Madge's niece as a classic example of this kind of idea...

In the context of Ballybeg, Aunt Lizzy provides the "passage money" for Gar (saying she won't accept the repayment of that money). Furthermore, Gar will stay with Lizzy and Con and work at an initial job that they have sourced (in the hotel run by Patrick Palinakis). The prevailing practice would be for Gar to remain with them until he gets 'set up' on his own (as Con and Lizzy did before him), at which point it would be expected that Gar might provide the seed money for another migrant. It is not difficult, for example, to imagine Gar providing money for young Joe (from the 'boys' who visit in Episode 2) to join him in America in a year or two.

In terms of social mobility, the opportunity to avail of the possibilities provided by chain migration allow Gar to dream of a quality of life (in consumer terms at least!) that would have been impossible for him to achieve in Ballybeg.

Key Scenes – What are they (in general) and how do they help us discuss the play's Cultural Context?

On a basic level, a key scene is ANY scene, or moment within a scene that you think is significant or revealing of a specific insight that can help you to address the question. In reality, texts aren't constructed as 'key scenes' linked together by 'filler' material, rather, there as elements of a text that will ebb and flow depending on the narratives involved.

Key Scene 1- The Scene that's Central to the Play – (Both literally and metaphorically!)

Episode 2 – Aunt Lizzy returns (Flashback Sequence) (3:20 on the audio recording)

In the process of imagining what life in America will be like (The American Dream, with its TVs and air conditioning), Gar recalls the day Aunt Lizzy visited from America by re-reading the letter sent to him after her visit. It is read "*strictly for belly laughs*", though the audience strongly suspects that there is a far weightier, emotion reason for doing so.

Identity: The 'Framing' within the script is significant here: Ben Burton is described as "**American**", Con and Lizzy are described as "**Irish-American**", while Gar, obviously, remains "*Irish*" (at this point at least!). This suggests that Friel is deliberately trying to examine the interaction of three different worlds or identities, where the behaviour of those characters is at least partly dependent on which world they represent). In terms of the Cultural Context idea of "social mobility", it is critical that Gar introduces the scene by asserting "**Dammit, Lizzy Gallagher, but you came up in the world.**" She has moved past her old "Irish" identity because she now deliberately signs her letters "*Elise*", an pretension that Gar finds preposterous.

Language: Aunt Lizzy has assumed (taken on) many American affectations "*Please desist from bustin' in on me?*" and indulges in the kind of listless reminiscence or nostalgia about the old country by describing the events of SB and Gar's mother's wedding in the chapel at "*Bailtefree*".

Character: The character of Ben Burton is used to symbolize the generosity of the host country. Lizzy illustrates how Ben helped them to assimilate into American life: "**He gave us this apartment. He gives us dough (money)... Looks after us like we were his own skin and bone.**" He's their "**first and best friend**". This is significant because it establishes the fact that Irish migrants to America in the 1930s were somewhat dependent (just as Gar himself will be) until they can get a job. It is also significant that Ben is described as "**a Black Baptist**", whereas he's really Episcopalian. Why does this matter? Well, it illustrates the different power that religion has in the two worlds. In Ireland, Lizzy would never interact with a Protestant, but in America, disregards Fr O'Flaherty's instruction to "**Let the whole cart-load of them, and the whole zoo of them, be to thee as the Pharisee and the publican.**" In Ireland that kind of decree from the pulpit would have resulted in no interaction whatsoever, but not in America, even though Lizzy describes it as "**Gawd's (God's) own Country**". She anachronously calls her parish priest in Philadelphia a "pastor", demonstrating just how far away from the control of the church she has drifted, relative to her time in Ballybeg.

Consumerism: In order to convince Gar to come to America, Lizzy relies on the allure of consumerism and materialism. She describes their life there, not by describing what they do, or how they feel, but in what they have. "**We have this ground-floor apartment, see, and a car that's air-conditioned, and colour TV, and this big collection of all the Irish records you ever heard, and fifteen thousand bucks in Federal Bonds.**" The 'bonds' are significant, because they indicate that Con and Lizzy have literally 'bought into' the American way of life. Compare this opulence and luxury with the scene later in Episode 2 when the 'boys' arrive and they have to turn out their pockets to see how much money they can scrounge up between them (Ned has 6s 2d "**Say a prayer they're fast and thrifty.**"). The contrast between the two world is stark.

