

MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY

— EDUCATION PACK PART B —



FAITH HEALER

by Brian Friel

4 MAR — 8 APR

SOUTHBANK THEATRE
THE SUMNER

A Belvoir production



MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

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Throughout these notes, look out for these icons for opportunities to learn more:



Activity



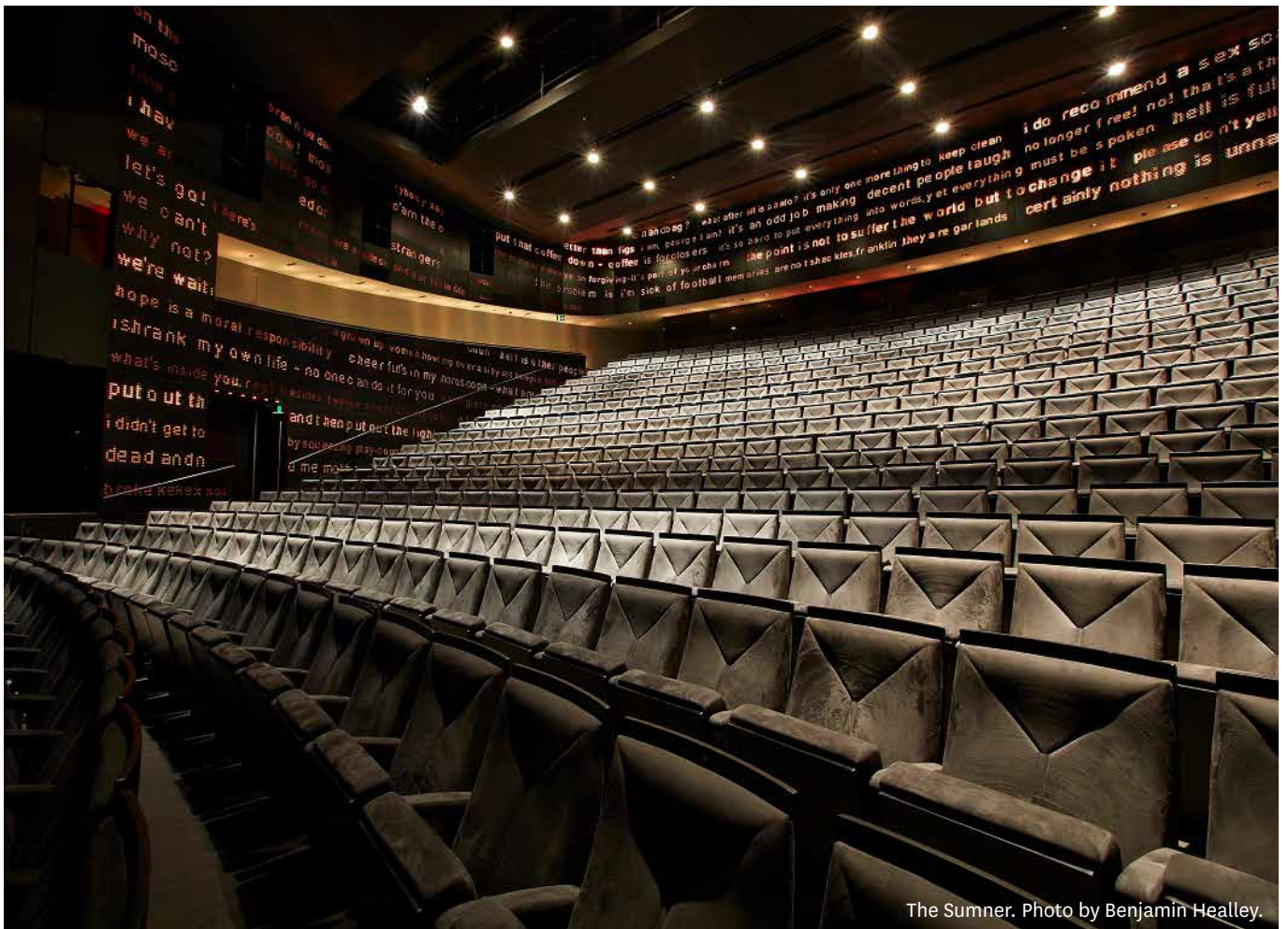
Discuss



Interview



Connect



The Sumner. Photo by Benjamin Healley.

Welcome



MTC is delighted to present Melbourne audiences with this exceptional production, which arrives in the Summer after an award-winning season at Belvoir in Sydney.

Faith Healer is considered by many to be Irish playwright Brian Friel's masterpiece. With a mythic resonance and the drama of Gaelic folklore woven through four captivating monologues, it is a story of great power that I'm sure will stay with you long after the curtain call, as it did with me.

Faith Healer is the first of three collaborations with interstate theatre companies in this year's season. Such collaborations are at the heart of the modern theatre industry, opening doors to new artists, ideas, resources and audiences. Combining forces with our interstate colleagues makes for a richer cultural landscape across the country and, ultimately, the chance for more people to see extraordinary theatre, such as this very special production of *Faith Healer*. Enjoy!

Brett Sheehy AO
Artistic Director

MTC acknowledges the Yalukit Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand, and we pay our respects to Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors past and present, and to our shared future.

Introduction

Because theatre is an ephemeral art form – here in one moment, gone in the next – and contemporary theatre making has become more complex, Part A of the *Faith Healer* Education Pack offered teachers and students a rich and detailed introduction to the play in order to prepare for seeing the MTC production – possibly only *once*.

In this second part of the resource we offer you ways to analyse, evaluate, describe and discuss the play in detail for the purposes of writing the performance analysis task. Part B includes additional contextual information, production images and a series of detailed prompts and questions for analysis. Importantly, return to Part A of the resource and read it in conjunction with Part B. They are companion parts that make up the whole study of this production.

“I think, when the possibility of being able to control, or determine what you should do, or what you must do, is no longer in your hands and can no longer be summoned, I think in that case death occurs. Maybe not necessarily a physical death but a spiritual death occurs” – Brian Friel on *Faith Healer*.

