



حوليات آداب عين شمس (مؤتمر قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها)

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جامعة عين شمس

Re-Visioning History through Memory in Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*

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Abstract:

Brian Friel (1929-2015) is an Irish prominent short story writer and playwright. Friel's work spans almost fifty years and his reputation expanded well beyond Ireland. *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) is one of Friel's outstanding memory plays. Named after Lugh, Lughnasa is the pagan ritual of the Celtic harvest festival in the Irish folk history. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel, through narrative memory, records a sequence of historical events and their impact on his vivid characters. Instead of setting his play in the 1990 present, Friel sets it in the 1930s, and traces the socio-economic conditions as well as the historical sequence in Eamon de Valera's Free State.

From a postmodernist perspective, history, like memory, is subjective. In *Tropics of Discourse* (1978), Hayden White, a postmodernist American historiographer, states "historical narratives, considered purely as verbal artifacts, can be characterized by the mode of figurative discourse in which they are cast" (94). According to White, a historian can "emplot" historical events and mold them in a fictional shape. By "emplotment" he means "the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures" (*Tropics* 83). Therefore, historical chronicles can be treated as fictional narratives which means that they are subject to analysis and interpretation and most importantly, like memory, to the view point of the narrator or interpreter.

The main goal of this paper is to examine how in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, according to White's theory, Friel deals with history as if it were a fluid private memory depending more on imagination and fictional incidents than on factual ones. In his memory play, Friel attempts to give an explicit re-vision of history, to transform it into a sequence of narrative events and to show their impact on the lives of his characters.

Key words: Brian Friel- *Dancing at Lughnasa*- Memory- Re-visioning History- Hayden White

Friel's great originality lay in the way he treated public history as if it were private memory – as a construct whose truth does not lie in its mere facts.

Fintan O'Toole

Brian Friel (1929-2015) is an Irish prominent short story writer and playwright. Friel's work spans almost fifty years and his reputation expanded well beyond Ireland. Many of Friel's plays deal with the eccentric use of memory. *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) is one of Friel's outstanding memory plays. Named after Lugh, Lughnasa is the pagan ritual of the Celtic harvest festival in the Irish folk history. The play is set in the fictional rural town of Ballybeg, the imagined setting of much of Friel's plays, Donegal, Ireland.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel, through narrative memory, records a sequence of historical events and their impact on his vivid characters. In "The Truth According to Brian Friel," Fintan O'Toole states that Friel's characters "turn history into words, images, stories. It is their way of not being crushed by the weight of its cruel inevitability". By doing so, in his memory play, Friel makes a kind of re-visioning of the historical events through the characters' memory and their reconfiguration of the past in 1930s Ireland. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel uses memory, as Kerwin Lee Klein states, "as a synonym for history to soften [his] prose, to humanize it, and to make it more accessible". According to Klein, memory "appeals to us partly because it projects an immediacy we feel has been lost from history" (129).

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Memory is the ability of recalling facts, events and past experiences. Memory has been defined by Rob Kelly as “a very complex phenomenon, with many factors affecting the encoding, storage and subsequent retrieval of information. Memory can be incomplete, distorted or inaccurate” (29). As for history, it is the study of past events according to the historian’s perspective. Like memory, history, in Keith Jenkins’s words, “remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian’s perspective as a ‘narrator’” (14).

In agreement with Jenkins’s explication, Hayden White, in *The Practical Past* (2004), states “a historical event is any occurrence that lends itself to investigation by the techniques and procedures currently in force among the guild of professional life of a given society or other kind of group” (43). Although there is no direct reference to actual events of the Irish history, the play records the social, religious, economic and political conditions of the time. Through narrative memory, Friel tortuously displays the history of Ireland in the 1930s. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the quiet domestic life in the rural Mundy household is disrupted by historical events such as the invasion of the industrial revolution, Irish War of Independence and the Spanish civil war.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, memory is deliberately mingled with history. As Klein states, “where we once spoke of folk history or popular history or oral history or public history or even myth we now employ memory as a metahistorical category that subsumes all these various terms” (128). The everyday details, the trivial events in the Mundy household, and the memories recalled by the characters convey a socio-historical background in rural Ireland. Though apparently memory seems to be emphasized over history in Friel’s play, he uses memory in his narrative as a means to record important historical events inside and outside Ireland.