It is almost as if Gar's interaction with returned emigrants has given him a taste of the freedom he has been lacking thus far. It is important that in the stage directions, Friel describes Gar as deciding "**Impetuously**" that he wants to go to America, though it is obvious that Lizzy and Con's return was designed specifically to try and get Gar ("**the only nephew I have**") to join them in America saying, "**We'll go home to Ireland, says I, and Maire's boy, we'll offer him everything we have. and maybe we could coax him – you know- maybe it was sorta bribery – I dunno – but he would have everything we ever gathered.**" It is clear that the one thing Lizzy wants, but can't have is family, whereas Gar's desire to escape Ballybeg takes precedence because of the timing of the scene. The reason S.B. isn't there to see them is because he is at Kate Doogan's wedding (Was Gar invited?) to "**some Dublin Doc**". Here, it is clear that Lizzy won't afford the social mobility that she herself has enjoyed because she describes Francis as "**Some Johnny hop-up.**" In other words, the location, the world in which the characters lives can be seen as dictating a lot about how they behave and the kinds of judgments they make.

Conclusion: This scene perfectly illustrates the Cultural Context of the play by showing us different characters from seemingly different worlds, but also illustrates how their behaviours change (and are influenced by) their current location. Lizzy wants to hold power in both worlds "**You think I'm a stranger here or something?**", but in reality, her attitudes and behaviour are far more American now than they are Irish – inhabiting another world has literally changed how she behaves back in her homeplace and with her only remaining relative.

The Church in 1960s Ireland

Quite apart from the “*Special Position*” held by the Catholic Church in de Valera’s 1937 constitution, the church held a lot of *de facto* power in Ireland, and rural Ireland in particular in this period. This led to a lot of ‘patriarchal’ and ‘paternalistic’ legislation, such as legal bans on gay marriage, abortion, divorce, and the Civil Service ban. Is it significant that Gar’s parents married in 1937? Their marriage would have fulfilled the requirement that “*mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.*” (Article 41.2) Even when Maire can’t fulfil that responsibility (because she has died), Madge, their housekeeper, fulfils it as a ‘proxy’, where she is literally paid more than Gar for her work.

As is still the case, the overwhelming majority of schools were run by the church, think of Master Boyle here conflict with the Canon here... So were most hospitals and childcare facilities (think of the recent scandals that have emerged about places like the Magdalene Laundries and ‘Mother and Baby Homes’).

Not only was it common for the local parish priest to play a prominent role in major local events, such as being on the board of the local school and GAA club, but they also used their bully pulpit to enforce kinds of economic boycotts. Therefore, for S.B to remain on the right side of the church was very important for his business.

The recitation of the Angelus, religious iconography & statues, and religious language are all common throughout the play and the behaviour of many of the characters are heavily influenced by this specific component of Cultural Context. Many such cases are very overt, but there are also subtler signs throughout.

Key Scene 2 – Canon Mick O’Byrne – Episode 3, Part 1 – (6 mins on the audio recording)

The importance of Religious and Secular rituals to the lives of the inhabitants of Ballybeg.
How far does Canon O’Byrne’s influence (and therefore the influence of the church) extend into everyday life in Ballybeg?

Religion throughout the play, culminating in the canon scene.

Stagnancy and Failure

Religion and Stagnation: Probably the most important idea in relation to religion in this text is the fact that the church is frequently viewed as a force of orthodoxy and stagnation in Ireland in the 1950s and 60s. Religious rituals, religious language, and religious morality are all littered throughout the text. This is seen most potently in the Canon scene in Episode 3. What is remarkable about this scene is its almost completely un-pass-remarkable. In other words, at a time of obvious turmoil and activity, both S.B. and the Canon continue their daily ritual as if nothing is happening, seemingly blind to the emotions and events that are overtaking them. This is most obviously seen in their opening interaction – “Canon: *And how’s the O’Donnell family tonight?* S.B.: *Living away as usual. Not a thing happening.*” The routine established by S.B. and the Canon is so predictable, that Gar can anticipate (almost) every turn of phrase “*Black for the crows and white for the swans*”. This stagnant routine is mocked by Private Gar who announces “(wildly excited) *Stop Press! News Flash! Sensation*”. *We interrupt our programmes to bring you the news that Canon Mick O’Byrne of Ballybeg, Ireland, has made the confident prediction that you’ll have rain before the morning. Stand by for further bulletins!*” The only resistance to this tedium is Madge’s hushed undertone that “*Wouldn’t you love to throw it round them!*” (referring to the supper she has just delivered), showing at least some modicum of rebellion, though it would certainly remain no more than talk...