Theatre Studies Unit 3 – Area of Study 3 – Outcome 3

The extract below from the VCAA VCE Theatre Studies Study Design is a reminder of the Key Knowledge required and the Key Skills you need to demonstrate in your analysis of the play.

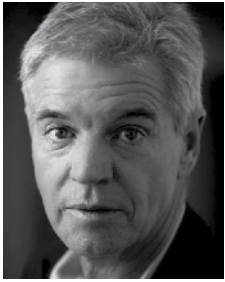
Key knowledge

- The contexts of the interpretation of a written playscript
- Decisions taken that were evident in the production to interpret the written playscript for performance
- The application of acting and other stagecraft to develop the written playscript for performance
- Theatrical styles in the written playscript and in the play in performance
- Terminology and expressions used to describe, analyse and evaluate a theatrical production

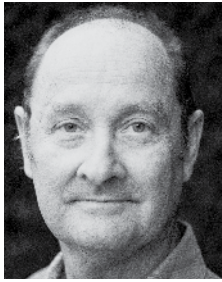
Key skills

- Analyse ways in which the contexts of a written playscript were interpreted through performance to an audience
- Evaluate the interpretation of the written playscript for performance
- Analyse and evaluate the application of acting and other stagecraft to develop the written playscript for performance
- Discuss similarities and differences of theatrical styles between the playscript and the play in performance
- Use appropriate theatrical terminology and expressions

Cast and Creatives



Colin Friels
Francis Hardy



Paul Blackwell
Teddy



Alison Whyte
Grace



Judy Davis
Director



Brian Thomson
Set Designer



Tess Schofield
Costume Designer



Verity Hampson
Lighting Designer



Paul Charlier
Composer & Sound
Designer

After Seeing *Faith Healer*

Now that you've seen the production it's time to start remembering, discussing, analysing and evaluating. On the next page is a table to help you do this.



Remembering the play

- Working individually, use the table on the next page to prompt and record as many aspects of the production as you can.
- What did you see, hear, feel, and what meaning or understanding did you make with regard to each stagecraft area?
- Pair and share, and then collate with the whole class.

Some ways to think about stagecraft areas:

- Set and Costume: place, time, aesthetic, palette, texture, tone, shape, mood, function
- Acting: focus, timing, facial expression, gesture, voice (including accent, tone, rhythm), movement, stillness, silence, pause, meaning, interaction, reaction
- Direction: use of space, actor/audience relationship, delivery, timing, sight lines
- Sound: diegetic, recorded, composed, scored, dramaturgy, mood, timing
- Lighting: mood, tone, texture, time, purpose, dramaturgy

Stagecraft area	See	Hear	Feel	Meaning
Set design				
Properties				
Costumes				
Hair and make-up				
Properties				
Sound/Composition				
Lighting states/design				
Acting techniques				
Use of space				
Directorial choices				
Actor/audience relationship				

Context and the world of the play

The world of a play could be considered as being the world we witness on stage through the dialogue, action, subtext, direction, and stagecraft/design elements. As an audience, we enter the world of a play at a particular point in characters' lives and exit at a particular point. The world may be a realistic world, a fantastical world, an absurd world, or any number of combinations and permutations of these and others. The setting for this production, *Faith Healer*, is a series of interiors sometime in the 1960s but the stories the three tell range across the landscapes of Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England across a number of years before this.



Playscript analysis

From your reading and analysis of the **playscript**, what contexts were evident – culturally, historically, socially, and politically?

- Select 3–6 quotations from the script that provide evidence of contexts.
- What is the immediate context for the characters suggested in the playscript?
- Where and in what period are the characters when we meet each of them?

Colin Friels in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.



Performance analysis

Write short responses to the following questions about the contexts of the **performance** world:

- When you first saw the onstage world, what were your thoughts? Was it what you expected?
- Did the performance world echo or capture the contexts you identified in the playscript?
- Discuss the differences and similarities between the contexts suggested in the playscript and those in the performed work.
- Compare and contrast using the 3–6 quotes you selected from the playscript.

Time

The concept of **time** in *Faith Healer* is fluid. The four monologues suggest that each character remembers time differently. Further, we only know each character within the interior world they now inhabit.



Alison Whyte (Grace)

“From Grace’s perspective what has happened to Frank has happened a year before. Teddy’s is a few days before Grace’s monologue because at the end he goes and visits Grace in the morgue. Frank exists in a kind of limbo or heavenly place. The actual monologues as delivered are happening in real time.”



Discuss time

- Discuss the actor Alison Whyte’s comments about **time**. Is this what you experienced?
 - How does **time** work in the playscript? Is it real time?
 - How does **time** work in the performance?
 - How does **time** link the past and the present?
 - How is the audience invited to view **time**? How did you understand/experience it?
-



Judy Davis (Director)

“*Faith Healer* could be described as a memory play: While memory is about what has happened in the past, it’s also about what might have happened but never did. That the characters’ troubled memories are often in conflict is unsurprising – we remember differently, sometimes what we need to remember, to create a coherent narrative for ourselves perhaps; at times, perhaps, to hide.”



Discuss time

Discuss the comment made by the director, Judy Davis, in relation to memory.

- How does it contribute to your understanding of **time** in *Faith Healer*?



Colin Friels (Frank)

“A world of memory, both imagined and real, and each as valid as the other. A haunted and a haunting world. A world that is as ephemeral as a ray of light that is glimpsed for tiny fraction of time but never forgotten. An intensely human world.”



Discuss time

- Discuss this description by the actor, Colin Friels.
- Reflect on the terms ‘imagined and real’, ‘haunted and haunting’, ‘ephemeral’, ‘ray of light’, ‘a tiny fraction of time’ and ‘intensely human world’.
- What aspects of the performance do you feel illuminated these?

Exterior World

As an audience we are reliant on the story telling and monologic structure of *Faith Healer* to conjure an **exterior world**.



Discuss exterior world

- What did you imagine about the life of Frank, Grace and Teddy on the road as you read the playscript?
 - Did the live performance enlighten or enliven your imagined understanding of these characters and their life on the road?
 - How important is the **exterior world** for these characters?
-



Discuss stagecraft elements

Consider the stagecraft elements of set, costume, make-up/hair, lighting, properties and sound.

