

Brian Friel: Two Recent 'Translations'—
The London Vertigo and *A Month in the Country*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of 'translation' has for long been central to Friel's art. His two latest 'translations' are *The London Vertigo* (1990), a version of Charles Macklin's *The True-born Irishman* (1761) and *A Month in the Country* (1992), a version of Turgenev's play. This essay offers a close analysis of Friel's latest drama, suggesting reasons for his attraction to the earlier plays, discussing the implications of the changes he has made to the original or earlier texts, and indicating ways in which these two latest plays represent a further development of his dramatic concerns.

Where *Dancing at Lughnasa* affirms the possibility of self-transformation through an embracement of bodily experience, and presents the 'lunacy' associated with 'Lughnasa' as a joyous, if momentary, experience of plenitude and freedom from oppressive religion and community, Friel, in his two succeeding plays, *The London Vertigo* (1990) and *A Month in the Country*, after Turgenev (1992), presents alternative views of the unconscious, of the bodily and the material, of desire, of the libidinal impulses. In *The London Vertigo*, the vertigo of the dance becomes 'the London vertigo' — a manic Anglophilia (matching the equally manic Hibernophilia which Friel excoriated in *The Communication Cord*); and in *A Month in the Country* it becomes the vertigo of love, love being an experience which carries people out of themselves and dissolves the boundaries between male and female, rich and poor, high and low, yet is the source of calamity, pain and confusion. Where the dance is irradiating, the 'London vertigo' is a foolish obsession and love a destructive passion. If *The London Vertigo* savagely mocks the very possibility of self-metamorphosis, *A Month in the Country*, allows the possibility but presents it as a release into 'catastrophe.'

After his most ambitious experiment in probing those realms beyond or before words in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel in *The London Vertigo* returns to his old theme of the problematic of language out of which our reality is substantially constituted, to look again

at the relationship between words (particularly the way they are spoken) and social power, and between language and identity. He re-writes the story of Christy Mahon's positive self-metamorphosis through language, exchanging the conventions of romantic comedy which govern Synge's play for the conditions of farce.

More specifically and explicitly, *The London Vertigo* is a 're-writing' of Charles Macklin's play, *The True-born Irishman*, which was first produced in Dublin in 1761 and then in Covent Garden, London, in 1767. Friel tells us that he was attracted to Macklin as a 'neighbour,' in both the geographical and the spiritual sense. Charles Macklin was born Cathal MacLaughlin, probably in 1699, probably in Culdaff in the Inishowen peninsula in Donegal. He was probably of poor peasant stock, though possibly descended from a leading old Irish family of Maclaughlins who lived in Inishowen. The details of his early life are not clear. We do know, however, that, seeking to make his way in the world, Macklin emigrated to England, having first learnt English (his first language was Irish), anglicised his name and converted to Protestantism to escape the rigours of the penal laws. In London he became one of the most notable theatrical figures of his day, second only to Garrick, in an age of great British acting. He was also a playwright of considerable merit, *The True-born Irishman* being his only Irish play. Both the play and the author embodied many of the tensions with which Friel himself clearly felt a special affinity.

Macklin, having accomplished a quite astounding fate of emergence and self-metamorphosis for himself, satirises in his play the attempt of a Mrs O'Doherty to perform a similar transmogrification. Mrs O'Doherty, the wife of a wealthy Irishman, Murrough O'Doherty, during a visit to London for the coronation of George III, is smitten by the 'London vertigo' 'a sudden and dizzy conviction that London is the very heart of style and wit and good fortune and excitement.' On her return to Dublin, Mrs O'Doherty, now suffering from a kind of Pygmalion complex, changes her name to Mrs Diggerty and speaks in a ridiculous posh accent. As far as she is concerned, it is not only clothes which maketh the woman, but also French food, long-tailed horses, a title, and — most fundamental of all — the language which she speaks. Where in *Translations* the pros and cons of adopting a new language are carefully balanced, here Mrs O'Doherty's replacement of her original language with another simply renders her a suitable case for the most savage satirical treatment. Mr O'Doherty, insisting on the importance of being earnest, sets out, with the help of his wife's brother, a Counsellor (i.e. barrister) by the name of Hamilton, to restore the absurd Mrs Diggerty to sanity and decent Dublin domesticity.

