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The Disintegration of Authority:  
A Study of the Fathers in Five Plays of Brian Friel  
by MARILYN THRONE

In his introduction to Brian Friel's Selected Plays, Seamus Deane observes that several of Friel's plays "have in common an interest in the disintegration of traditional authority . . ." (17). In particular, Deane is thinking of Living Quarters (1977) and The Aristocrats (1979) where that traditional authority is clearly lodged in the characters of the fathers. In Living Quarters, the father, Frank Butler, is also the commandant of the battalion stationed in Ballybeg, a recently returned hero who has carried nine wounded men to safety during U.N. service in the Middle East. The father of The Aristocrats is O'Donnell, district judge in Ballybeg. Butler has four adult children; O'Donnell, five. The authority examined in the plays is both familial and social. And in both plays we encounter disintegration in the authority roles: Frank Butler may be a hero and about to be promoted, but he has only cardboard authority at home where his son has had an affair with his second wife; similarly Judge O'Donnell is a stroke victim his children keep tabs on via a "baby tender."

If we look beyond these two plays, we find Friel commonly investigating this same disintegration by examining the role of the father. Furthermore, he invariably casts the father into some societal role that is also authoritarian. In the early play Philadelphia, Here I Come! (1965), S. B. O'Donnell—sometimes known as Screwballs—is a county councillor who owns a general shop. In Faith Healer (1979), Grace Hardy's father is a judge by name of O'Dwyer; and while Frank Hardy's father was really a storeman in a factory, Frank insists that he was a sergeant of the guards and imagines him always in the role and setting of a policeman. And finally, in Translations (1980), although the legal and civil authority is in the hands of the ignorant, ruthless, and English Captain Lancey, Hugh Mor O'Donnell has enormous social prestige within the Irish community of Baile Beag because he is the hedge-schoolmaster.

However, whatever titles and real or titular power Friel's fathers have, they also have a shared impotence. Two of these characters, Judge O'Dwyer of Faith Healer and Judge O'Donnell of The Aristocrats, have suffered strokes. In Living Quarters, Frank Butler has been twice set aside by his wives in favor of his son Ben who stands beside his mother when Gerald Kelly arrives to date Helen and who has an affair with Anna, his
father's second wife. And two of the fathers are made powerless by inarticulation: S. B. O'Donnell, a silent man, awed by his memory of the way his little boy once chattered, and Hugh Mor, articulate in the wrong languages, in Latin, Greek, and Irish, who can therefore hurl only classical epithets at an English soldiery too ill-educated to be insulted by them.

This combination in the fathers of a power or authority, which is sometimes crippling to their children, and an impotence in solving the problems of life in general and of Ireland in particular creates conflicts with and within those children. Such conflicts are the crises of the several dramas. "The sins of the fathers are visited unto the third and fourth generations" — or, in Friel's plays, at least unto the second. For it is significant that it is the fathers who play the authoritarian roles; the impact of the mothers is negligible in most of the plays. Only in *Living Quarters* is the mother a real force in her children's lives, trying to teach *noblesse oblige* to Helen who marries a mere batman and becoming the presence her son both loves and hates; but she is already six years dead when the play begins and the conflict arises not from her interaction with her offspring but with their versions of their father's ill treatment or lack of authority over her. Indeed, the mother is dead before any of the five plays begins. In *Translations*, she is barely a memory; in *Faith Healer*, though Frank Hardy says he went home for his mother's funeral, in fact he went home for his father's, and his only real memory of his mother is of her singing a hymn, "Yes, heaven, yes, heaven, yes, heaven is the prize" (338). In the same play, Grace's mother is portrayed as living a half-mad and chaotic life.

The mother is a more vibrant memory in *Philadelphia* and *The Aristocrats*, but one we suspect has been created by her children. The O'Donnell brood in *The Aristocrats* cannot remember their mother as the actress suddenly wooed and won by their stern father judge, so they have concocted false memories of her playing "The Bedtime Waltz" and dancing with John McCormack. Similarly, in *Philadelphia*, Gar has had to construct in his mind a picture of the mother who died when he was only three days old; he keeps repeating the little he knows: that she came from "Bailtefree beyond the mountains; and her eyes were bright, and her hair was loose . . ." (37) and that "for many a night" S. B. "must have heard her crying herself to sleep . . . " (37).