- How do these elements assist in constructing and composing the **world of the play**?
- How do they reflect the contexts as suggested by the playscript?



Colin Friel in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.



Discuss Field Day Theatre

Brian Friel's company Field Day Theatre created theatre that was political in its intent but also aimed "to use culture to heal sectarian divides".

- Discuss what it means to "use culture to heal sectarian divides".
- Discuss how the play may have revealed sectarian divides (Protestant and Catholic).
- Discuss how the play reveals any political commentary about class, religion, the troubles, societal roles.

Structure and Meaning

Faith Healer is a scripted play and is structured as four monologues by three characters.



Discuss structure

- What is the difference between a monologue and a soliloquy?
 - What is **the function** of a monologue and a soliloquy in a play?
 - Why would a playwright choose to write a play using this structure? What does your research tell you about Friel's choice?
 - Discuss the effectiveness of the structure of *Faith Healer* – how does it reveal the world, the characters, the story? How does this structure differ from other forms of theatre you have experienced?
-

The following quotation makes some interesting points about structure and meaning. We don't necessarily see any action. Rather, we experience narration.

“Both *Faith Healer* (1979) and *Molly Sweeney* (1994) are monologic. Their status as theater pieces demands that we respect them as performance, but their form encourages us to treat them as prose poems. Their lack of conventional stage action is, however, through a sort of logical hairpin curve, exactly what makes them so dramatic. By replacing action with narration, Friel not only critiques the Irish penchant for oratory, but he also dramatizes his contention that events are meaningful mainly insofar as they become stories, fictions told by their participants. Their meaning resides not in what actually happens but in how they are narrated by and to the people who participated in them.”

Source: DeVinney, K. (1999). Monologue as Dramatic Action in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 45(1), pp.110-119.



Discuss narration

- Discuss how meaning is made through **narration** as opposed to **action** in *Faith Healer*.
- Whose story did you find the most compelling? Why?



Colin Friel in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.



Paul Blackwell in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.

Theatrical Styles

Consider the four descriptions of *Faith Healer*'s theatrical style below, from actors and reviewers:

“It is a **memory play** for sure but it is also very much **direct address**. There is no **fourth wall** ... In *Faith Healer* Grace and Frank have this last opportunity to tell their stories. Both characters present a **testament** to their experience. So to speak directly to an audience is somewhat confronting and laid bare. However, there is something about the notion of **‘talking to the air’** that speaks to this play in terms of its style” – Alison Whyte (Grace).

“The play is a **mystery story** in both the mundane and spiritual senses. Though each of the narrators tells essentially the same tale in **four soliloquies** (Frank speaks first and last), their accounts disagree in ways that leave us dizzy ... You’ll have no trouble getting the gist of the experiences shared by Frank, Grace and Teddy ... But beyond that you don’t know what version of reality to accept.”

Source: Ben Brantley, reviewing *Faith Healer* (2006), nytimes.com

“*Faith Healer* is, in part, a **thriller**, whose boundaries are so subtle and slippery that the crime could almost be missed. At the centre of the drama is a death (artistic or physical, you decide) that viewers can only piece together slowly, bit by bit. **In its style it is social realism**. Brian Friel possessed a unique ability to portray a sense of Ireland and **Irishness** in his work and to do so with an unerring sense of realism.”

Source: Rachel Flaherty, Brian Friel, ‘Giant of world theatre’ dies aged 86, irishtimes.com

“*Faith Healer* is **classic story telling**. Stripped of tricks but presented in detail by the performers” – Colin Friel (Frank).



Discuss theatrical styles

Discuss the descriptions of the play presented above.

- Consider each of the **bold** terms
- Work in pairs and find *evidence* of these in the script and in the performance
- What other theatrical styles or conventions of styles do you think are evident in the play – remember to provide *examples* to argue your case.

Acting, Characterisation and Language

The playwright provides the audience with ample time to observe and analyse the three characters within the world of *Faith Healer*. The following activities will help you analyse the acting, characterisation and language for each of the three characters.

Grace

Read the following extract from an interview with Alison Whyte who plays Grace in this production.



Alison Whyte (Grace)

“Grace is wild girl. She has more of her mother than her father, and of a mother who went in and out of a mental asylum. There are references in the script to the mother not speaking much but presenting as very wise, and the father being painted as a patriarch and severe.

Grace is from a middle to upper middle class Irish family. Her father is a Judge. She has studied law but not practiced because she met Frank. She is a bit of a rebel falling in love with Frank and eloping with him. I love Frank’s description of Grace and he never having had ‘a heady relationship’. It was always a heady relationship! Full of fighting, passion, love and it destroyed them in the end. They hated each other and they loved each other.

Within the writing, it truly feels that Grace is making up the story as she goes along. I can feel that she is digging herself out of the dark places that she encounters throughout the monologue, especially as the story progresses.”

Using the descriptions above as a beginning point, analyse the character of Grace and the interpretation by Alison Whyte.



Discuss Grace

- What characteristics does Alison Whyte describe Grace as having?
- Analyse and evaluate the actor’s use of movement, gesture and voice in conveying these characteristics.
- Consider physical attributes, use of language, rhythm, silence, use of stagecraft and use of space.
- How did make-up, costume, set and props contribute to the portrayal of Grace?
- How was Alison’s understanding of her relationship with Frank as “heady ... full of fighting, passion and love” made evident by the actor in her monologue?



Alison Whyte in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.

Frank

Francis Hardy, played by Colin Friels, the faith healer of the play, evokes love, disgust, loyalty, hatred, passion, wonder, and numerous other emotions in the two people who shared his life the most. As an audience we witness his story on two occasions, book ending the play, a prologue and an epilogue if you will.



Colin Friels (Frank)

“Frank is the essence of the Celtic human. The essence of the artist, a truly creative creature. A channel for the very corpuscles of human existence. For Frank, the world is how he creates it.”