The tension at the heart of *The True-born Irishman* is an opposition, recurrent in Anglo-Irish drama, between the provincial and the cosmopolitan, between the natural and the cultured, between the 'Irish' and the 'English' virtues. The play is bitingly anti-English, not only making fun of the pretentious aping of English manners and behaviour by Irish people but also touching on various unfair English practices affecting Irish prosperity. J.O. Bartley, in his introduction to a selection of Macklin's plays, ventures the opinion that 'the implications [of *The True-born Irishman*], though more superficial, are wider than those of Swift's nationalist writings; and though subordinate to the plot, and emerging as part of the presentation of character . . . are real and revealing' (*Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, ed. J. O. Bartley [London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1968],

p. 27). It is generally agreed that O'Doherty, a part Macklin wrote for himself and played to great acclaim, was a mouthpiece for its creator's own views on Ireland, especially on the excesses of English colonialism and the corruption of politics in Ireland. O'Doherty, Bartley conjectures, is probably descended from a leading Donegal family who lived in Inishowen and were the overlords of the Maclaughlins from whom Macklin himself probably sprang. Bartley concludes:

The choice of names is hardly likely to have been accidental when made by a MacLaughlin. There must be some identification here. Macklin, had circumstances been different, might have found himself in a position like O'Doherty's, from where to object to English manners and influences, and taxes, to dislike and distrust politicians, and to praise Irish traditions and the names surrounding them. (28)

All of the attractions of Macklin's play — broad and entertaining characterisation, vigorous dialogue, farcical satire, lively comic invention — are retained in Friel's. The changes that Friel has made — compressing the original three acts to one, reducing the cast from fourteen to five, vigorous pruning to produce 'a lean and less discursive text' — all these changes were made with a view to increasing the play's attractiveness to theatre companies today, and they are yet further demonstration of Friel's own assured theatrical instinct.

Macklin's true-born Irishman, Murrough O'Doherty, represents a departure from the conventional stage Irishman, and an attempt at more realistic portraiture. Following the example of Ben Jonson, Macklin sought to incorporate into a basic humour-type some sense of individual character. The estranged status of the provincial Irishman is used as an image of authenticity, but neither Macklin nor Friel resorts to sentimentalism in the depiction of his 'true-born Irishman.' Indeed, Friel finds Macklin's O'Doherty 'pompous and ponderous,' and it is interesting to note that many of Friel's changes to Macklin's play serve to diffuse further any idealising tendencies in the depiction of the 'true-born Irishman.'

For example, after Friel's O'Doherty echoes Macklin's in protesting to his brother-in-law about Mrs O'Doherty's desire that he should procure a title —

She would have me desert my friends and sell myself, my honour and my country, as several others have done before me, so that she may sink the ancient name of O'Doherty in the upstart title of Lady Ahohill or Lady Culmore or some such ridiculous nonsense.

Hamilton replies in a direct address to the audience: "'Sell my country"! He really means it would cost him money!' (*LV*, p. 20). Hamilton's interjection, disallowing O'Doherty any idealistic, patriotic claims, imputes to him only a base materialistic motive, and, coming at an early point in the play, inevitably colours the attitude we take to O'Doherty.

One of Friel's more notable excisions is a section in Macklin's play where O'Doherty lambasts 'courtiers,' 'patriots' and 'politicians' and affirms the virtue of the unspoiled affections, common sense and the natural life. The passage, Bentley comments, would 'seem to express Macklin's own views' (87):

take this judgment from me then, and remember that an honest quiet country gentleman who out of policy and humanity establishes manufactories, or that contrives employment for the idle and the industrious, or that makes but a blade of corn grow where there was none before, is of more use to this poor country than all the courtiers, and patriots, and politicians, and prodigals that are unhanged. (87)

Friel is ready to suppress this affirmation of sympathetic quality in O'Doherty in the interests of producing a more dramatically piquant text that relies on 'showing' rather than 'telling.'