It is clear, then, that Friel is emphasizing not the parent's role, but rather the father's role. It is also clear that in all of the plays the children are presented as actually or psychologically crippled by their fathers.

In *Philadelphia*, Friel's treatment of Gar O'Donnell's psychological crippling is simply presented by dividing the character on stage into two roles played by separate actors, Public Gar and Private Gar. His dilemma is that he is twenty-five years old and still a virgin; his days are spent work-
ing in his father's store and his evenings with a group of young men equally frustrated by their equally limited prospects. Gar's only possible resolution is to escape to Philadelphia, and this self-imposed exile is made bitter by the fact that he does not believe that his leaving will mean a great deal to his silent, uncommunicative father.

In the other plays, because the families are larger—or in the case of *Faith Healer*, because we deal with two separate single-child families—Friel has more scope to present the multiplicities of effects the fathers have on their children.

For instance, there are four offspring in *Living Quarters*. Tina, still a child at eighteen, is brought into sudden adulthood by her father's suicide. But before that event, her only employment was tending to household chores within her father's house which she has not yet left; we see her and the middle daughter, Miriam, getting Frank's uniform ready for the ceremonies in honor of his heroism. Miriam says: "The years may have passed but we're still Daddy's little beavers" (191). Miriam herself, twenty-five years old and the mother of three children, is the plump practical wife of the local court clerk, Charlie Donnelly. Miriam has opted for an absolutely ordinary life with an absolutely ordinary husband, and Friel makes clear in little and big ways that she is an uncertain, narrow-minded woman. She holds her family, the Butlers, as superior to the people of Ballybeg: "... all the buckos from the village—the Morans and the Sharkeys and all that gang—all squinting and gleeking and not missing a bar" (184); she believes Anna is too young to have married her father; and she blames her father's refusal to accept a transfer away from Ballybeg, "this bloody wet hole" (189), for her mother's ill health and death.

Frank Butler's eldest daughter, Helen, who married his batman, Gerald Kelly, is divorced and living in London. Her relationship with her father is special; it is she who plays at writing his after-dinner speech and who teases him. Frank promises to send her a copy of his report on his heroic rescue mission, she is supportive of his marriage with the young Anna, and Frank confides in this daughter: he wonders aloud if his rigid military discipline has carried over too much into his household and family; he analyzes his family and sees Anna's difference from them: "So unlike us: measured, watching, circling one another, peeping out, shying back" (196). After her father's suicide, Helen seems to accept responsibility for Tina, but she is too much affected by the tragedy of her own life. She has told her brother, Ben, that she still loves her ex-husband: "I thought I'd squeezed every drop of him out of me. But now I know I haven't forgotten a second of him" (215). And in London, after the denouement, she and Tina "seldom meet," and Sir, the narrator cum stage director, tells us "Helen has had to give up her office job because of an acute nervous breakdown" (245).

Ben, the only son in the family, is hesitant and nervous; Miriam calls him a "mother's boy." The day his mother died, Ben called his father a
murderer, and he tells his sister Helen he has “preserved” that hostility for the past six years “out of a sense of loyalty” (212):

—which you do in a state of confusion, out of some vague residual passion that no longer fires you; hitting out, smashing back, not at what’s there but at what you remember; and which you regret instantly—oh, yes, yes, yes, never underestimate the regret. But then it’s too late, too late—(212)

Sir informs us that Ben’s father wanted him to go into the army, but his mother wanted him to be a doctor. He was in his first year as a medical student when his mother died, and he never went back to college; he lives in a caravan on the strand, and he has spent the time his father was being heroic in the Mid East having an affair with his father’s new young wife. He says: “I don’t give a damn about anyone or anything” (217), but in fact that is not true. Ben treasures the memory of his father stroking his face on the childhood trip home when the boy got drunk and sick from sampling the wrong thermos. In impassioned speeches, he reveals to Sir, after his father’s suicide, that his behavior has not been based on love for his mother and hatred for his father but just the opposite:

And what I was going to say to him was that ever since I was a child I always loved him and always hated her—he was always my hero. And even though it wouldn’t have been the truth, it wouldn’t have been a lie either: no, no; no lie. (245)

The four children of the Butler family of *Living Quarters* are each crippled psychologically: Tina is kept a child until she is forced into instant adulthood by Frank’s suicide; Miriam is bigoted and narrow; Helen suffers a nervous breakdown; Ben, twice jailed after his father’s death for being drunk and disorderly, is on his way to alcoholism. In *The Aristocrats*, the crippling is even more clearly seen. Here there are five children, Judith, Anna, Alice, Claire—the youngest daughter—and the only son, Casimir.

