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**CHARACTER – ACTOR “PRESERVED IN PERPETUITY”
LIVING QUARTERS BY BRIAN FRIEL**

1

Living Quarters by Brian Friel, first staged in 1977, deals with the relationship between reality and illusion, past and present, individual and community. It shows the process of creating theatre and employs a variety of techniques portraying Friel's deep knowledge and interest in the world theatre and drama theories. *Living Quarters* does not fascinate the audience with its plot, but rather with its abundance of, though not new, but originally used devices of ancient drama or of modern playwrights, such as: Yeats, Pirandello, Priestley and Wilder. Friel is particularly influenced by their concept of time cycle and their methods of breaking dramatic illusion.

The play deals with the events which happened in the Butler family on May 24, some years before the present action takes place, when Commandant Frank Butler, celebrating the victorious return from a successful military operation abroad, committed suicide after having learnt that, during his absence, his newly-married young wife had had an affair with his son. The whole family, gathered to honour the triumphant father, witnesses and participates in the events of the day, which will persist forever in the memories of its members. These incurable memories permanently repeat themselves in the characters' minds, allowing this one day of the past overshadow and dominate their present lives. The play, enacted in their consciousness, becomes a projection of the inner experiences of the Butlers' past.

And the people who were involved in the events of that day, although they're scattered around the world, every so often in sudden moments of privacy, of isolation, of panic, they remember that day, and in their imagination they reconvene here to reconstruct it – what was said, what was not said, what was done, what was not done, what might have been said, what might have been done; endlessly raking over those dead episodes that can't be left at peace¹.

¹ B. Friel, *Living Quarters* in: *Selected Plays*, London 1984, Faber and Faber, p. 177. All the references in the text will be to this edition.

But sole imagining of what had happened is not enough for the characters who, 'out of some deep psychic necessity' (p. 177), conceived 'the ledger' and a figure of Sir. The ledger is 'a complete and detailed record of everything what was said and done that day' (p. 177). It is kept and read by Sir, 'the ultimate arbiter' (p. 177), who does not belong to the family, but all the time controls what is going on on the stage, where the characters, step by step, re-enact the fatal day in the way they perceive it. The reason for the endless repetition of the past is the fact that, although people remember some events well, each time they are re-lived by them, some details are always omitted. Appearing as the first character on the stage, Sir explains to the audience the mechanisms of the recollections, his role in the drama, and the cause of its enactment:

And it is the memory of those lost possibilities that has exercised you endlessly since and has kept bringing you back here. (p. 206)

The return to the past happens against the characters' will and expresses their smothered emotions and passions connected with the tragedy which completely changed their lives. Ben, Frank's unloyal son, most mercilessly tormented by the memories, sees them come

out of some vague passion that no longer fires you; hitting out, smashing back, not at what's there but at what you think you remember; and which you regret instantly – oh, yes, yes, yes, never underestimate the regret. But then it's too late, too late – the thing's preserved in perpetuity. (p. 212)

This concept of 'the preservation in perpetuity', called by Nietzsche 'the eternal recurrence'² was later used by Freud in his studies over the nature of human mind forced to repeat unpleasant incidents. However, the idea of the cyclic character of human lives and history was not only the domain of the German philosophers. Yeats's theory of gyres, also evident in his writing, is based on the assumption that European history and man's existence proceed in repetitive cycles which take shape of a whirling cone. A new spiral begins approximately every two thousand years and each time it directs the lot of humanity into a different way³. Yeats applied these ideas, deriving from his occult interests, in both his poetry and dramatic works, trying to prove their relevance not only to the whole mankind, but also to individuals' lives⁴.

² As in: J. Peter, *Vladimir's Carrot. Modern Drama and the Modern Imagination*, London 1987, Andre Deutsh, p. 121.

³ R. Ellman, *Yeats. The Man and the Masks*, Oxford 1979, Oxford University Press, p. 228.

⁴ See: Yeats's *The Player Queen*.