Also notable is the way Friel makes more use of O'Doherty's confidant, the barrister Hamilton, developing a much stronger dramatic relationship between the two characters, largely through emphasising O'Doherty's barely veiled contempt of his brother-in-law's supposed innocence. Thus, where Macklin introduces the business of renewing the leases in a simple expository way by referring to 'young Lord Oldcastle, who you know has a large estate in this country, and of whose ancestors mine have held long and profitable leases, which are now near expiring' (88-9), Friel is much less bland and seizes his dramatic opportunities. Exploiting Hamilton's role of one who, as befits a lawyer and an Ulster Scots-Irishman (which his name would suggest he was), is a bit of a precisian, he uses him to expose O'Doherty's corrupt middlemanship:

O'DOHERTY: You know those huge estates owned by Lord Oldham?

HAMILTON: On which your family for generations have had long and profitable leases?

O'DOHERTY: The same. (To audience) Is the boob getting saucy?

HAMILTON: And have sublet at enormous profit to much less fortunate Irishmen?

O'DOHERTY: (To audience) Indeed he is! (*LV*, pp. 20-21)

Again, both Macklin and Friel have Hamilton express shock that O'Doherty would consider stooping to blackmail to obtain a good bargain from Count Mushroom in the business of the leases. Here is Macklin:

COUNSELLOR: But, sir, I hope you won't accept of leases upon those terms.

O'DOHERTY: O, I have no time to moralise with you on that point, but depend on it I will convince you before I sleep of the propriety of my taking the leases: Lord, what signifies it; it is only a good bargain got from a foolish lord by the ingenuity of a knavish agent, which is what happens every day in this country, and in every country indeed. (89)

And here is Friel's much more dramatically pointed version:

HAMILTON: But, Murrough, you couldn't accept the leases upon those terms.

O'DOHERTY: Could I not? (To audience) And he's a barrister! Question is: How did the noodle ever qualify? (*LV*, pp. 21-22)

By having O'Doherty mock Hamilton's moral squeamishness Friel strengthens the suggestion of O'Doherty's cynical ruthlessness and unscrupulousness.

Later, Friel's Mrs O'Doherty emphasises her husband's purely mercenary resistance to buying her a set of long-tailed horses and a title: 'You know it [the title] can be had! Just open your tight purse' (*LV*, p. 31). In Macklin's play, she complains to Lady Kinnegad about her husband:

MRS DIGGERTY: Aye, but he is as close-fisted as an old judge — Lord, he has no notion of anything in life, but reading musty books, draining bogs, planting trees, establishing manufactories, setting the common people to work, and saving money.

LADY KINNEGAD: Ha, ha ha! the monster! (103)

In omitting this exchange, Friel again suppresses expression of O'Doherty's positive qualities.

At the end, Friel follows Macklin in allowing O'Doherty both a patriotic and a personal motive for revenging himself on Lord Mushroom, but quickly undermines any moral status O'Doherty might aspire to by having him include amongst his complaints against the English the objection that they are threatening Irishmen's monopoly on cuckoldry!

I'll make him smart. And smarter. Impudent rascal to make a cuckold of an Irishman — take our own trade out of our own hands! And a branch of business we pride ourselves so much in, too. Why, sure that and the manufacture of linen are the only free trades we have. (*LV*, p. 37)

These spiralling ironies work to problematise the concept of 'true-born Irishman,' stripping it of any unifying potential by turning it into an image of amorality and ruthless exploitativeness as well as of patriotic pride and provincial authenticity.

The most radical of the changes Friel has made to Macklin's play is his use of direct address to the audience. This is a Brechtian device, breaking the illusion of reality, reminding the audience of the fictional nature of what it sees, and creating the distance to allow more critical evaluation of the action. Largely through the direct address to the audience, as we have seen, Friel develops the relationship between Hamilton and Mr O'Doherty; the technique also allows him to complicate the characterisation of Mrs O'Doherty, and to develop his analysis of the problematic of language.