Although he is in his thirties and his father has been brought low by several strokes, Casimir still trembles at his father’s voice. He was nine years old when his father told him that he was different, and when he discovered that large areas of human life were not “accessible” to him, that he must conduct himself with “circumspection” (310). He has matriculated in law but not completed his studies nor joined the family judicial tradition. Instead, he works part time in a food factory in Germany; he is married to the very German Helga with whom he raises a family of three sons and a dachshund. The sons hardly speak English; Casimir hardly speaks German, despite the fact that mostly he is the *kinder mädchen*, or nanny, for his sons. Casimir is the O’Donnell child most engaged in recounting made-up memories of past glories for the visiting American researcher Tom Hoffnung; he tells the stories linking the furniture and knickknacks with past great people—the George Moore candlestick, the Yeats cushion, and the Daniel O’Connell chaise longue.
And in the madness of Act II, it is Casimir who finds the holes of the old croquet court and begins the imaginary game with Claire.

This youngest sister is emotionally unstable. A talented pianist who had a scholarship to study in Paris, Claire was thwarted in her ambition by Father who didn’t want her to become “an itinerant musician” (259), and who therefore trapped her in Ballybeg Hall with himself, his silent brother, Uncle George, and her unmarried sister. Claire is oppressed by the situation in Ballybeg Hall, confiding “I don’t know how Judith stands it. She’s lucky to be so . . . so strong-minded. Sometimes I think it’s driving me mad” (291). And she plans to escape that situation by marrying a greengrocer who drives a “great white lorry with an enormous plastic banana on top of the cab” (269), a fifty-three-year-old widower with children and a live-in sister.

The two middle sisters have found equally unsatisfactory means of escape from their father’s house. Anna is Sister John Henry, a nun in St. Joseph’s mission in Kuala in Zambia. From her Christmas tape we learn that she is really in an arrested childhood; she pictures the family unchanged by time; she teaches her African children Irish songs; and her violin playing is “the playing of a child” (304). Alice has escaped into alcoholism. She has married Eamon, who is from the village; a man whose grandmother was a maid at Ballybeg Hall and regaled the boy with stories of its glamour, Eamon has fallen in love with each of the O’Donnell sisters in turn and married Alice, one assumes, simply because she was the one who said yes. Her fights with Eamon descend into physical violence; she enters the play with a bruised cheek from a blow from him after she threw a book. At home in London, she spends her days drinking in their basement flat.

The oldest O’Donnell child, Judith, is paradoxically the child most tied to the father in practical ways and most free of the father in the ways of mind and spirit. On Judith has fallen the care of Father, Uncle George, and Ballybeg Hall, the once proud seat of a Lord Chief Justice, which is now, in fact, a ruin with a leaky roof, dryrotted floors, and inadequate heat. On the other hand, Judith is a political activist who once ran away from the house of her politically indifferent father to take part in the Battle of the Bogside, and she is the mother of an illegitimate child whom she intends to retrieve from Coventry and raise after her father dies. She survives as an independent spirit who maintains sanity in a servile condition through dedication to an exhausting routine of chores: “Maybe it’s an unnatural existence. I don’t know. But it’s my existence—here—now. And there is no end in sight” (299).

There is no doubt that the two central characters of Faith Healer, Frank Hardy and his sometimes acknowledged wife, Grace, are crippled, both in their relationship with each other and in their perceptions of themselves. Frank Hardy not only pursues oblivion by drinking, he also deliberately courts death by going out into the courtyard in Ballybeg,
although, according to Frank's own testimony, he was both warned by the barman that he'd be killed if he failed to cure the cripple and knew that himself as a fact. He is incapable of staying with his wife in Kinlochbervie when she bears their child and cannot bring himself to ask Teddy about the dead child. Grace has once run away from Frank and back home where, in the past, she was the lawyer-daughter of a judge-father. But she returns to the husband who often introduces her as his mistress rather than as his wife; and after Frank's gruesome death, Grace herself commits suicide.