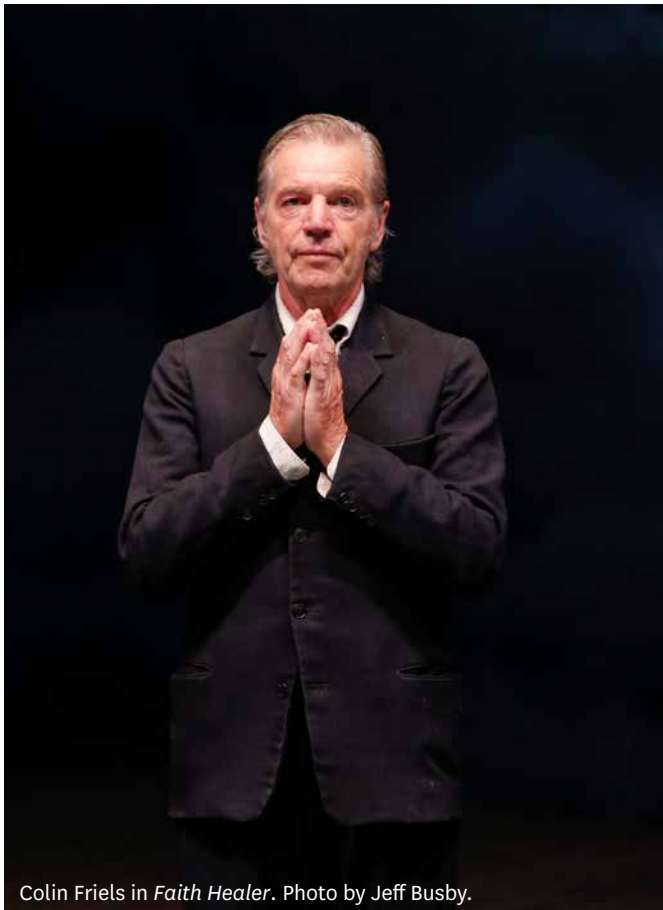
Discuss Frank

Discuss the description actor Colin Friels gives of his character:

- What does he mean by “a channel for the very corpuscles of human existence”?
- What type of world does Frank create for himself?
- What characteristics does Frank describe **himself** as having?
- How do the other characters describe him?
- Analyse and evaluate Colin Friels’ use of movement, gesture and voice in conveying these characteristics.
- Consider physical attributes, use of language, rhythm, silence, use of stagecraft and use of space.
- How did make-up, costume, set and props contribute to the portrayal of Frank?

Read Frank’s description of his relationship with Grace below.

FRANK: But it was never a heady relationship, not even in the early days. But it lasted. A surviving relationship. And yet as we grew older together I thought it wouldn’t because that very virtue of hers – that mulish, unquestioning, indefatigable loyalty – settled on us like a heavy dust. And nothing I did, neither my bitterness nor my deliberate neglect nor my blatant unfaithfulness, could disturb it.



Colin Friels in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.



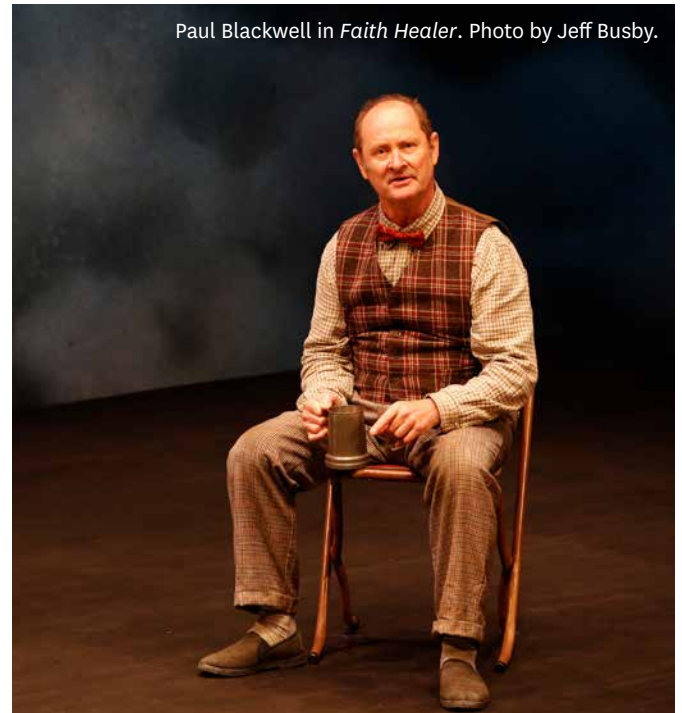
Analyse the performance

Write a short response, using evidence from the production, discussing how the actor, Colin Friels, portrayed Frank’s relationship with Grace as described in the quote above.

Teddy

The manager of Frank and often of Grace, a cockney showman, is played in this production by Paul Blackwell. In some ways he also provides comic relief to the darkness of the narrative. Frank describes Teddy as follows:

FRANK: Yes, let me tell you about Teddy, my manager, Cockney. Buoyant. Cheerful. Tiny nimble feet. Dressed in cord jacket, bow-tie, greasy velour hat. I never knew much about his background except that he had been born into show business. And I never understood why he stayed with me because we barely scraped a living. But he had a devotion to me and I think he had a vague sense of being associated with something...spiritual and gave him satisfaction. If you met him in a bar he'd hold you with those brown eyes of his.



Analyse Teddy

- Analyse and evaluate Paul Blackwell's use of movement, gesture and voice in conveying the characteristics that Frank Hardy describes.
- Consider Blackwell's use of physical attributes, language, rhythm, silence, use of stagecraft and use of space.
- How did make-up, costume, set and props contribute to the portrayal of Teddy?
- How did you respond to Teddy?

“Although a mere manager, Teddy shows a subtle awareness of the power of illusion, of the capacity of words and names to confer a sense of reality, and of the way in which this gift seemed to pass from Hardy to his clients in those successful moments of healing.”

Source: Declan Kiberd, *Brian Friel: A Casebook*, 1997, p. 222



Discuss Teddy

- Discuss this description of Teddy
- What insights does Teddy offer us about Frank and Grace and their relationship?
- When do we discover that Teddy is in love with Grace?

Status

We never see the three characters in the one scene, we only hear their version of events.