Mrs O'Doherty is shocked into a resolve to mend her ways, but even as she assents to the good advice of her brother, she reveals an irrepressibly wayward and defiant side of her nature directly to the audience. When Hamilton, appealing to her mercenary instincts rather than her moral conscience, tells her that her husband is going to throw her out with only £100 a year if she doesn't reform, she is immediately filled with panic and, apparently, with remorse: 'I shall make no defence, brother. The story shocks me. Help me. Advise me.' But the direct address to the audience which follows lets us see behind the Public façade to the Private thought: '(To audience) Well, I'm caught, amn't I?' (*LV*,

p. 34). Hamilton's advice that 'tears of repentance are the brightest ornaments a modern fine lady can be decked in' is met with her distinctly unrepentant aside: '(To audience) Wouldn't he give you an ache in the jerkin?' (*LV*, p. 35). Friel follows Macklin in allowing Mrs O'Doherty to reform, but then retreats from this comfortable resolution. There is the same refusal on Friel's part to indulge an easy sentimentalism in his treatment of Mrs O'Doherty as in his treatment of Mr O'Doherty. Friel keeps Macklin's concluding moralising pronouncement, but quickly dispels any sentimentalism by following the sententious language of the triplet with a further culminating intervention from the irrepressible Mrs O'Doherty:

- O'DOHERT:* Indeed I think it's fairly ended. The coxcomb's punished; the fine Irish lady's mended. (Suddenly Mrs Diggerty's head appears round the door.)
- MRS DIGGERTY:* (Winking broadly at the audience) For the time being! (*LV*, p. 45)

Friel thus incorporates into the play a further exploration of the gap between 'Public' and 'Private' that has always fascinated him. Ultimately, the 'London vertigo' includes a sense of the instability of meaning, of self-division, and the impossibility of closure. Friel complicates the traditionalist's warning against the excesses and absurdities of the modern 'English' world by adding his postmodernist recognition of the primacy of the unconscious, of the bodily and the material, of desire, of libidinal impulses. This results in a break with the signifier, with representation, and the foregrounding of a set of formalisms, in this case the conventions of farce, most notably the use of direct address to the audience. Thus, Friel resists totality and closure. Against Mrs O'Doherty's unselfconscious decadence Friel asserts a positive decadence, a self-conscious awareness of our fictionalising powers and the provisionality of all meaning. Mrs O'Doherty's closing line opens the possibility of further transgression of the play's dominant discourse and ideology.

Macklin's Mrs O'Doherty is of course a patriarchal construction of the feminine. She is in fact a particularly misogynistic version of patriarchal ordering, based on masculine fantasies of the female body — the myth of an unrestrained feminine libido that operates independently of cultural codes, but which is ultimately subject to the 'phallic' power to control or 'master' women and regulate female sexuality within national, moral and economic structures. Friel, however, offers a kind of 'feminist' rewriting of Macklin's play, turning Mrs O'Doherty into an 'other' feminine that cannot be fully controlled within the terms of the phallic law. Refusing to expose itself openly to public view, this 'other' femininity mouths the words it has been culturally assigned, but also unsettles orders of patriarchal logic, unravelling the stories by which culture explains itself to itself. The feminine confounds the structures of received narratives (Mr O'Doherty's, Macklin's). Through the figure of Mrs O'Doherty Friel asserts the presence of unruly feminine energies that refuse to be repressed, a troublesome fluidity, a resistance to fixity and simple categorisation. Through Mrs O'Doherty he mocks the whole metaphysical enterprise and insists on the priority of the body and the concrete relationships of the

historical process. Traditional essentialist ideas — including the concept of a racial essence, of 'the true-born Irishman,' or even of a coherent self — are thrown into question.