What is less clear in this play, simply because Frank and Grace are middle-aged, is the influence of their fathers. Still we have that chilling interview between Grace Hardy and her father, Judge O'Dwyer. The old man is stricken and at first does not recognize his daughter, but when he does, he pronounces sentence against her: "sentencing me to nine months in jail but suspending the sentence... threatening that if I ever appeared before him again he would have no option but to send me to jail and impose the maximum penalty..." (348). And Frank Hardy is unable even to acknowledge his father's death; he says he went home from Kinlochbervie to attend his mother's funeral—though his mother died long before and Kinlochbervie is the site of his child's death (Grace tells us that in fact Frank went home to his father's funeral from Wales). He recounts his father's telling about her death "as if he were giving evidence" (338); his childhood memories include his father "watching me through the bars of the dayroom windows as I left for school..." (338), and kowtowing to inspectors from Dublin, and showing rotten teeth when he laughed. And those memories of his father are at the root of Frank's need to return to Ireland to regain his faith-healing gift and of his suicidal keeping of the appointment with the young men and their crippled friend in the courtyard of the inn in Ballybeg.

Manus and Owen, the two sons of Hugh Mor O'Donnell, the hedge-schoolmaster in Translations, are again evidently crippled by their father. Both have been brought up in the erudite and intoxicating atmosphere of this Irish scholar. Manus, the older, has been actually crippled by Hugh Mor's falling drunk over his crib when he was a baby. Manus cares for his father, baking his bread, making his tea, and taking his classes when his father is absent or drunk, but he receives no pay for this last chore and therefore he cannot propose to Maire until he is offered the school at Inis Meadhon. Owen, the younger, has become a collaborator with the English; not only is he engaged in renaming the Irish places, he even for a while accepts the English name Roland in place of his own Irish name. And after Yolland disappears and Manus must flee Baile Beag, Owen takes his brother's place to care for Hugh Mor.

It is clear that in each of these plays we are observing men and women whose lives have been damaged because of or through their relationships with their fathers. And yet, paradoxically, we must also acknowledge that
in each of these plays the relationships of the fathers and their children share intensity and love. And it is in the real or imagined characters of the fathers that we discover the motive for the intensity of the love of the children, and the reason for the failure of the relationships.

S. B. O'Donnell, of Philadelphia, is a monumentally silent man, who loved the wild, barefoot girl from over the mountains in Bailtefree, when "She was nineteen and he was forty . . ." (37). He does not remember what Gar does, the rainy afternoon fishing in the blue boat when he wrapped his coat around his son and sang "All Round My Hat I'll Wear A Green Coloured Ribbono," but he remembers Gar in a sailor suit even Madge has forgotten, and he remembers walking his son to school:

... 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 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 . . . Maybe, Madge, maybe it's because I could have been his grandfather, eh? (97)

Frank Butler of Living Quarters fears that perhaps he has brought too much military discipline into the house. Two of his children, Alice and Ben, seem to blame him for their mother's death, because he wouldn't accept a transfer to another area, but Ben's betrayal of his father, through the affair with Anna, brings from Frank a plaintive protest that his life with his first wife has not been a happy one and that he has sought long-delayed happiness in this late marriage. He says:

But an injustice has been done to me, Sir, and a protest must be made. I don't claim that I have been blameless. Maybe my faults have been greater than most. But it does seem — well, spiteful that when a point is reached in my life, and late in my life, when certain modest ambitions are about to be realized, when certain happinesses that I never experienced are suddenly about to be attainable, it does seem spiteful that these fulfilments should be snatched away from me — and in a particularly wounding manner. Yes, I think that is unfair. Yes, that is unjust. (240-41)

It is a mild protest, for his first wife has been shrewish and demanding as well as ill and unhappy with what she considers too low a station in life.

There is less room for forgiving Father Judge O'Donnell in The Aristocrats, or for understanding him, except that like S. B. he, too, has married a younger woman with a free nature, Friel thus suggesting a romanticism and a vulnerability, a possibility of dreams, in the man that once was. Mother was an actress, traveling with the Charles Doran Company:

Spotted by the judge in the lounge of the Railway Hotel and within five days decently wed and ensconced in the Hall here . . . And a raving beauty by all accounts. (295)

And Willie remembers the judge dealing leniently when Willie was caught driving a car without license tags, insurance, or brakes:

Let me off with a caution! He must have believed me. No, he didn't. Knew damn well I was a liar. He just pretended he believed me. (323)
Still the ledger against Father Judge O'Donnell is long: his wife committed suicide; he informed his only son, then aged nine, that it was lucky he hadn't been born in the village where he'd have become the village idiot, but "Fortunately" in Ballybeg Hall where "we can absorb you" (310); he kept his daughter Claire from pursuing her music; Alice recalls that until this last visit when she saw him wasted with the strokes and impotent, she had never touched his face, "... is that possible never to have touched my father's face?" (289-90); and he torments Judith, the daughter who tends to his needs, by senilely informing her that "Judith betrayed us," but "... Anna's praying for her" (257).