Discuss status

- How would you describe the status relationship between the three characters in the play?
- What do their stories conjure regarding status?
- Is there a suggestion of interdependency?
- Which character did you respond to the most? Why? Analyse your response.

Language

Consider the following commentary on Friel’s use of language in the playscript:

“As a playwright Brian Friel is renowned for his use of an English language that harkens back to the Irish Gaelic. During his time with Field Theatre Friel claimed that, although the Irish ‘flirt with the English language’ they have not comfortably assimilated it, and that ‘the whole issue of language’ remains ‘very problematic’ for the Irish. Friel’s solution, however, was not to propose a return to Gaelic, but to continue with a process begun by other playwrights such as Synge and Joyce. Friel comments, ‘We must make English identifiably our own language’. English words must become ‘distinctive and *unique* to us.’”

Source: F.C. McGrath, Brian Friel and the Politics of the Anglo-Irish, *Language*, pp. 3-4, 1990.



Discuss language

Discuss the language of the play. Consider its rhythm and structure:

- How did the language on the page translate into performance?
- Do you agree with the commentary above that the use of English is “distinctive and unique”, recognisable as Irish? What qualities does it have that may make it so?
- How does the language of the play assist in creating the world and the characters?
- Could this play be set elsewhere? Be recontextualised? Why/Why not?

Consider these actors’ comments on the language in Brian Friel’s playscript:



Alison Whyte (Grace)

“Nothing is out of place, all the punctuation rings true. If you lose your way you must return to the script because it is a musical score, so well-crafted and Friel must have been channelling the angels when he wrote it! It is brilliant. It has to be performed in an Irish accent! ... In *Faith Healer* Grace and Frank have this last opportunity to tell their story. Both characters present a testament to their experience ... it is the most exquisite piece of dramatic writing.”



Colin Friels (Frank)

“Friel is a genius with language and gives the actor the greatest of opportunities to paint intensely detailed stories full of human complexities. The rhythm flows like honey. One is blessed to be able to utter Mr Friel’s words. The accent is Irish, slightly southern Irish, and is simple to accomplish with that writing.”



Discuss language

- What insights do these quotes give you to each actor’s way of working?
- How integral is the Irish accent to the performance?

The villages

Each character evokes the names of the villages they visited in the long years of travelling together on the road.

Aberarder, Aberayron
Llangranog, Llangurig,
Abergorlech, Abergynolwyn,
Llandefeilog, Llanerchymedd,
Aberhosan, Aberporth...



Discuss the villages

- How does each character recall these towns?
 - Discuss the delivery of these names by each character – rhythm, emphasis, cadence, tone, pitch, pause etc.
 - Why do you think the playwright has included this as a repetitive motif?
 - How do the stagecraft elements of **lighting and sound** combine to enhance the delivery particularly with Frank?
-

Actor/Audience Relationship

The direction of *Faith Healer* is a key aspect to consider when discussing the actor/audience relationship. Other things to consider include the use of space, rhythm and the structure inherent in the playscript. You may also like to imagine how you might have experienced the performance differently from different seats in the auditorium.



Discuss actor/audience relationship

- Describe the actor/audience relationships in the performance
 - Evaluate the effectiveness or otherwise of the actor/audience relationships that were established, maintained or shifted.
 - Evaluate the actor/audience relationships with regard to the intentions of the playwright.
 - Did the direction of the performers enable you to respond to and feel **affected** by the directorial decisions?
 - Did the direction, timing and use of space worked in a complementary way? Evaluate the effectiveness of the direction in addressing timing, rhythm, and structure.
-

Direction

Apart from the opening directions in each monologue, there is very little stage direction given throughout the scenes in the written playscript. Consider the playwright’s note at the beginning of the playscript:

NOTE: Stage directions have been kept to a minimum. In all four parts the director will decide when and where the monologist sits, walks, stands, etc.



On stage

- Select one of the four scenes in the play.
 - Draw a bird’s eye view of the set for that scene including set pieces and properties, entrances and exits.
 - Mark some key points on that stage map where the actor moved throughout the scene and when they stayed still.
 - Discuss the relationship between the direction and the theatrical style of the play – how might they have informed each other?
-

The question of whether characters are talking to the audience directly, or talking to themselves behind a fourth wall, is a key consideration for the director.



Discuss the fourth wall

- What does the script suggest with regard to a fourth wall? Look for specific examples.
 - As a member of the audience, did you feel you were being directly spoken to? Give three examples.
-



Alison Whyte (Grace)

“Some aspects directly address while in other points the audience bears witness. So there is an inner monologue and an outer monologue, talking to the audience and talking to the air.”



Discuss soliloquising

- Were there times when you felt that the characters were soliloquising or “talking to the air” as actor, Alison Whyte describes? Find three examples.
 - Discuss the acting and directing techniques that enable these differences
 - Discuss how other stagecraft such as lighting may have worked
-

Set

Look at the theatre design of the Sumner, Southbank Theatre at MTC right.



Discuss set design

Discuss how the contemporary proscenium structure of the Sumner was reconfigured in order to host the set design for *Faith Healer*.

The set design for this production of *Faith Healer* reconfigures the Sumner Theatre. Further, the design offers the performers and the audience such features as:

- A raked stage that seems to be floating in a non-specific space
- The creation of a more intimate actor/audience relationship
- A back drop of clouds that almost wraps around the space
- A simple and uncluttered space for the actors to perform
- No entrances or exits
- The festooning of the sign: The Fantastic Francis Hardy, Faith Healer One Night Only