In his introduction to his version of *A Month in the Country*, Friel indicates his reasons for returning a second time to Turgenev. He sees Turgenev as the kind of writer who managed magnificently to turn to artistic account the difficult conflicts that threatened to overwhelm him in everyday life. 'For all his vacillations,' Friel writes, 'the inner man, the assured artist, was organised and practical . . . he marshalled all these irreconcilables and put them to use in his work. Vacillation, the inability to act decisively, the longing to be other, to be elsewhere, became the very core of his dramatic action' (*MC*, p. 10). Friel could be describing his own dramatic interests, for self-division, the 'enemy within,' the longing for 'otherness' and the challenge of multiple possibility, are themes which he has placed at the centre of his dramatic action, from earliest plays such as *Philadelphia* and *The Enemy Within* through *Faith Healer* and *Translations* to *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *The London Vertigo*. Turgenev, Friel believes, 'fashioned a new kind of dramatic situation and a new kind of dramatic character where for the first time psychological and poetic elements create a theatre of moods and where the action resides in internal emotion and secret turmoil and not in external events. We now have a name for that kind of drama: we call it Chekhovian' (*MC*, p. 10). 'Metabiotic' ('a mode of living in which an organism is dependent on another for the preparation of an environment in which it can live' [10]), the term Friel uses to describe the relationship between Turgenev and Chekhov, could apply just as well to the relationship between Friel himself and these two great Russian writers. From them he learnt the potential of psychological and poetic drama which probed the fine, ever-changing nuances and scarcely perceptible vicissitudes of passionate feeling, reflected in dialogue of exquisite sensibility and the complex interplay of emotions. For *A Month in the Country* is a web of delicate patterns, like the lace-making Natalya refers to. It is a play of lyrical feeling, touched by nostalgia, set amongst the declining Russian aristocracy in a distant province. Like Chekhov and Turgenev, Friel is attracted to the country house setting, the atmosphere of delicate inertia and boredom, the longing for escape, as earlier plays such as *Living Quarters* and *Aristocrats* would also illustrate. *A Month in the Country* gives him another image of family, of a traditional order disrupted from within and on the brink of collapse, doomed to destruction by the forces of history.

The play presents a dark vision of love as 'madness' (*MC*, p. 81) and 'catastrophe' (*MC*, p. 94), an irruption of dangerous, irrational bodily energies. It is about the destruction of a quiet, rural idyll caused by the arrival of a young tutor, Aleksey. Aleksey acts as a catalyst, giving rise to the giddy 'madness' of love. Natalya, the twenty-nine-year-old wife of Arkady and mother of nine-year-old Kolya is, like Chekhov's three sisters, filled with a vast discontent and longing and, seeking escape from her pointless life and boring marriage, falls in love with fresh young Aleksey. Vera, Natalya's seventeen-year-old ward also falls in love with him. Aleksey, the simple, natural, vigorous, somewhat naive university student is, in turn, overwhelmed by the strong, elegant, infatuated Natalya. The 'month' in the country is no lyrical escape but a deadly period of incubation in which the characters become the helpless, anguished victims of love's destructive contagion. Natalya jealously pursues Aleksey, destroying the happiness of her innocent ward whom she is willing to see married off to the pathetic fifty-seven-year-old landowner Bolshintsov just

so she will no longer be a rival. ‘Unhinged’ by both love and jealousy, Natalya bullies Vera, terrifies Aleksey, snaps at Lisaveta, deals with Schaaf, the German tutor, in a most capriciously high-handed manner and treats her besotted but platonic lover Michel with exaggerated suspicion and outrageous rudeness. She is unfair, unreasonable, unpredictable and unstable, veering wildly from one mood to another, abusing her power and position, and revealing a quite shocking capacity for ruthless cruelty. Michel refers to her ‘terrible disquiet’ (MC, p. 59), and tells her that she acts as if ‘possessed’ (MC, p. 59), that she is ‘pitiful’ (MC, p. 59) in her infatuation. Vera calls her ‘demented’ (MC, p. 79): ‘That’s what love does: makes the unreasonable perfectly reasonable’ (MC, p. 80). Natalya herself recognises that her life has ‘lost all sense of balance’ (MC, p. 67). The vertigo of love makes her behave in a way that appalls even her, but she cannot help herself. She speaks of suffering ‘a kind of temporary . . . derangement’ (MC, p. 58) and confesses that she is ‘just slightly demented . . . unhinged . . . And dangerously irresponsible — giddy, heady, almost hysterical with irresponsibility’ (MC, p. 58).