As we deal with the members of the family on two layers: as the present-based group of characters and as the devoted participants of the past event, the analysis of their behaviour in the two dimensions is necessary. Therefore, a gradual presentation of the plot and a description of some individual characters will be followed by the discussion on their double role: as actors and as characters.

The memorable day of Frank's suicide becomes a turning point in the Butlers' lives. What happened before and after loses its significance for the characters, but obviously, the events preceding his death explain the tragedy.

The author presents the Butlers living next to a military camp. They seem to be a homogeneous unit tied by cherished memories of a happy childhood and youth, but, actually, they deceive one another. The four children brought up in a strict military discipline, have problems with adjusting themselves to adult life. Miriam devotes all her time and thought to her children; Helen was left by her husband who probably could not stand up to her and her mother's expectations; Ben stopped his university education in order to spend the rest of his life in a caravan. Only Tina, the youngest, still has an innocent and naive attitude to the world. The autocratic system of running the house and family affairs exercised by Commandant Butler and his first wife, destroyed especially Helen's and Ben's lives. Called 'a spoiled mother's boy' (p. 187), Ben admits that, in fact, he had hated his mother until the day of her funeral, which gave him spiritual freedom. The mixed emotions of love and fear resulted in his stammering. As in Friel's previous plays, Gar's in *Philadelphia* and Ingram's in *Cass McGuire*, Ben's stammering derives from his sense of insecurity, shyness, inability to express himself and to communicate with others. He had been looking in vain for a genuine, warm and true contact with his mother, and has eventually found it in the relationship with Anna, his stepmother. She, the most obvious outsider of the play, is treated by her husband, Frank, more like an object to be proud of, 'a mascot' (p. 196) than a feeling person. Her alienation from the rest of the family is clearly visible in the scene in which she cannot participate: it is when the Butlers remember their childhood adventures. Besides, Anna is the only character whom Sir has not introduced, thus stressing her outside position in the family history. No wonder that Ben, who also fails to find his place in the house, sees an ideal partner in Anna. One cannot escape interpreting Ben's behaviour in terms of the Oedipus complex. His love for Anna, his substitute mother, and the bad relationship with his father, indicate his, apparently unconscious, strife for an emotional link with the stepmother and the desire to take revenge on his father. It is only after his father's death that Ben is able to reveal his real attitude to his parent:

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 my hero. And even though it wouldn't have been the truth, it wouldn't have been a lie either. (p. 245)

The history of the Butler family closes with their scattering around the world and the re-experiencing of the fatal day in their minds becomes the only thing connecting them. The recollections, defined by Sir as: 'wishful thinking of lonely people in their apartments', (p. 225) makes them all a family again.

At the beginning of the play, Sir instructs the minor players, Father Tom and Frank's son-in-law, Charlie, about their roles. Inflexible in his denying longer and more important parts for the two, he clears out the stage for the play. In this sense, we can view the enacted recollections in terms of the 'play-within-the play' device and to be more strict, 'the rehearsal of the play-within-the play' with Sir acting as the audience.

If there is a character who attempts to circumvent the rules and accelerate the tempo, Sir intervenes by interrupting the play, whereas the others remain motionless. For example, when Anna cannot bear the tension of her guilt any more and tries to confess her betrayal earlier than the ledger orders, the others 'stand with frozen smiles. Now that ANNA and SIR has gone off they are released again'. (p. 203) During the reconstruction, the characters behave as actors who are aware of the difference between the spectacle and the reality, they are eager to stop the spectacle occasionally and discuss the play. However, as the drama they are rehearsing is a part of their lives, they cannot reject an emotional involvement in the action. Undoubtedly, out of suspense, they themselves prompt Sir to continue with their play.