Such simultaneous rigidity and impotence in the midst of an intense relationship is germane to Faith Healer as well. Grace's father, Judge O'Dwyer, calls Frank Hardy a mountebank who has implicated his child in a "career of chicanery" (371); he is symbolically represented by "... the long straight avenue" of his estate, "flanked with tall straight poplars, across the lawn, beyond the formal Japanese garden ..." (347). Frank's father, actually a "storeman in a factory in Limerick" (345-46), is remembered as a policeman, but one without authority, whose son can slip his hands in and out of the locked bracelets of the handcuffs, who is servile to the inspectors from Dublin, and who exposes a mouthful of rotten teeth when he laughs—clearly a symbol of law which has no bite. And yet, impotent as this pair of fathers is, they draw their children back actually and in imagination to Ireland and they are intensely involved in their children's understanding of themselves.

In Translations, Hugh Mor O'Donnell, an alcoholic mocked by his students and crippling to his sons, is nevertheless vouchsafed by Friel the late-dawning comprehension that what he has prided himself on—the classical languages and literatures of Greece, Rome, and Ireland—is not sufficient to defeat the barbaric English who are conquering his land. When he sees his contemporary, the Infant Prodigy, Jimmy Jack, sliding out of reality into a realm where he believes he is going to marry the Greek goddess Athene and have family suppers with his father-in-law, Zeus, Hugh Mor capitulates to Maire's request to teach her English. He tells his remaining son, Owen, that they must learn the new names the English have imposed on their ancient land. And yet, though Friel gives Hugh Mor understanding and knowledge, he does not grant him the ability to do anything about the tragedies taking place around him: Manus is fleeing up the coast for the murder of Yolland, the Irish language and place names are being supplanted by English, Maire and others like her are determined to emigrate to a better life, and the English soldiery are plundering the town of Baile Beag.

And Hugh Mor's impotency, clear in the face of the conquering English, is echoed in each of the other plays. In every case, we are witness to the impotence of the father in passing along whatever heritage he represents to his offspring.
In *Living Quarters* and *The Aristocrats*, the families fall away after their fathers' deaths. "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. . . ." Most of the children, we understand, are doomed to unhappiness and despair. Frank Butler's four, Tina, Miriam, Helen, and Ben, become respectively a waitress in an all-night cafe, a snobbish woman who thinks she is superior to her neighbors, a sufferer from a nervous breakdown and unable to work, and a man twice jailed for being drunk and disorderly. Father Judge O'Donnell's five are no more fortunate. Anna will remain a child immured in St. Joseph's mission in Africa; Claire will marry her greengrocer and care for his children while his sister runs the household; Alice will fight her alcoholism in the basement flat in London with silent Uncle George as her companion; Casimir will continue as nanny for his children, impressively not even passing his own language on to his sons; and Judith, the only one we can hope might find some happiness, will raise her illegitimate child alone because Willie, who loves her, will not accept the child.

In *Philadelphia, Faith Healer*, and *Translations*, our only hope is that the offspring will find their ways into new worlds, because the worlds of their fathers are either lost or doomed. Gar leaves the sterility of his father's world for Philadelphia. Owen is told by his father that he must make the transition into the Ireland being created by the English language and soldiery. And Frank Hardy's escape, if it can be called that, is into the mysticism of his profession; but as his art is arcane and he has no control over it, he must ultimately return defeated to Ireland and to his ritualized death for his failure to cure the incurable.

Policeman, city councillor, judge, commandant — no real or imagined authority can achieve the continuity of the culture, as Friel perceives it. Insofar as the fathers of these plays are loved — and truly they are all loved by their children — they affect their children's lives. But insofar as they are figures of authority, they do not affect their children's lives.