Aleksey also describes his feelings for Natalya as ‘hysteria’ and ‘madness’: ‘A Chinese squib — a quick, blinding flash — then nothing’ (MC, p. 100). Not long before he was speaking of her as the stable centre of a way of life which he found overwhelmingly impressive: ‘At the centre of all this elegance and grace, there you were — the core, the essence, the very epicentre of it, holding it all in place’ (MC, p. 82) lines which echo Natalya’s to Michel: ‘When I’m with you I feel so centred’ (MC, p. 29). But centres cannot hold in this play: Michel is as abruptly cast aside by Natalya in her singleminded pursuit of Aleksey as she is by Aleksey. Aleksey is gentle, friendly, easily upset, gauche, cocky. Like the boy narrator in *Dancing at Lughnasa* he is a kite-flyer. His innocent vitality, natural vigour and active personality contrast markedly with Michel’s introspective brooding. As the catalyst who opens or frees the submerged, unruly forces of personality he is also opposite to the engineer, Arkady, who is symbolically constructing a weir, as if to stem the tide of human feelings and regulate the natural forces welling up within people. Friel cuts the references in Turgenev’s play to such boyish activities as Aleksey’s chasing squirrels, climbing trees, hunting wild birds and riding cows, but the young tutor in Friel’s version is still a curious object of Natalya’s amorous attentions. He is something of an ironic ‘opener’ or ‘freer’ or catalyst, for the freedoms he stands for have a distinctly childish quality, and he himself is much more at ease with Kolya and Vera than in the company of adults. The disruptive intruder, Aleksey, is a comic version of the rude and formidable Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons*. Both spring from the same social milieu, both are members of the new intelligentsia; both are self-made, socially sensitive, with a positive outlook, though Bazarov is more explicitly political in his orientations; both lack awareness of the irrational and betraying power of love. And our attitude to Aleksey is as ambivalent as it is to Bazarov, for Aleksey combines the limitations of the naïf with the positive force of his status as the romantic embodiment of natural vitality.

In stark contrast, Michel’s outward elegance masks a tired and cynical intellectualism which loses sight of the body and of nature — all that Natalya is desperately seeking to recover. She dreams of meadows and woods, the simple natural life, and welcomes Doctor Shpigelsky with these words: ‘You have the news of the countryside; bring some fresh air in here; cure us all; give us a good laugh’ (MC, p. 24). Having led a life of privileged

indolence she craves for direct sensuous experience, while all that Michel can offer her are symbols and allegories, an aestheticised 'Nature': 'You are so eloquent about "nature",' she says to him, 'But of course you're wrong . . . Nature is blunt and crude and relentless. Nature cares about nothing except itself — surviving and perpetuating itself. Your exquisite nature is a savage' (*MC*, p. 43). Michel is a courtly figure out of the artificial world of *amour courtois*, the faithful devotee who suffers the pains of unrequited love, suddenly exacerbated by the thought that he is losing Natalya, not to her husband, but to 'that calf' (*MC*, p. 46) Aleksey. Anna suggests that it may be Michel's spirit of knightly nobility and romance which constitutes a moral centre: 'The people who offer their love without reservation, even though that love is never fully appreciated nor fully reciprocated, they are the fortunate ones' (*MC*, p. 107). However, our attitude to him is as ambivalent as it is to Aleksey. There is nothing attractive about Michel's permanent joylessness. When all the others move off to launch Kolya's new kite he is left alone, 'isolated, wretched' (*MC*, p. 49), unable to 'fly.' Failure in love leads inexorably to his bitterly demoralised conclusion that 'All love is a catastrophe . . . An endless process of shame and desolation and despair when you are stripped — you strip yourself! — of every semblance of dignity and self-respect' (*MC*, p. 94). In Turgenev's original version, Michel's cynicism is also dangerously subversive, for he tells Aleksey not only that all love is calamity but that independence is all that matters, that he must seize whatever pleasures life offers, and that freedom is the highest value — sentiments which amount to a passionate denunciation of conventional social ethics, particularly of family morality, and which, not surprisingly, were cut by the Russian censors. If there was something of Turgenev in Aleksey as a member of the new classless intelligentsia and epitome of natural vigour, there was also no doubt something of himself in the figure of the pained and unsuccessful lover too. Isaiah Berlin, for example, suggests that Michel's situation was perhaps 'inspired by Turgenev's own ambivalent position in the household of the singer Pauline Viardot, whom he loved until the end of his life (his relationship with her husband was in some respects not unlike that of Rakitin and Islayev)' (p. 14).