This slow progress towards the sorrowful moment is divided into several stages. When the suspense is growing, there is time for considering what would have happened if the individual members of the Butler family had decided to do or say something else on that day. It is the period

when different decisions *might* have been made. Because at the point we've arrived now, many different conclusions would have been possible if certain things had been said or done or left unsaid and undone. (p. 206)

This period of lost possibilities, the actual driving force and cause of the returns to the past, is followed by 'the gaiety stage' (p. 225), which opens Act II. The characters, 'outside' the drama, amuse themselves with the family stories and childhood memories. The 'euphoric' mood brings about relaxation, and joking makes them forget for a moment the real reason of their gathering. Sir, who enters the stage slightly later than the others, is ready to allow the Butlers a few liberties. He is sure, however, that

they're always being true to themselves. And even if they've juggled the time a bit, they're doing no harm. We mustn't be impatient with them. (pp. 225)

The burst of joyfulness quickly shifts into a high-strung climax of the play when Frank leaves the living-room in order to shoot himself (pp. 241–242). The real tragedy of the rest of the family reproducing this moment, is their helplessness and inability to restrain Frank. Besides, Father Tom, who runs around the stage in panic and despair, shouting at Sir and the others to stop Frank, the characters stand still in their reverie: 'BEN remains encased and intact in his privacy'..., Helen 'looks at him [Tom] as if he were a stranger'. No one responds (p. 241). The tragic moment is deflated by Tina, who rushes onto the stage too early – before the shot – and, in a frenzy, shouts loudly, 'Daddy – Daddy – Daddy – Daddy'. (p. 242) She is immediately stopped by Sir, who whispers, 'Not yet! Tina! Not yet!' She freezes, waits a while until the shot is heard and resumes her desperate screaming. Tina's mistake not only abases her father's suicide, but has a deeper theatrical purpose: it stresses the discrepancy between performance and reality. In Brechtian style, it distances the audience from the performance and serves as another device to stress that the watched spectacle is only an enactment of reality, and is held in the characters' minds.

The last phase of the play is typified by relaxation and the characters 'emerge from their cocoons'. (p. 242) In an atmosphere of relief and serenity they light cigarettes. The performance is over and its players ready to go back to their own homes. This is the time when Sir thanks the characters for their acting, and reads from the postscript of the ledger about their lives after the memorable May 24. Having closed the book, he is the last person to leave the stage.

3

The theme of the cyclic reappearances of the events found an earlier advocate in J. B. Priestley's literary work. In his *I Have Been Here Before*⁵, the characters discover that they have already experienced the meeting in the country hotel before. Seized by this vague feeling, they are soon confirmed in their suspicion by a mysterious Dr Gortler, who explains their fears and has all their biographies written down in his notebook. Walter Ormund, one of the characters trapped in this eternal moment, to whom Gortler has just revealed the secrets of this world-ruling theory, wants to know 'Why should this poor improvisation be our whole existence'⁶. Dr Gortler replies: 'We must play our parts until the drama is perfect'.

⁵ J. B. Priestley, *The Plays of J. B. Priestley*, London 1962, Heinemann, vol. 3.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 264.

For Friel's characters, it seems that the process to achieve perfection will never stop; they are coerced to participate in re-enacting the day of Frank's death, although they live in various places in the world or they may even be dead. From Gortler's words, it is clear that each repetition in the cyclic existence is, according to Priestley, a play, which people, as in a theatre, have to perform periodically. Shakespeare's 'Life is a stage' obtains a broader meaning here: people are not actors who enter the stage of life just for one time only, but they perform the same piece endlessly.

Friel leaves it unsaid whether each 'performance' in *Living Quarters* is stimulated by one or by all the characters. It may be an individual memory of a single character escaping out of his or her control, which initiates the enacting of the drama in the way this character perceives the past event. It is more likely, however, that such an individual memory becomes a collective one, and, thus, causes the re-experiencing of the day, providing all the characters' views and versions of what had happened. This collective memory is the ledger itself, as well as Sir, the person who monitors the accuracy of the realisation of its contents.

Dr Gortler and his notebook clearly relate to Sir and the ledger, but what differentiates the two plays is the entirely unconscious participation of Priestley's characters in the repeated action and, only later on, their slow recognition and comprehension of the principles of the cyclic system, while the Butlers approach the process with more understanding.

Equally unused to the returning to the past is Emily in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*⁷, who, on her funeral day, meets all the dead people of her town gathered at the cemetery. They discourage her from re-living past experiences because

As you watch it, you see the thing that they – down there – never know. You see the future⁸.