In *The Aristocrats*, Eamon, who has married into the family, says: "And this was always a house of reticence, of things unspoken, wasn't it?" (279). He might well be speaking for all the houses in all the plays. Friel emphasizes that these fathers are good men and that there is something warm and loving about most of them. After all, both *The Aristocrats'* Judge O'Donnell and S. B. O'Donnell in *Philadelphia* have wooed and won young, vibrant wives, the judge an actress from Charles Doran's troop, and S. B. the girl from beyond the mountains. And not only has *Living Quarters'* Frank Butler also won and married a beautiful young woman, he has romantically told the wounded men he carried to safety in the Mid East all about her:

Each time I crawled back to base with a man on my back — each trip took about half an hour — I told him about you — everything about you — your hair, your neck, your shoulders, the way you laugh — everything. Luckily most of them were too ill to listen. Not that that made any difference — I'd have told them anyway. (222)
The fathers may have been warm, may have been loving, may even have lived a romantic hour or two in their lives, but, sadly, that humanness is not communicated to their children. Frank Hardy, in *Faith Healer*, has no loving memories of his father, nor has Frank’s wife Grace, though somehow both those fathers are part of the lure of Ireland for their children. In *Translations*, Hugh Mor’s wisdom is couched in the dead languages of Latin, Greek, and Irish. To his sons he and his world are a burden, if not as mad as the world of Jimmy Jack, at least comically alcoholic and pathetically impotent in the face of English modernism. Hugh Mor might well say with Manus that he has only “The wrong gesture in the wrong language” (432).

Clearly Friel is almost obsessively investigating a familial catastrophe, and in his reiteration of it in play after play, he is exposing the failure of the Irish culture to communicate its heritage to its offspring. It is the relationship with the fathers that is presented time after time, the relationship with the parent traditionally associated with societal authority. And that authority is reinforced by giving the fathers the various roles of judge, councillor, policeman, commandant, and teacher. But juxtaposed against those titles and postures of authority is not only the impotence of these fathers, an impotence created by silence, cuckolding, illness and age, servility, or—in the case of Hugh Mor—the displacement of the culture, but also the startling repetition of the crippling effect they have on their children. Instead of leading their children toward productive, useful lives, the fathers leave only exile, alcoholism, nervous breakdowns, sterile marriages, and suicide.

Friel probes the Irish culture, examining the past (*Translations*) as well as the present in both the upper class (*Living Quarters* and *The Aristocrats*) and middle class (*Philadelphia* and *Faith Healer*). The problems within Irish society are severally examined. In *Translations*, Friel concentrates on the historical and cultural impact of the imposition of the English language. In *Philadelphia*, the frustrations of young Gar’s life expose the limitations of a puritanical and closed society. *Faith Healer* balances the tatters of faith against the formulas of law. And in *Living Quarters* and *The Aristocrats* we search the ability of the younger generation to carry on, not an upperclass role, but any sort of valuable social role at all. In each and every situation, Friel’s conclusion is adamant: there is no help from one generation to the next.

Brian Friel is not the only Irish writer to be consumed with a need to define the father image for himself and his audience. James Joyce was similarly drawn to the theme, as were Frank O’Connor, Sean O’Faolain, and Sean O’Casey. In a national literature rife with powerful and beautiful images of good, strong women characters like Kathleen ni Houlihan and the Shan Van Vocht, like Synge’s Maurya and O’Casey’s Juno, it is significant to find Leopold Bloom and Yeats’s Cuchulain, O’Faolain’s Phil Crone and O’Casey’s Paycock. Like his brother writers, Friel is con-
fident in the creation of strong, loving females, Madge of *Philadelphia*, Crystal of *Crystal and the Fox*, Judith of *The Aristocrats*, and Maire of *Translations*, but when he searches for comparable male strength, he finds only delusion, frustration, silence, tyranny, and confusion.

For all a father means to any of us, he must also be our definition of our society, of its laws and its justice, of its artistry and its imagination. Perhaps the mother is too rapidly cast into symbolically spiritual—and therefore heroic—roles, and thus eludes the bitterness of reality. Or perhaps the Irish writers are consistent within their culture; for if a culture, like the Irish or the American black, is deprived of its sovereignty, then the societal role of the father as symbol and reality of authority must be eroded, and forever there can be no relationship between the father and his children except one of a frustration that ultimately exposes the impotence of the father and the crippling of the children.

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