The upshot of the month in the country is that Michel has to leave with Aleksey. Natalya's desperation recalls Pegeen's after the departure of her 'only Playboy' whom she did not have the courage to follow: 'And who is he to decide I haven't the courage to throw all this up and go with him!' (*MC*, p. 102), she cries in a fit of angry self-recognition. She hasn't the courage, and remains with her husband for whom she has respect but not love, facing total breakdown: 'Everything's in such a mess . . . I'm afraid I can't hold on much longer' (*MC*, p. 103). Vera's attempt at reassurance — 'everything'll soon be back to normal' (*MC*, p. 103) — only provokes the outburst that 'it's the normal that's deranging me, child.' Arkady, kindly as always, 'puts his arm around her' (*MC*, p. 103) and says soothing words, but she 'removes his supporting hand' (*MC*, p. 103) and the last we see of her is withdrawing to her room to lie down. There is an uneasy return to the status quo.

But what of the others? Vera's future lies with the moribund Bolshintsov. Arkady's jubilation at the end is treated with special irony, for he never knows the real reason for his wife's strange behaviour nor for Michel's and Aleksey's sudden departure. The only winners would seem to be the vigorous, positive, capable people — the servants, Matvey

and Katya, (their relationship duplicating the age gap between Natalya and Aleksey; the ghostly influence of Katya's mother paralleling Anna's influence in Arkady's marriage); and the plain-speaking realists — Dr Sphilgesky and Lisaveta (whose prosaic, contractual relationship contrasts with the vertiginous swings in the central relationship between Natalya and Aleksey). The Doctor in the end gets his team of horses as reward for engineering the sickening match between virginal Vera and the doltish Bolshintsov. The Doctor survives and prospers because he doesn't believe in love — and that is the basis of his self-justification to Vera: 'If I thought for a moment that love was a necessary — even a desirable — ingredient in these matters, then I'd say: pass this up. But since I don't . . . (He shrugs)' (*MC*, p. 99). Whatever success he enjoys is bought at the cost of the death of the heart. The play as a whole dramatises the pathetic, ghastly consequences of the failure of these people to reconcile heart and head, personal feeling with social and family responsibility, traditional value with the experience of the body.

The vertigo of love, we come to see, is but a condensed form of a more general disruption signalled by the pervasive instability of the relationship between words and the world to which they putatively refer. Thus, Friel develops a familiar theme of his own within the framework of Turgenev's drama. A gap opens up, in Beckettian or Pinteresque fashion, between speech and action. Natalya vacillates wildly between wanting Aleksey to stay and knowing he should leave:

And he's staying?

Of course he's staying.

But he really should go.

Should he?

Oh yes — he really must go.

Why must he?

Because if he stays, Natalya . . . (She hugs herself. Her face is alight . . . if he stays . . . you are lost). (*MC*, p. 72)

Even as Aleksey promises to leave 'Tomorrow,' he 'kisses her and swings her round' (*MC*, p. 83) in a wild, ecstatic dance of freedom. Love unloosens the connection between speech and action, producing an ironic disjunction between them, pulling apart speech itself into violent self-contradiction. Natalya's insistence that Aleksey must leave 'Tomorrow' is immediately followed by 'And don't go, Aleksey — don't go — don't ever go' (*MC*, p. 83). At the end, perversely, her love can find expression only in words of hate: Aleksey's brief note saying 'Goodbye' provokes an unexpected vehemence — 'How dare he, the pup! The jumped-up, baby-faced pup! Who the hell does he think he is! . . . The bastard! (About to break down) Oh my God . . .' (*MC*, p. 102).