Instead of setting his play in the 1990 present, Friel sets it in the 1930s, and traces the socio-economic conditions as well as the historical sequence in Eamon de Valera’s Free State. From an indefinite present, most appropriately in the 1960s, Michael, the narrator, recalls the 1936 summer when he was a seven-year-old child with his maternal family in the Mundy household. By doing so, according to Prapassaree Kramer, Michael “inhabits the present with the audience, but his family remains frozen in 1936” (172). In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the interpretation of events is based on the subjective remarks given by the narrator.

In a flashback form, Michael recounts the repressed lives of five unmarried rural Irish women, the Mundy sisters, his mother and her sisters who confront economic and social distress as a result of modern industrialization in the Irish Free State which was plagued by poverty, famine and emigration. The livelihood of his maternal family’s domestic industry of glove knitting is threatened due to the industrialization of the

area. They desperately strive to make a living and to keep the unity and stability of the family.

Kate, the eldest of the Mundy sisters and its main breadwinner, tries to preserve order and unity of the household as she says:

You perform your duties as best you can-because you believe in responsibilities and obligations and good order. And then suddenly, suddenly you realize that hair cracks are appearing everywhere; that control is slipping away; that the whole thing is so fragile it can't be held together much longer. It's all about to collapse. (35)

As this quote shows, the socio-economic conditions in Irish Free State threaten the established order. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, through a group of memories, the characters express their passions, desires and deprivations.

In his play, Friel traces the socio-political development in Ireland, and deliberately mingles important historical events with narrative. In her song, Maggie, the second eldest of the Mundy sisters, refers to Eamon de Valera and people's advocacy for him as a national leader. She sings "Will you vote for de Valera, will you vote? If you don't, we'll be like Gandhi with his goat" (4). De Valera was one of the dominant political figures in 20th century Ireland. He struggled to prove Ireland's right to gain self-determination and to achieve independence from Britain. With his fellow nationalists, de Valera won the Irish elections overwhelmingly, and captured 73 of the 105 Irish seats in the British parliament. Instead of going to London, they established an Irish parliament and declared it the legitimate government of the Irish people. (Sarbaugh 145)

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel, according to Hayden White, makes a fictional "emplotment" of historical events. While performing everyday domestic duties, Rose Mundy sings "Will you come to Abyssinia, will you come? Bring your own cup and saucer and a bun. . . Missolini will be there with his airplanes in the air" (3). In Rose's song, Friel refers to the Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini and the Italian-Ethiopian colonial war in Africa (1935-37). As a result of this war, Ethiopia was defeated and subjected to Italian military occupation. According to White's theory, Friel, in "a literary," "fiction-making" operation, matches up "a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind" (*Tropics* 85). In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the historical perspective is created through everyday specific details in the Mundy household as well as in the memory of its members.

With Michael's narrative memory in the Mundy household, important historical events are reconfigured. Another important historical event is recorded by Friel in *Dancing at Lughnasa* is that of the international brigades. These brigades were groups of foreign volunteers who fought on

the Republican side against the Nationalist forces during the Spanish war (1936-1939). Gerry Evans, Michael's father, leaves Chris to fight with the international brigades in Spain, an action to which Kate shows her dissatisfaction, as she says, "It's a sorry day for Ireland when we send young men off to Spain to fight for godless Communism" (52). As a participant in the Irish War of Independence, Kate criticizes the Free State's decision of sending volunteers from Ireland to fight in the Spanish civil war.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the theme of memory is reinforced by the constant absence of Michael's child-self who is only created by the author's stage directions and never seen on stage. Therefore, his lines are delivered by the adult Michael. To show the authority of memory and the power of imagination in the play, Michael, the narrator, is totally detached from action as he never participates in the dialogue with any of the characters.