Discuss set design

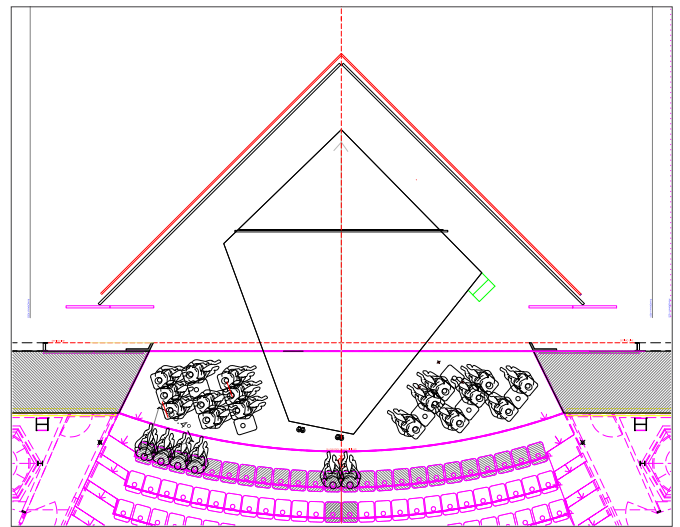
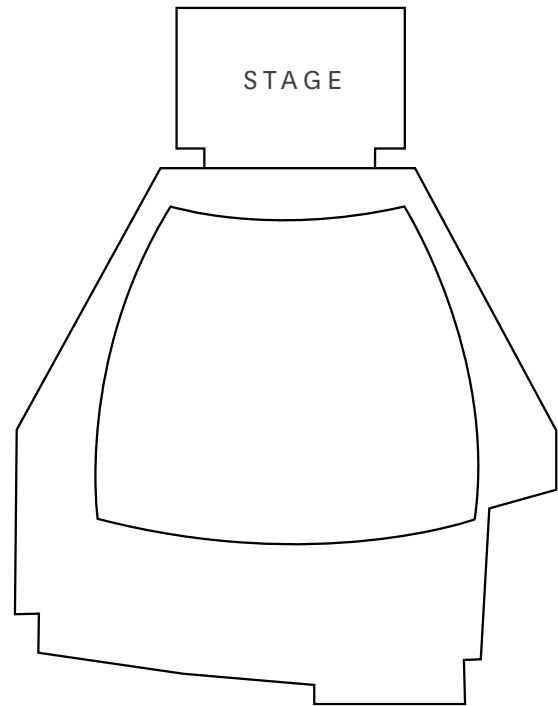
- Discuss each of the above features of the set design – do you agree they were features?
- How did each aspect contribute to creating the world of the play?
- Consider the written playscript – what **themes** and ideas do you think the design team drawing on in the creation of this set?



Discuss set design

Compare the set design in the performance to any elements that are suggested by the script.

- What similarities and differences do you find?
- Write some examples of similarities and of differences – consider the stage directions in the script as a starting point.



(From top) The Sumner, Southbank Theatre;
Ground plan of the *Faith Healer* set in the Sumner

Properties

The properties used in this production are quite simple. Teddy's scene contains the most props and items. Some props include:

- Wicker basket
- Whiskey, beer bottles
- Drinking glasses
- Small record player
- Bottle opener
- Newspaper article

What others did you notice?



Discuss props

Discuss how each of these props was used by the performers and how they may have enhanced character:

- How would you describe the aesthetic of these props?
- Do the properties sit in harmony with the world of the play?
- Are they consistent with those mentioned in the playscript?
- Did any properties take on a **symbolic** value?



Alison Whyte in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.

Costume and Make-up

Throughout this resource and on the MTC website there are production photos that will allow you to recall the costumes and make up worn by the characters in the play.



Mood Board

Return to Part A and look at the mood board on page 16 – discuss the palette, textures, period, class, function, gender, and other qualities of the costumes for each character.



Discuss Costume

Choose ONE character from the play and discuss their **costume** and **hair** in detail

- How did the costume, make-up and hair convey aspects of their character?
 - Did the costume, make-up and hair convey the period and the contexts?
 - Did the character alter their costume or use it in any particular way?
 - Evaluate the overall effectiveness of the costume in establishing the character.
-



Production Photos

Annotate the production images offered in this resource to assist you in analysing and discussing costume, hair and make-up. For example, how Teddy's bow-tie communicates characterisation.



Alison Whyte, Paul Blackwell and Colin Friels in *Faith Healer*. Photos by Jeff Busby.

Sound and Composition

Each of the characters talks about, refers to or sings snippets of the song *The Way You Look Tonight*, music by Jerome Kern and lyrics by Dorothy Fields.



Listen

Find a recording of the song online and listen to the other lyrics not included in the script. Many contemporary artists have recorded covers of this song, so make sure you also listen to one from a time period relevant to the characters. Try to locate Fred Astaire (1936).

The way you look tonight (excerpt)

Lovely, never, ever change
Keep that breathless charm
Won't you please arrange it?
'Cause I love you, just the way you look tonight



Discuss lyrics

Discuss the lyrics of *Just the way you look tonight* and perhaps watch the video clip:

- How did you respond to this song in the play?
 - At what points did it occur? How was it referred to?
 - Why this song? What might it mean to each of the characters?
 - How does each character remember the song and why it was part of their lives?
 - How might this song act as a **metaphor** within the play?
-

Sound designer and composer, Paul Charlier, offered several insights into another song that is mentioned in the play, *On Ilkla Moor baht 'at*, or *On Ikley Moor without a Hat*:



Paul Charlier (Composer & Sound Designer)

The song 'Ikley Moor' is mentioned, almost in passing, by Frank in part one as being sung by Grace to a group of people they're drinking with. Later on we discover this scene took place in the hours immediately preceding Frank's death. The method and meaning of this echoes the murder sacrifice of Celtic Kings and the renewal these rituals hoped to bring about.

Excerpt from *On Ilkla Moor baht 'at* (On Ikley Moor without a hat)

A traditional Yorkshire song - interpretation in Standard English

You're going to catch your death of cold
Then we will have to bury you
Then the worms will come and eat you up
Then the ducks will come and eat up the worms
Then we will go and eat up the ducks
Then we will all have eaten you
That's where we get our own back



Discuss sound design

- Discuss the design process that is suggested here.
- How has Paul Charlier used the script, the song and its greater meaning to inform the composition for *Faith Healer*?

Read the following extracts from an interview with Paul Charlier (Composer & Sound Designer):



Paul Charlier (Composer & Sound Designer)

“[In considering the sound design] we looked to that part of *Faith Healer*’s created world and references that may be unclear or unfamiliar to the audience, looking for how to bring those informing aspects and feelings to the performance or to **the environment of the performance**.