Contrary to Friel's and Priestley's idea of recurrence, it is one of the happiest days of her life Emily wishes to repeat and, moreover, she is not forced to do that but looks forward to seeing her family again. Whereas the repetition brings a temporary relief to the Butlers, Emily regrets going back to her twelfth birthday and, disappointed with the behaviour of the friends and relatives who, in her opinion, cannot enjoy single moments of their lives, she decides to stay in the present.

According to the vision in *Our Town*, it is possible to remain in the present. However, another play by Wilder, *The Skin of Our Teeth*⁹, totally rules out the probability of avoidance of such repetitions. This family

⁷ T. Wilder, *Our Town*, [in:] *The Three Plays by Thornton Wilder*, New York 1961, Bentam Books.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

⁹ T. Wilder, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, [in:] *The Three Plays...*

history develops in parallel to the history of humanity, whose cyclic quality is emphasised by the same opening and closing scene. The Antrobuses' life is shown against the background of the Stone Age, the modern times and the totalitarian wars. During each epoch, the family has to face different social and political patterns characteristic of the given times, but the problems and emotional relationships inside the family remain unchanged. The author deployed here an interesting idea of a clock surrounded by a circulating planet system, in which every hour is named after a great philosopher¹⁰. The clock, made up of living actors who cite fragments of the theories of the philosophers they represent, proves that not only the universe, human life and history, but also man's thought is subject to the inevitable recurrence of the evolution process. Such a permanent rebirth of human ideas, repeatedly replaced by new concepts, suggests that, together with the closing of each cycle, the capacities of our mind and the world are precisely determined and limited. Wilder's vision of time is more optimistic than Friel's, however. The former assumes that certain movement in the fourth dimension is possible, and although it is in advance predicted that it will come back to the same point, it allows people to proceed along the circular line endowing each stage of their lives with equal importance. Friel is pessimistic in the sense that he makes his characters re-enact only one incident of their existence and, instead of a cycling process, they are imprisoned at one point in time. Able to obey only the chronology of the fatal day, they cannot move on freely to the following phases of their lives. Time loses here its meaning and becomes motionless. Consequently, there is no death, as 'a character', says Pirandello, 'will never die'¹¹. Sir, who assures the characters that he possesses all the time, can command it only within the boundaries of one day.

4

The figure of Sir, 'the powerful and impartial referee' (p. 177), whose words begin and finish the play, can be interpreted in number of ways. The most obvious reading of his presence in the play is that of a director, who, having the script of the spectacle and willing to observe what is written in it, prepares the play, gives clues to the actors concerning the drama, and interrupts the rehearsal when he thinks it is necessary. On the other hand, however, he becomes a metaphor of a writer at work. He informs the characters:

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 122–123.

¹¹ L. Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, [in:] *Pirandello: Three Plays*, transl. R. Reitty, London 1985, Methuen, p. 79.

What I would like to do is to organize those recollections for you, impose a structure on them, just to give them a form of sorts. (p. 178)

Like a writer, he is making a selection of the events, which he promises to be 'as fair and representative as possible' (p. 178)

Sir remains outside the action, watching it and sitting on his stool in the corner of the stage. In his comments on the action, his control of the past and present, Sir reminds us of the chorus of ancient drama¹², another sphere of Friel's interests. Like the chorus of a Greek tragedy, Sir turns to the audience explaining the background of the play and in this sense, acting also as a narrator¹³. He introduces the Butlers, reads the information about them from the ledger while the characters appear on the stage to play their roles. For example, he describes the youngest daughter, Tina, when she is preparing her father's uniform for the celebration in the following way:

The pet of the family. Singing because her father is back from the Middle East and because she has never seen such excitement in the camp before. Her life up to this has been protected and generally happy and content. (pp. 181-182)

According to the chorus's rules, Sir reveals the emotions of the characters, he talks to them about their feelings and opinions on what is happening. This is a fragment of his conversation with Helen, the oldest daughter, left by her husband:

SIR: Do you still feel anger?

HELEN: No, not a bit, I think. Not a bit.

SIR: And him – how real is he?

