

An analysis of brian
friel's presentation of
the relationship
between madge and
g...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In his play Philadelphia, Here I Come!, Brian Friel utilizes the entirety of the storyline to develop and present the dramatic relationship between Madge Mulheren and Gareth O'Donnell. Quite quickly, Friel makes it evident to the audience that Madge acts as a substitute mother and mentor to Gareth, whose own mother died soon after he was born. Madge plays a unique role because she attends to the daily household tasks of the O'Donnell family, along with leading the family in devotional practices. Although she is a servant by definition, Madge is connected to the family on a deep level. The most crucial role that Friel entrusts to the character of Madge is to mitigate the broken bond between father and son.

The relationship between Madge and Gareth is first presented to the audience in the opening scene. Here, the audience is given insight to the unique level of intimacy that the two share. Regardless of the fact that Madge is essentially a servant to Gar, Madge is treated as a friend. As she prepares tea for Gar, the two share a dance, and Gar begins to tickle her as she "squeals for mercy." This immediate boisterous play is very indicative of the level of comfort between the two. It is in this opening scene that the audience is introduced to the fact that Madge also plays a motherly figure to Gar. Madge senses that Gar is distressed when he begins to talk about his father. Immediately, Madge begins to comfort Gar, telling him that S. B. is "losing a treasure, indeed!" Brian Friel further develops this motherly characterization of Madge when she continues to console Gar by informing him that although S. B. "doesn't speak much," it "doesn't mean that he [S. B.] hasn't feelings like the rest of us." Here, Madge suggests that both herself and S. B. care deeply for Gar. Because of the dialogue that the two share,

the audience gleans that from Gar's perspective, Madge is the figure in which Gar seeks solace. Gar shares his feelings about his father to Madge, interestingly, this is one of the few instances in the play that Gar is seen sharing his emotions aloud as "public." While Gar is discussing his grievances towards his father to Madge, he begins to talk rather vulgarly as private, referring to his father as "screwballs." This is a pattern of name calling is seen throughout the entirety of the play, and is not limited to his father alone, in fact, Gar even calls his supposed friends "ignorant bloody louts." Madge, however is the only character of the play that Gar does not express any negative thoughts towards, moreso, he refrains from calling her any negative names. As Gar continues to express his resentment towards his father in this scene, he begins to take out his frustration on Madge. This is seen as he begins to talk in a more violent manner "I'm damned if I am gonna speak to him first." Although Gar begins to speak in a more dramatic and violent manner, Madge simply remains calm and continues preparing the tea.

Another manner that Madge conveys her care for Gar early in the play is when she informs him a multitude of times to ensure that his "shirts are well aired" before he wears them. Madge reiterates versions of this line three times. Through this simple line, Friel demonstrates that Madge has a tendency to go above and beyond the call of duty. Washing Gar's clothes is part of her job, but caring for Gar's smell illustrates the immense level of care that Madge possesses for Gar. Another manner that Brian Friel dramatically presents the relationship between Madge and Gareth is through Gar's reliance of Madge to learn about his own mother. Because of S. B.'s

inability to have an “ unpredictable” conversation, or discuss anything pertaining to his own emotions, Gar relies on Madge to garner information relating to his mother. When private begins to reminisce on the stories of his mother, the line “ Madge says” is repeated a total of eight times all in a one page section. This pattern of speech indicates Gar’s dependence upon Madge’s stories. Because Gar’s mother died three days after his birth, the only way he has come to know his mother is through Madge’s verbal memory. A memory that may not be “ verifiably true,” but nevertheless manages to hold “ a truth of it’s own.”

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the relationship between Madge and Gareth is the fact that she acts as the O’Donnell spiritual leader. It is Madge that leads the nightly rosary, regardless of the fact that the Canon visits the house on a nightly basis. Another spiritual task fulfilled by Madge is evident through her role as an unbiased mediator for Gar and S. B. This is illustrated through her multiple attempts to repair the blatantly broken relationship between father and son. One of the unique ways that Brian Friel presents this mediator role is through the utilization of stage directions. When serving dinner, Madge gives S. B. “ a cold hard stare” suggesting that she does not approve of his current behavior. This “ stare” seems to be Madge’s attempt to elicit an action or response from S. B. Through the use of this stage direction, Friel is able to effectively characterize, and speak volumes about the overall character and role of Madge. A “ cold hard stare” is an action often used by mothers or wives. This simple stage direction is a powerful advancement towards Friel’s goal of portraying Madge as a motherly figure.

In a final attempt to enlighten the audience of the true nature of the relationship between Madge and Gar, Brian Friel makes use of the unfortunate naming of Brigid Mulheren. Early in the storyline, Madge makes mention that she will soon have a grandniece, and shares her excitement over the fact that the child will be named after herself. However towards the end of the play, it is revealed through dialogue that the child was named “Brigid.” In an attempt to not spread her glum or force Gar to feel pity for her, Madge does not inform him that her grandniece has been named Brigid as opposed to assuming her own namesake. This is an attempt to make their final moments as pleasurable as possible, and is Friels last effort at demonstrating the motherly qualities possessed by Madge.

Through his many uses of characterization, Brian Friel is able to effectively separate Madge from the other characters of the play: this is able to provide Gareth and Madge with a unique and rather dramatic relationship. Though her duties are primarily servant-like in nature, Friel has bestowed to her a certain level of authority over the O'Donnell family. This, an important tool for her task of mitigating the spiritual longing between father and son. Although she is no mother herself, Madge's proclivity to console Gareth, merits her the honor of being loved “ more than any of them [other characters]” by Gareth O'Donnell. Therefore demonstrating Gar's respect for her as a parental unit. Although Madge is not recognized as an official family member, Brian Friel portrays her in a manner that makes her indispensable to Gar. It is through these ways that Brian Friel presents the relationship between Madge and Gar in a dramatic fashion.