An idea arose that because **the characters on stage are situated within a mass of clouds** that these **intangible and ghost-like memories** are as insubstantial as the wind. I found a Polish proverb: ‘Never seek the wind in the field. It is useless to try and find what is gone.’ So **the music in *Faith Healer* is carried on the wind to the characters**, it has been played off in some unknown place at an unknown distance and time.

It both carries and evokes memories. It also becomes a **core between each story**. The wind moves off the stage to encompass the audience.

The Bodhran drum and Uilleann pipe may help locate the piece, the **harshness of the landscape** and a **poetic despair**. Yet a tension is created because the pieces don’t fit: **the two instruments play in different tempos** – they combine almost by chance, and there is no continuous melody, only fragments, played by the pipe.”



Discuss sound

Discuss each of the **bold** terms in the quotes above

- How do they equate with your understanding of the play?
- How did you experience the compositional sounds?
- Where did the sound come from? Did you feel it “encompass” the audience?
- Did it feel a part of the overall world of the play?



Listen

Listen to the Bodhran drum and Uilleann pipe that Paul Charlier refers to on YouTube.



Extended response

Evaluate the effectiveness of sound and composition in evoking some of the ideas that the composer talks about in the extracts from his interview. Use specific examples from the production.

Lighting

While one role of lighting is to light the performers, what other roles does it have in theatre? For example, the opening image of light on Frank, the shifting lights across the clouds, the way light closed down or opened up the performance space. In this moment, the lighting contributed to creating the world of *Faith Healer*. There are many other examples you can discuss where lighting contributed to the performance in this way.



Discuss lighting

- What particular lighting states and changes can you remember as being significant, memorable, striking and why?
- Did the lighting give a sense of **time** passing? Standing still? How?
- What different types of 'lamps' were used to create these states?
- In particular, discuss the use of the 'birdie' lamps placed around the edge of the performance space.



Kinlochbervie lighting

When each character tells the story of their time in Kinlochbervie, Sutherland, Scotland, there are significant lighting shifts.

- Consider how the lighting combines with pivotal points in the story to draw our awareness.
- Describe the lighting changes that occur, their effect on the performing space, the actor and the backdrop.

Publicity

For those students taking on publicity roles, you may like to consider the following:

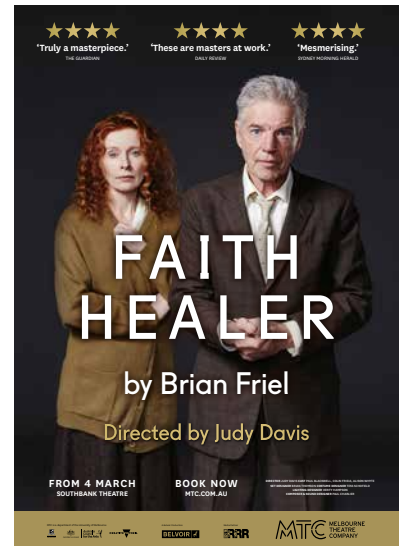
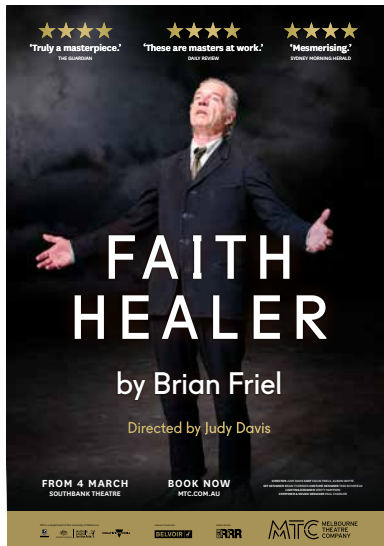
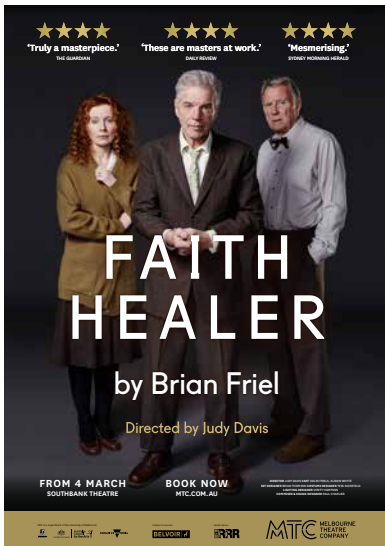
The MTC production of *Faith Healer* is a remount of the Belvoir production seen in Sydney in 2016. The original promotional photo included each of the three cast members from the Belvoir production (including Pip Miller who played the role of Teddy). When it transpired that Mr. Miller was unavailable for the MTC production, MTC had to quickly come up with another marketing solution.

Several factors were involved in this decision, including time pressures, availability of actors, and costs involved in a reshoot. Consequently, using an image from the Belvoir production was considered, but ultimately it was decided to retouch Mr. Miller out of the original image.



Poster

- Explore the MTC website for marketing and media publicity approaches to this production.
- Annotate the poster design and how you feel it represents the play.
- Of the two options, why do you think the retouched image was chosen over the production image?



Three designs of the marketing poster, with the original image, a production image and the retouched image.
Photos by: Justin Ridler, Brett Boardman



Discuss publicity

- What would you tweet in order to promote the production?
- Which creative team members do you think the media might like to chat to prior to the production opening? During the season?
- How would you promote this show on social media?
- If the show wasn't selling well, what type of publicity campaign could you devise?
- What would be a Twitter handle for this show?



Backstage Blog

Visit mtc.com.au/backstage to see what other content was generated for *Faith Healer*. What other stories would you write for this blog?

Stage Management

For those students taking on stage management roles, you may like to consider the following:



Discuss stage management

- What OH&S issues do you think a stage manager may need to consider with regard to the set design for this production?
- What do you think would be some key **cues** you may need to write on the promptscript?
- How would you **pre-set** this show?
- What would the stage manager need to do at the end of the show in order to prepare for the next performance?
- What **props** are brought on stage during the performance? What is the stage manager's role with regard to these?



Paul Blackwell in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.

Themes and Concepts



Colin Friels (Frank)

“What does this play say to its audience? Be a human being!”