HELEN: Gerry? That's over.

SIR: Altogether?

HELEN: I'm wary. I'm controlled. I discipline myself.

SIR: Then this home coming was a risk?

HELEN: In a way.

SIR: A test? A deliberate test?

HELEN: Perhaps. (p. 183)

He runs another conversation in a similar mode with Frank:

SIR: You are nervous

FRANK: Yes.

SIR: Of what?

FRANK: I don't know.

SIR: Can it be to do with Anna?

FRANK: Yes. Maybe. I don't know. With myself. I'm jittery for some reason.

¹² U. Dantanus, *Brian Friel: The Growth of an Irish Dramatist*, Gothenburg Studies of English 1985, p. 161.

¹³ R. A. Banks, *Drama and Theatre Arts*, London 1991, Hodder and Stoughton, p. 55.

SIR: That's understandable.

FRANK: And unhappy. Suddenly unhappy. Profoundly unhappy.

SIR: It's the tension. (p. 192)

Both extracts resemble the way of talking which a psychoanalyst imposes on a patient when he wants him to dispose of nervousness by means of gradual revelation of his problem while the doctor is subtly prompting the answers. The whole idea of curable effects of repeating and examining the details of 'traumatic' incidents, in fact, derives from psychoanalysis. Whatever methods Sir uses, he succeeds in calming down the characters and, thus, realises his main objective: the continuation of the action. However, from time to time, he decides to break it; for example, when he notices that the characters exceed the borders of his already determined vision of the play. Thus, the moment Anna, Frank's second wife, appears too early in order to tell everybody about her affair with Ben, Sir interrupts the scene and makes her leave the stage (pp. 202-203). He does not only know the past of the characters, but his ledger contains the details of their lives from the tragic day up to the present. At the end of the play, Sir informs the audience where each character has gone and what they have been doing since they left their living quarters in Ballybeg. This is another way, apart from the extended memory sequence, in which Friel deals with the issue of time in the drama. The author plays with the idea of time division into past, present and future, and makes these concepts dependent on the audience's point of reference. If we consider the presentation of the events to be the recollection of the past, Sir's continuation of the Butler's history relates to their present. However, if we take a more complicated version into account, i.e. allow ourselves to think the events on the stage happen here and now, as past and present constantly intermingle with each other, then Sir's revelations would refer to the future. This would give him an additional power and authority in the play, making him the 'ruler' of the time. He already possesses the ability to stop the action of the drama any moment he likes, as well as to prolong certain scenes because '*he has all the time in the world*'. (p. 208) All the characters unquestionably acknowledge his dominance over the play. Frank says: 'You're in command, Sir' or 'So carry on as you think best, Sir. I'm in your hands'. (p. 207)

Sir, 'the final adjudicator' (p. 178), and the ledger, personify fate – they govern human lives, predetermined and unchangeable, against which any fight is pointless and sentenced to failure. In his omniscience, Sir acts like God who directs human existence. He admits that he was conceived by the characters, but

no sooner do they conceive me with my authority and my knowledge than they begin flirting with the idea of circumventing me, of foxing me, of outwitting me. (p. 178)

This paradoxical principle is also valid in any religion, whose rules, first, people conscientiously obey and, next, they try to avoid them. Although, like the characters in *Living Quarters*, people are invited to speak their thoughts, they cannot influence their already drafted lot.

Father Tom, a chaplain and a close friend of the Butler family, asks Sir to remind him of the features of his own character:

I don't suppose it would be a breach of secrecy or etiquette if I – if you were to let me know how I'm described there, would it? You know – something to hang the cap on – 'good guy', 'funny guy', 'bit of a gossip'. Which of my many fascinating personas should I portray? (p. 179)

This, again, confirms the predetermination of the stage characters, but also, owing to Sir's detailed answer to Tom's questions, it serves Friel as a useful introduction of the whole family.

The persons participating in the recollection must observe, as mentioned earlier, the rules and the order of appearance. Otherwise, they are asked by Sir to leave the stage. On the other hand, the characters are allowed to complain about the inaccuracies they notice in the reconstruction of the day:

HELEN: It's not right! It's not right!