Failures of Religion: In some ways, the quiet, stoical relationship between S.B. and the Canon might not be all negative. As Private Gar notes “*there’s an affinity between Screwballs (S.B.) and me that no one, literally no one could understand – except you, Canon.*” The Canon is, after all, “*warm and kind and soft and sympathetic – all things to all men.*” However, it is clear from Private Gar’s attitude that these qualities have been systematically squandered. He could help to make sense of the world for the O’Donnells, but chooses not to. Perhaps the most scathing (and disappointing) comment that Gar makes throughout the play is his condemnation of the Canon, saying “*because you could translate all this loneliness, this groping, this dreadful bloody buffoonery into Christian terms that will make life bearable for us all.*” The implication here is that it isn’t religion, *per se*, that is the problem, because religion offers a way to understand the turmoil of the world around us, but rather it’s the rigidity of the type of religion practices by the Canon, devoid of empathy and understanding that is the problem.

Religious Ritual: It is also noteworthy that this Episode begins with the rosary being recited on stage (“*The words are barely distinct, a monotonous, somnolent* drone*” (*that would send you to sleep). This is such an autonomic process, that it allows Gar’s mind to wander and daydream about his upcoming adventures – “*with a big blonde nuzzling up to you*”. Madge’s gentle mocking of Gar who is lost in his reverie is (appropriately) religiously framed, saying “*And what about St Martin de Porres?*” (a recently canonized saint renowned for his austerity of lifestyle).

Language: While not as overt, there are many examples of religious language used as vernacular throughout the play. In summing up his relief to be free of the ‘boys’ Gar consoles himself by saying: “*But for Aunt Lizzy and the grace of God*”. Similarly, in his mock hotel interview, Gar claims (wittily) to have attended an “*old Irish Turas, or pilgrimage to St Harold’s Cross*” (a secular area of Dublin).

Church & State: Even where religion is a source of continual tension and friction, as between the Canon and Master Boyle, there is a comfortable familiarity about the ways in which it summarizes the relationship between ‘Church and State’. As Boyle notes “*I think so much about him that – ha – I feel a peculiar attachment for him.*” This kind of love/hate relationship is probably the most useful way to summarize the relationship between the two men, and the two institutions (the Church and Education) that they represent.

The link between religion and social stratification is also tangible. Early in Episode 1, Gar describes Senator Doogan, musing that the he carries a card on which is inscribed “*I am a Catholic. In case of accident call for a Bishop.*” This conspicuously doesn’t read “*Call for a priest*”. This could also be seen as an example of the *hand-in-glove relationship* between senior clergy (like John Charles McQuaid) and senior politicians in Ireland. Even the imagined lives of the characters are dictated by Cultural Context.

Sexual Mores – Relationship, Marriage, and Social Class

What does Kate tell Gar to say to her father, Senator Doogan, in order to make the possibility of a wedding proposal successful? Why does she feel she must persuade Gar to lie and inflate his income? The answer to this is because, at the time, many viewed marriage as largely (if not primarily) an economic contract. The terms of this contract are heavily influenced by the text's Cultural Context.

Kate, suspecting her parents' intentions for her, knows she must act decisively if she is to have any agency over her future. She focuses in on a number of ideas, all drawn from Cultural Context, because these would have been the requirements of the people "in the world of the text" were they to get married. She must not marry 'below her station'. Gar fails her.

Even in parts of life where the Catholic Church didn't have lot explicit power, they were seen to police the moral behaviour of Ireland, particularly in areas such as sexual behaviour. As poet Paul Durcan noted in his own work, "*We all grew up in a lunatic asylum of sexuality*" – a description that could certainly be extended to the experiences of Gar and the boys in PHIC, and on Gar's relationship with Kate Doogan.

In many ways, the earlier scene with 'the boys' illustrates just how limited and juvenile their views around sexuality really were. Think about the range of actions taken by the different characters which seem unusual (or preposterous) to the modern audience, which were basically required of (or enforced upon) the characters in the play, simply because that's what was expected by the 'world of the text', i.e. its Cultural Context!