Ritual and sacrifice



Paul Charlier (Composer & Sound Designer)

“*Faith Healer* involves the story of a man who ultimately offers himself up to a sacrifice, to be sacrificed – a necessary ritual in Celtic mythology to ensure the continuation of life, earth and society (although Frank himself may not see his own death in that way). His mutilated body, the still born baby, their parents are now buried and so the heart of the stories, in a way, emerges from the ground beneath these ghosts who are now re-telling their tales.”



Discuss ritual

Discuss this analysis by the sound designer and composer in relation to the deeper meanings of the play:

- What aspects of the script and the performance highlight these ideas?
 - Reflect on the use of music in the performed work. Did it evoke the idea of rituals and sacrifice?
-

Faith and healing

The title of this production offers the most obvious themes. Consider what these words mean to you, people you know, and the characters in the play.

FRANK: And occasionally it worked – oh, yes, occasionally it did work. Oh, yes. And when it did, when I stood before a man and placed my hands on him and watched him become whole in my presence, those were nights of exultation, of consummation ...



Discuss faith

- What is faith? What does it mean to be healed?
- How does the script excerpt potentially explore the concepts of faith and healing?
- Discuss how the title of the play might act as a metaphor for its characters – **who has faith, is faithless, faithful, is healed, heals, desires healing?**

Identity and self

“The Father in *Six Characters*, worries about how he will be performed by the Leading Man: ‘it will be difficult to act me as I really am. The effect will be rather...as he senses me...and not as inside of myself feel myself to be’. If we cannot exist without being perceived (or ‘acted’), but we are never perceived accurately, can we exist?”

Source: Gleitman, C. (2009). Three characters in search of a play: Brian Friel’s *Faith Healer* and the Quest for final Form. *New Hibernia Review*, 13(1), pp. 95-108: Project Muse.

FRANK: Never knew why I kept [the newspaper clipping] for so long. It’s testimony? I don’t think so. It’s reassurance? No, not that. Maybe, I think...maybe just as an identification. Yes, I think that’s why I kept it. It identified me – even though it got my name wrong.



Discuss identity and self

- How does *Faith Healer* explore the theme of **self** and **identity**?
- How many versions of the three characters are presented to us?
- What is Brian Friel, the playwright, saying about how self and identity are shaped

Memory and truth



Alison Whyte (Grace)

“I believe it explores the notion of truth, which at this point in contemporary times is really relevant given the rise of ‘alternative facts’ and the fluidity of truth. ‘What is truth?’ is a central question.”



Judy Davis (Director)

“*Faith Healer* could be described as a memory play: ‘while memory is about what has happened in the past, it’s also about what might have happened but never did.’ That the characters’ troubled memories are often in conflict is unsurprising – we remember differently, sometimes what we need to remember, to create a coherent narrative for ourselves perhaps; at times, perhaps, to hide.”



Discuss memory and truth

- How does each character remember the events at the pub in Ballybeg on Frank’s final night?
- How does each character remember the birth and death of Grace’s child?
- How does each character remember the relationship between Grace and Frank?
- What did you find most surprising about the different versions of **memories**?
- What happened to Frank? What happened to Grace?

Faith Healer and the broader Theatre Studies unit

Consider your study of this production in regards to other Areas of Study in Theatre Studies:



Discuss Theatre Studies

- What does your study of *Faith Healer* reveal about the production process?
- How does the discussion, analysis and evaluation of *Faith Healer* provide an understanding of approaching unseen material in both Outcome 2 and in preparation for the end-of-year exam?
- How might studying *Faith Healer* support your approach to the Stagecraft Examination for either acting or design?

Further reading

The following excerpts from books and articles provide more food for thought when analysing *Faith Healer*:

“*Faith Healer* is a portrait of the artist, and ‘the element of the charlatan that there is in all creative work. [...] How honourable and how dishonourable it can be’ (Friel, 1999, p. 111). In this portrait, the artist is seen as shaman, con-man, performer, liar, rhetorician, and finally as scapegoat” (Peter Lawley, *The Excluded Child*, 2009, p. 2–3).

“The most moving element of the play is the strange, inconclusive but very deep relationship between Francis Hardy and his wife. It is a coupling that is full of cruelty – his cruelty to her in the momentous labour of childbirth; her vicious mockery of him when his charisma fails; their joint harshness to Teddy whom they abandon for days on end; their neglect of parents whom they have left behind in Ireland. It is a relationship which, like most deep loves, has awkward zones of emptiness and inscrutability where little is shared or understood” (Declan Kiberd, *Brian Friel: A Casebook*, 1997, pp 218-219).

“*Faith Healer* is an eloquent apology for the distortions of memory, for it argues that every man must be an artist and illusionist, that every man must recast his memories into a pattern that is gratifying enough to allow him to live with himself” (Declan Kiberd, *Brian Friel: A Casebook*, 1997, p. 222).



Videos

Videos from the Belvoir production of Colin Friel's and Alison Whyte in character are available on YouTube:

- Colin Friel as Frank: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wG75Z4z68Uk>
- Alison Whyte as Grace: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-35jkOVaLGk>



Colin Friel in *Faith Healer*. Photo by Jeff Busby.

Connect



Photo by Sarah Walker



When you visit Southbank Theatre, share your experience on Twitter and Instagram with the hashtag **#mtcFaithHealer** and tag **@melbtheatreco**



Like MTC Education on Facebook for behind-the-scenes information about our Education Program and discover ways for you to get involved with MTC. **facebook.com/MTCEdu**

Programme

Production programmes are now just \$2 and are available for purchase in the theatre foyers. You can also download a copy of the *Faith Healer* programme at mtc.com.au/backstage.

Attendance Information

In this production there is occasional use of strong language, reference to alcoholism and depression, and an offstage death. For further information, please call the MTC Education team on (03) 8688 0974.

Duration

Approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes, including a 20 minute interval.

Go online to read more about visiting with school groups and opportunities for students. mtc.com.au/education

Enquiries

For general MTC Education enquiries: email education@mtc.com.au or contact our Education Coordinator 03 8688 0974.

School bookings: email schools@mtc.com.au or phone 03 8688 0963.