SIR: Yes, it is.

HELEN: No, it's not. It's distorted – inaccurate.

SIR: I would tell you. Trust me.

HELEN: The whole atmosphere – three sisters, relaxed, happy, chatting in their father's garden on a sunny afternoon. There was unease – I *remember* – there were shadows – we've got to acknowledge them! (p. 188)

They can rebel and protest although they realise it will not alter their situation. Frank, just before his death, speaks to Sir:

And I am fully aware that protesting at this stage is ... absolutely pointless. But an injustice *has* been done to me, Sir, and a protest must be made... But it does seem – well, spiteful that when a point is reached in my life, when certain modest ambitions are about to be realized ... that these fulfilments should be snatched away from me – and in a particularly wounding manner. (p. 240–241)

Even though the dissatisfied characters' statements do not affect the action, they add psychological dimension and reveal thoughts and feelings underlying what happened.

5

In many respects *Living Quarters* is similar to Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*¹⁴, in which, suddenly, during a rehearsal in a theatre, a group of people appear on the stage claiming that they are

¹⁴ L. Pirandello, *op. cit.*

characters conceived in an author's mind and whose drama has never been written down. They ask the producer to stage their story, otherwise they will never get freedom and relief from the drama of which they are a part. Thematically, both plays deal with a family tragedy, betrayal and suicide, and in the formal layer they both represent the enactment of the tragic events, guided and directed by an outside person: Sir in *Living Quarters* and the Producer in *Six Characters*. Whereas Pirandello's characters believe that performing their story will release them from its contents forever, the Butlers realise that the process of repetition cannot be stopped. The 'six characters', contrary to Friel's, do not possess the script of their drama.

It's in us, Sir. (*The ACTORS laugh*) The play is in us: we are the play and we are impatient to show it to you: the passion inside us is driving us on¹⁵.

As there is no script, the characters in Pirandello's play quarrel about the exactness and accuracy of the events not only with the Producer and the actors who are performing their parts, but also with one another. This fact entails another difference between Friel's and Pirandello's vision of the play. The latter's concept is more complex as it is composed of three, not two, levels of action. The levels represent: (1) actors – the play they rehearse before the arrival of the characters and their attempts to enact the characters' drama, (2) the characters – their persuading the Producer to stage their story and reconstructing the events, (3) the characters' reconstruction of the events. Friel does not include actors in *Living Quarters* because the play relates more to the way human mind works. He creates an insight into memory and psychological mechanisms, whereas Pirandello's main goal is to explain a relationship between illusion and reality. The visible device which helps to distinguish the two spheres are masks characterising each of the six persons. The masks, exaggerating human features, emphasise the fictitious nature of the characters who wear them. Friel's characters do not wear masks. Yet, they seem to put on the masks of their past, as it were, each time they switch into the collective memory scene. Pirandello's characters also exist in such a unity and collectiveness. Father, the protagonist of the play, says:

This is the real drama for me; the belief that we all, you see, think of ourselves as one single person: but it's not true: each of us is several different people, and all these people live inside us...¹⁶

In their endeavour to persuade the Producer to have their drama performed, the characters admit that they cannot bear being 'trapped, chained and suspended in the eternal moment'¹⁷ any longer. This 'eternal moment', and, in Friel's words, 'the preservation in perpetuity' makes the reality, in which

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

the characters live, unchangeable. By calling their drama 'reality', they absolutely violate the conception of theatrical illusion. Father, speaking on behalf of the other characters, argues that

if we ... have no other reality outside our own illusion, perhaps you ought to distrust your own sense of reality: because whatever you touch and believe in and that seems real for you today, is going to be – like the reality of yesterday – an illusion tomorrow¹⁸.

If we accept that the characters live in a 'reality' – a theatrical reality – we should also recognise our, audience's life, as an illusion. Friel invites us to play with the ideas of fact and fiction too: first, when he makes the distinction between past and present blurred, and, next, when by Sir's and other characters' interruptions to the memory scenes, he breaks the dramatic illusion.

