

Philadelphia, Here I Come!

- Philadelphia, Here I Come! is a play written by Brian Friel.
- Gar O'Donnell lives with his father in 1960s Donegal.
- Gar is preparing to emigrate to Philadelphia.



Gar seems delighted to be emigrating

Gar's alter ego, Gar Private appears

Gar remembers his lost love, Katie Doogan

Gar recalls his aunt Lizzy begging him to emigrate

Gar's rowdy friends come to say goodbye

The Canon and S.B. play draughts, mocked by Private

S.B. and Gar cannot agree on a childhood memory

Gar Public asks Private why he has to go

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXXKIL0suCg>

- Link to film adaptation




Key plot details

Gar O'Donnell - who lives with his father **S.B.** in 1960s Donegal - is preparing to emigrate to Philadelphia to live with his aunt, **Lizzy Sweeney**. The play takes place over the evening before his departure.

There are two actors playing two Gars - **Gar Public** and his alter ego **Gar Private**, who is only seen by the audience. Gar Private speaks the internal thoughts of Gar Public. Together they present “two views of the one man”.

At the beginning of the play Gar seems delighted to be leaving for Philadelphia. He cheerfully discusses it with the housekeeper **Madge**, who has been Gar's mother figure since his mother died soon after his birth.


Through conversations with Madge, Gar Private and S.B. himself it becomes clear that Gar and his father have a strained relationship and neither has broached the topic of his departure.



A flashback lets us know that Gar has recently lost his love, **Kate Doogan**, to another man. This seems to have prompted his decision to go to Philadelphia.

Visitors call by throughout the evening - Gar's friends ("**the boys**"), Kate Doogan, the **Canon** of the parish and **Master Boyle**, a local teacher. Through these visits we build up a picture of Ballybeg as lacking opportunity and spontaneity for the residents.

In Episode II the action flashes back to a visit from Gar's aunt Lizzy and her husband **Con**. They are visiting the O'Donnell residence on a return trip from Philadelphia. We see Gar agreeing to go to live there.



It becomes clear as the play progresses that Gar is not entirely sure about leaving, also that S.B. is more worried than he lets on to those around him, including Gar.

The play closes with Private asking Public, “God, Boy, why do you have to leave? Why? Why?” and Gar replying, “I don’t know. I - I - I don’t know.” The ending is **ambiguous** and we are left unsure whether Gar goes or not.

Episode I

The opening stage directions inform us there are two Gars who present “two views of the one man”.

Gar Private is the alter ego who speaks the thoughts, opinions and dreams of **Gar Public**.

Gar Private is invisible to the other characters and only heard by Gar Public and the audience.

Gar Public, however, never sees or looks at Gar Private. As Friel writes in the stage directions, “One cannot look at one’s alter ego.”

Cheerful optimism

The cheerful banter between Gar and the housekeeper **Madge** - the first two characters on stage - show that Gar is very close to Madge. But there are hints right from the beginning that he does not enjoy such a close relationship with his father, who is also his boss in the family-run dry goods store.

At the beginning of the play Gar seems delighted to be leaving for Philadelphia.

Flashback to Katie

- In this episode we see the first flashback scene. Gar thinks back to an encounter with his now lost love “darling **Katie Doogan**” and her father, **Senator Doogan**.
- Kate and Gar discuss how they will get married, but the scene ends with Gar losing his nerve and leaving before asking the Senator’s permission for Kate’s hand in marriage.
- It was clear to Gar that Senator Doogan did not think he was good enough for Kate
- Key Scene
- <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=philadelphia+here+ic+ome+katie&&view=detail&mid=32C8C968467802BD952632C8C968467802BD9526&&FORM=VRDGAR&ru=%2Fvideos%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dphiladelphia%2Bhere%2Bic%2Bome%2Bkatie%26FORM%3DHDRSC4>

Master Boyle visits

Master Boyle - a teacher from the local school - visits to say goodbye.

Boyle is portrayed as a self-involved alcoholic, but he comes across as a sympathetic man. Like Gar, he has had only failure and disappointment in his life and in Ballybeg.

Episode I concludes with Gar experiencing a rush of **sentimentality** as Boyle leaves and Madge re-enters the room.

Like many of the characters we have met so far, Gar tries to repress his real feelings and finds truthful communication difficult.

Episode II

Episode II opens a short time afterwards, with Gar still in his bedroom. He checks the documents he needs for his journey.

Flashback to Aunt Lizzy

The action flashes back again to a visit from Gar's aunt **Lizzy** and her husband **Con**.

Overwhelmed by a variety of emotional forces, Gar agrees to go to live with them in Philadelphia.

However, when we are brought back to the present Private admits that he doesn't really want to go.

Gar leaves the house and S.B. enters from the shop to read his newspaper.

Madge is frustrated at S.B.

- Madge loses patience with S.B. about his inflexible nightly routine and how busy she is. But we can see that her frustration really stems from S.B.'s inability or unwillingness to acknowledge that his son is emigrating.
- When Madge finishes her rant and leaves the room we notice that S.B. has been reading his newspaper upside down - a sign he may be thinking more about Gar leaving than he is letting on.

The boys visit

Gar returns with his friends - "**the boys**" - whom he has met coming to say goodbye to him. There is much loud talk about the number of girls they attract, but it is obvious from Private's commentary that the boys lie and exaggerate.

Although the only show of real friendship is when **Ned** presents his belt to Gar as a leaving present, the scene does close on a **nostalgic** note.

When the boys leave Private begins a frustrated tirade about his friends. But his monologue ends poignantly, reflecting that the memories he is left with will be "precious, precious gold".

Kate visits

This scene is followed by a visit from Kate. She too has come to say goodbye.

Gar's resentful attitude causes her to leave awkwardly and Gar "buries his face in his hands".

Private's disjointed monologue builds up to Public's final words in this episode. In a "whispered shout" he cries, "Screwballs, say something! Say something, father!"

This outburst suggests that Gar is desperate for his father to acknowledge his departure.

Episode III

Episode III opens a short time later with Gar, S.B. and Madge saying the rosary.

When they have finished praying, Gar Public asks S.B. if he still has a memory from Gar's childhood.

But the Canon, Ballybeg's parish priest, turns up before S.B. can be questioned any further.

The **Canon** and S.B. play draughts, in exactly the same way they do every night, with few new topics of conversation.

Gar takes this opportunity to quiz Madge about his mother. Madge reveals little and suggests Gar ask his father.

Part One of Episode III ends with S.B. and the Canon playing their uneventful draughts game.

The final scene

- The final scene begins in the middle of the night. Gar's belongings are sitting packed outside his bedroom. S.B. is awake and making a cup of tea when he sees them.
- As he "touches the coat" and stares at Gar's bedroom door, we suspect that he is more concerned about Gar's departure than he shows.
- When Gar can't sleep and finds S.B. awake too, Private urges Public to communicate with his father.
- Gar asks again about the memory he has of a childhood boating trip they shared, but S.B. doesn't remember it the same way.
- Overcome with frustration and emotion Gar "rushes quickly into the shop".
- When Madge returns from a family visit we get a rare insight into S.B.'s mind as he wonders whether he'll manage without Gar. One of his final lines before he leaves the stage is, "I was too old for her, Madge, eh?"

An ambiguous ending

The play closes with Private asking Public, “God, Boy, why do you have to leave? Why? Why?” Gar replies, “I don’t know. I - I - I don’t know.”

The ending is **ambiguous** and we are left unsure whether Gar goes or not.