Friel exploits the character of Schaaf to make comic capital out of the inadequacies of language ('Hartz are trumpery' [*MC*, p. 17]; 'With Lizaveta Bogdanovna ever again I refuse to couple' [*MC*, p. 22]; 'The cat's gone! Who stole the cat?' [*MC*, p. 24]). Bolshintsov's attempts to learn a new language, the language of love, are equally comical in the scene where the Doctor rehearses him in lover's speech before he confronts Vera. Bolshintsov's final appearance, when he comes on and stands, face raised, smiling,

listening to Vera's piano-playing, confirms our sense which the play gives us of the woeful inadequacy of words. To describe the beauty of the music, the spirit of Vera, Bolshintsov has but a single word, a pathetic cliché, to close the play: 'Nice . . . nice . . .' (*MC*, p. 109).

Arkady, too, is without words for either love or for his suffering when he thinks his wife is being unfaithful to him with Michel. It is left to Arkady's mother to speak for him and express his pain: 'I would like to know what passion is so magnificent it can justify this' (*MC*, p. 69). A little later he declares his own exasperation with the inadequacy of other people's naming when he shouts at Matvey for calling his weir a dam: 'Weir — weir — weir! Why is everyone so stupid. It's a weir — not a dam' (*MC*, p. 87); yet Arkady himself keeps mis-naming Aleksey, calling him Ivan by mistake. At another point, we find Vera pondering the adequacy of certain words: 'Esteem affection — love . . . maybe they are synonymous; maybe they should be' (*MC*, p. 79). To Michel love is a 'game' (*MC*, p. 84), the language of love merely a means 'to dissemble' (*MC*, p. 84). He has learnt to distrust language ('All that inflated language, the emotional palpitations, the heaving passions'), yet cannot be content without it: 'We regret most of the things we say and we regret even more all the things we don't say; so that our lives just dribble away in remorse' (*MC*, p. 84). The Doctor makes a pretence of a vigorous, healthy language through the forced *jouissance* of his terrible punning and his insistence on constructing an elaborate fiction of himself in his absurd 'love-talk' to Lizaveta. The latest in a long line of Friel's masquers, role-players, jokers and playboys going back to Gar O'Donnell in *Philadelphia*, he tells her he is giving her 'Shpigelsky without the mask' (*MC*, p. 76), that she won't be marrying 'the laughing, fawning, ingratiating Shpigelsky. You're teaming up with the bitter, angry, cunning peasant' (*MC*, p. 76). But as Lizaveta recognises, the fiction of himself currently on offer cannot be the whole truth either. Identity will not be reduced simply to a 'Public' and a 'Private' persona.

Friel constantly reminds us of how words create worlds. In the first major interview between Natalya and Vera in Act 1 Scene 3 we see that Vera's ultimate statement of love for Aleksey is the result of a collaborative process in which, under pressure from Natalya's jealous prodding and probing, Vera actually talks herself into the admission of love, gradually creates the fact of love, brings to consciousness and formulates what before had existed only as a vague and fleeting feeling. Vera's innocence of Natalya's ruthless jealousy at this point, like Arkady's innocence of the true situation at the end of the play, illustrates Friel's delicately ironic method, which indicates a profound disturbance between depth and surface. The controlled and elegant surfaces of these characters' aristocratic lives are constantly being disturbed by irruptions of nervous outbreaks, quarrels, hysteria. But, as always in Friel, lying behind the disruptions and divisions, behind words, behind the mind/body split, is the ghostly presence of an aesthetic order and harmony symbolised by the music of the Irishman John Field which is threaded through the action.

The play is a curious, superbly satisfying mixture of opposites, a sophisticated recognition of the paradoxes of life. It is both funny and sad, romantic and realistic, and it is this comprehensiveness of vision that no doubt was one of Turgenev's major attractions to Friel.