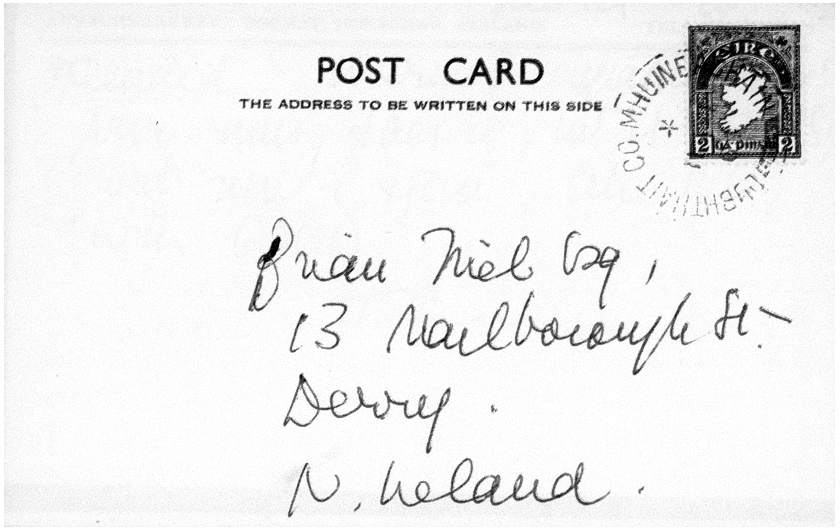
Tyrone Guthrie

DEAR MR FRIEL

Letters of a Celebrated
English Theatre Director
to a Young Irish Writer
with an introductory essay
by Brian Friel

The Gallery Press
in partnership with
The Tyrone Guthrie Centre


POST CARD

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE

CO. MHUINEACHÁIN

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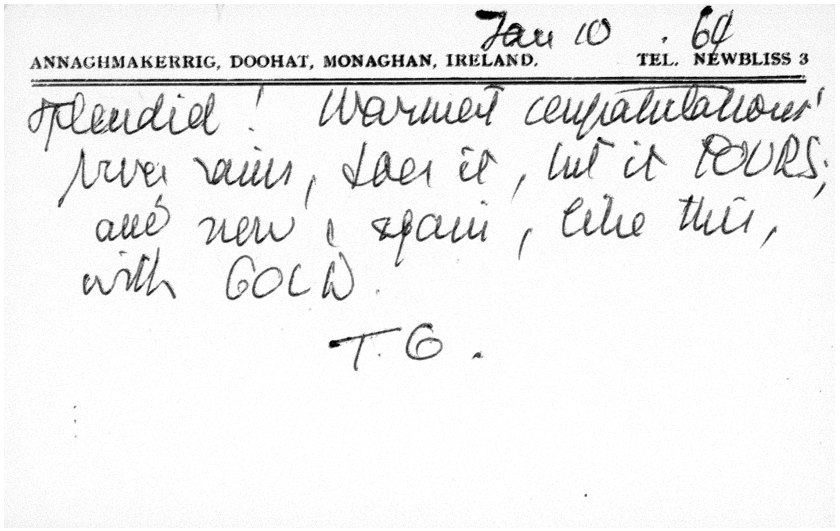
Brian Friel Esq,
13 Marlborough St.
Derry.
N. Ireland.


Jan 10. 62

ANNAGHMAKERRIG, DOOHAT, MONAGHAN, IRELAND. TEL. NEWBLISS 3

Splendid! Warmest congratulations! Never rains, but it POURS, and now I spain, like this, with GOLD.

T.G.

30 January 1962 From Brighton

but home address
Doohat PO,
Monaghan,
Ireland

Dear Mr Friel,

I have read your wonderful story 'Foundry House' in the *New Yorker* of a month or two ago. We have been lent a friend's flat for the two weeks that we are here with a play; and the *New Yorker* was lying around.

I had heard of you and had read odd pieces by you in Irish newspapers. But this was the first play [*sic*] by you which I encountered. It is most haunting, powerful, poetic and TRUE, not just 'realistic' (who wants realism!) but true.

Believe me, I've more to do than just write fan letters; but I could not forbear to thank you for the thrill I got from 'Foundry Ho.' & for the sympathy and humour which inform it.

Ever, Tyrone Guthrie

I know you live in Derry but that seems a wee thing vague all alone on an envelope!

27 Oct 1966 Annaghmakerrig

Much enjoyed our lunch, many thanks to both. Scripts enclosed need not be returned. The Barry Stavis one is not the final version — he has, I think, considerably improved the end — less sentimental and briefer.

I hope you think well of *House of Atreus*.

Ever, T.G.

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27 May 1967 Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, USA

Dear Brian,

Rumour (from the lips of a very nice Irish Professor at St Thomas' here) — name: McCernaghan or McClenaghan or some such, 45-ish and very handsome — hath it that you are coming to Chicago sometime this summer.

If so, and if you can spare the time, it's only a wee stop on to Minn . . . one hour by plane; or — a more agreeable and cheaper, tho' slower alternative — 7 hours by TRAIN.

There are still 3 trains daily on each of 2 routes — the Milwaukee or the Burlington Lines. We could put you up here and many old friends and wellwishers (incl. P Ballantyne) would be happy to see you with which BROAD hint I will draw to a close; hoping you are all in fine form and that the new house is giving satisfaction.

T.G.

24 June 1967 Minnesota Theatre Company

My Dear Brian,

The 2 plays arrived the day you left! The first one — the young people — is absolutely excellent. Charming, funny, poignant and technically *most* skilful. I admire especially the shadow that falls, entirely naturally, over the youngsters' dialogue, when one knows from the narrator that their destiny is settled.

About the second I am much less happy. It has marvellous dialogue — the man's part especially — but I don't find it written with much sympathy or attempts to get 'into' the characters. The two middle-aged lovers are treated with something near ridicule, which isn't nice. A more interesting theme than the holy tyrant provoking them beyond endurance would, in my opinion, be to explore why these two people were having their love affair so late in life: The woman, I presume, because her mother has so entirely dominated her, but why the man? Shyness? *His* mother? They are *sad* characters, and to treat them (as you have, unless I have *quite* misunderstood) as Comics is unfeeling and unlike you and unworthy of you. And, since it *is* you, the Author keeps intervening to spoil the sport. If I were you, and if there's still time, I would re-write it as a sad play. The anecdote (sorry, PLOT) doesn't need to be changed at all. The desanctification of poor dear St Philomena can still be the occasion for a tiny, impotent gesture of rebellion; but the turning of worms whose predicament we more fully understand and who are presented for our sympathetic affections, not our ridicule.

The man, I would suspect, has an overwhelming mother-complex, which has kept him from all other female contacts till after his mum's death. This would make the defiance of the other, the substitute, matriarch more truly amusing, I suggest, because more, poignant.

I do hope I'm not being impertinent. But advice and suggestions can always be IGNORED and in this case without giving the very least offence.