Similar interruptions of the action occur in both Wilder's plays mentioned earlier in this chapter. The Stage Managers in *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth* stop the performances at will, when they disapprove of the actors' way of presentation, when they wish to shorten certain scenes or add some extra information about the characters and the play's contents. For example, the Stage Manager in *Our Town* invites a famous historian and a publisher onto the stage to give the reports about the place's past and social structure. He encourages the audience to questions the experts and, like Sir, introduces the characters. In *The Skin of Our Teeth*, the Stage Manager goes even further when he apologizes to the audience for stopping the play because some actors have been taken ill. The audience witnesses the rehearsals of the understudies who prepare the parts shown later in the play. Sabina, one of the main characters, does not hesitate to break the action any time she thinks it is necessary and she states her opinions about the play turning directly to the spectators.

I hate this play and every word in it. As for me, I don't understand a single word of it. Besides, the author hasn't made up his silly mind as to whether we're all living back in caves or in New Jersey today¹⁹.

Wilder's characters, unlike Friel's, are theatrical parts enacted by actors, who, when breaking the drama, behave like ordinary people, like those gathered in the audience. In fact, what Friel, Pirandello and Wilder focus on when they show characters taking over new roles in front of the audience, is the process of creating the theatre, the methods of establishing and destroying the illusion, which is the essence and purpose of theatre. This analysis of theatre mechanisms held in a theatre can be found in the earlier drama, for example, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In its dealings with the past, *Living Quarters* can be treated as a memory play. This kind of drama is best represented in the Japanese Noh theatre,

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 122–123.

¹⁹ T. Wilder, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

in which the protagonist (shite) enacts a past incident in front of his companion (tsure).

The primary point to be remembered in the analysis of a Noh play is that action is generally recollected and that the plot hinges on an event that has already taken place in the past. This means that the dramatic situation is not necessarily acted realistically before one's eyes. Rather it is poetically recalled and discussed by the characters and chorus, and their movements become dreamlike glosses to the idea carried by the words²⁰.

This means that the Noh play is more illusive in its presentation of the past, but in the same degree as Friel's drama, it concentrates on a character 'isolated by a deed' and 'subsumed into the memorable action by which he is known'²¹.

Living Quarters, one of the formally most challenging plays by Brian Friel, focuses on two main issues. First of all, it deals with the cyclic nature of time; secondly, it analyses the process of making drama. Friel's characters, caught in a trap of time, are unable to dispose of the memories of the past and are forced to relive them over and over again. By assuming the given roles when re-enacting the past event, the Butlers become actors playing parts in their own memories. This 'play-within-the-play' technique is one of numerous examples of breaking the dramatic illusion by Friel in *Living Quarters*. The fact that Friel's experiments with time structure and stage illusion can be compared with the drama of ancient Greece and medieval Japan, with Yeats, Pirandello, Priestley, Wilder and Brecht, proves *Living Quarters* to be in continuity with the world theatre tradition. Furthermore, by its innovative approach to those issues the play becomes a great contribution to the development of modern drama.

Izabela Wojciechowska

LIVING QUARTERS BRIANA FRIELA

Autorka bada dwa zagadnienia obecne w *Living Quarters* Briana Friela. Jednym z nich jest problem cykliczności czasu, którego ujęcie w *Living Quarters* zostaje porównane z dziełami innych dramaturgów współczesnych zajmujących się kwestią wpływu przeszłości na teraźniejsze losy bohaterów. Poza porównaniem Friela z takimi dramatopisarzami jak Yeats, Pirandello, Priestley, Wilder i Brecht, przedstawiono wpływ filozofii Nietzschego i Freuda na twórczość Friela. Drugim zagadnieniem, którym zajmuje się autorka, jest proces tworzenia teatru przedstawiony zarówno w sztuce Friela, jak i w wybranych sztukach teatralnych kilku z wymienionych autorów.

²⁰ F. Bowers, *Japanese Theatre*, London 1954, Peter Owen, p. 17. S. C. Ellis, *The Plays of W. B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer*, New York 1995, St. Martin's Press, p. 115.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 22.