Key Scene 3 – Gar and Kate Doogan – The politics of love in 1960s Ireland

Episode 1 -Flashback Scene (9:40) and Episode 2 - Visit Scene (28:15)

Thinking about the ways in which Gar and Kate's relationship was influenced by the cultural context of the play...

Context: It is worth noting that the flashback sequence examined here emerges from Gar discovering a newspaper (used to line his suitcase) that was from his parents' honeymoon. The thought of his parents' marriage puts him in mind of his own failed romance with Kate Doogan. The description of S.B. and Maire's wedding ("*She was nineteen and he was forty, and he owned a shop, and he wore a soft hat, and she thought he was the grandest gentleman that ever lived.*") This followed a common pattern of marriage, a legacy of post-famine Ireland, that dictated much of what was possible in terms of romantic relations at the time. The impossibility of Gar & Kate marrying creates long-term resentment for Gar, a significant 'push' factor.

What kind of marriage? The flashback is of "*the night the two of you made all the plans*" – this scene illustrates what was required if a successful marriage was to be made possible. Two interconnect (intersectional) issues are to the fore: the economic requirements and the religious requirements. The young couple had planned to have "*fourteen of a family – seven boys and seven girls.*" This very large Catholic family would have been a distinct feature of the mid-20th Century, and speaks to the church's ban on contraception.

Money and Marriage: While Gar's motivations seem to be predominantly driven by lust ("*I'll never last till Easter! I'll – I'll – I'll bloody-well burst!*"), Kate has been brought up to see marriage as being a socio-economic contract. She warns Gar that "*No matter what you say we just couldn't live on that much money. It - it's not possible. We'll need to have more security than that.*" To make a marriage possible Gar has to ask his father for a pay rise, but he also discloses his secret source of income to Kate, the "*egg money*". Kate realizes that there is a distinct urgency at this point because she suspects that her father is planning to arrange a marriage with Doctor Francis King, although he downplays it to Gar calling it "*not even what you might call an understanding*", though it is clear what is intended here... Kate, therefore, presses Gar into asking her father, Senator Doogan, for her hand in marriage (a very patriarchal practice!) "*It must be now, Gar, now!!*" If he doesn't act fast, her fate (very much beyond her own control) will be sealed for good. In order to overcome the class snobbery Kate tells Gar to lie about his financial situation – "*You have £20 a week and £5,000 in the bank.*" In the world of the text, economics significantly influenced love and marriage.

Disparity in power: Gar is acutely aware of the difference in power between the two families, the Doogans and the O'Donnells. In planning his proposal, he hesitates between titles for his prospective father-in-law "*Mr Doogan – Senator Doogan – I want to ask your permission...*" i.e. he specifically acknowledges that he is a Senator (remember Aunt Lizzy's question "*When did they start having senators about this place for Gawd's sake?*"), whereas his own father is not just financially worse off than Senator Doogan, he is also politically weaker, just a "*County Councillor*", a far less prestigious position. In the 'world of the text', the wedding was a non-starter as the disparity in power between the two families would have dictated.

Episode 2 Insights: The idea of the lost love haunts, and will continue to haunt Gar. He is either too embarrassed or cowardly to say goodbye to Kate properly, and it is she who comes to him to wish him farewell. It is interesting to note how she sees the situation... She has kept up to date with all of Gar's news, having the details of his travel and knowing all the plans "*You know as much about it as I do.*" It is the parochial nature of Ballybeg that makes this possible "*You know Baile Beag – Small Town.*" Kate goes along with the fantasy that Gar will return home in 20 years' time – "*I'll come home when I make my first million, driving a Cadillac and smoking cigars and taking movie-films*" – is just another example of Gar's misdirected bravado. In many ways, the small-talk which dominates the first half of the scene is emblematic of the lack of clear communication that we see with S.B. and Gar, but is dripping with sub-text. It is also interesting in this short passage that Kate's marriage to Dr King appears to be a rather joyless affair. When Gar asks after him, Kate replies, quite revealingly, "*I hear no complaints*", suggesting that there is as little communication in her marriage as existed between S.B. and Maire. Kate is trapped, but Gar is free...?