For Michael, his narrative memory owes more to imagination than it does to mere facts. Michael adopts Kelly's concept that all memories are "constructive," and, therefore, may contain "inaccurate or 'false' information." Moreover, memories can sometimes become "substantially distorted and may even relate to events that predominantly never occurred" (29). Also, Friel, in Andreas Huyssen's words, thinks that memory is "always transitory, notoriously unreliable, and haunted by forgetting" (38). Therefore, Michael's memory is fluid as in it "everything is simultaneously actual and illusory." Moreover, that memory, as Michael states, "owes nothing to fact" (D L 71).

As a matter of fact, Michael has "some awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before [his] eyes, of becoming what they ought not to be" (2). Like memory, history is subjective and fluctuated. According to White, most historical sequences can be narrated in a number of different ways so as to "provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings" (*Tropics* 85). As this quote shows, historical events, like memory, are mere narratives that are subject to interpretation.

Michael, the "love child" of Chris, the youngest of the Mundy sisters, is the narrator whose memory shapes the whole play (40). At the outset of the play, when Michael first appears downstage left, as clarified by Friel's stage directions, he is isolated in a "pool of light" while the rest of the stage is in "darkness" (1). A position that implies the authority of the narrator's memory over characters and action. Only when Michael begins speaking, lights are slowly brought up on the rest of the stage showing other characters standing "motionless in a formal tableau" like a family photograph that is subject to the narrator's explication and depiction (1). In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the theme of memory is reinforced by Michael's constant invisibility. Michael's child-self is never seen on stage, and his adult-self is never involved in the action of the play.

From this "pool of light," Michael stands watching his child-self, his mother and her siblings while "different kinds of memories offer themselves to [him]" (1). He recalls the harvest festival of Lughnasa in the first day of August and the newly acquired wireless set, the Marconi that refers to Guglielmo Marconi who was the inventor of radio at that time, which emits traditional Irish music and sometimes a blast of "The British Grenadiers" in the Mundy household referring to the British colonization of the time (4).

Excited and thrilled by the magic music emitted from the wireless set, the five Mundy sisters burst into wild circle dance. Michael is obsessed by the nostalgic memory of his mother's and her four sisters' dance. By dancing, the characters express their suffering in a desperate life full of losses, disappointment and demolished dreams. Through dancing, according to Cassandra Fusco, Friel demonstrates that "the cycle of life, like the body's dance of self-exploration, although short, can effect transformation." By dancing, the Mundy sisters seek seminal transformation "to heal the mismatch between desire and sexual-cum-social roles in the lop-sided and moribund Mundy household" (109). Through dancing, the Mundy sisters find a temporary escape from the distressed life imposed on them as single women in the Irish Free State.

For Michael, the delightful memory of dancing is closely linked with and distorted by the desperate homecoming of his uncle Father Jack after a twenty-five year service in Uganda. In this sad memory, he is disturbed by the "forlorn figure of Father Jack shuffling from room to room as if he were searching for something but couldn't remember what" (2). By Father Jack's twenty-five-year absence from homeland as a member of a Christian mission to Africa, Friel records the colonial Irish history of the first part of the twentieth century when Christian missionary activity became a significant phenomenon in the European churches. Christian missions were sent to different parts of the world, in particular to the British colonies in Africa.

It is noteworthy that Friel uses White's "emplotment" to give meaning to the historical events he chooses to chronicle in his play. This kind of "emplotment," in White's words, "is dictated by the dominant figurative mode of the language he has used to describe the elements of his account prior to his composition of the narrative" (*Tropics* 94). As a matter of fact, Evangelization is one of the main objectives of the European missions to Africa. In addition to the religious purpose of those missions, spread of English language, especially in the British colonies, was of great significance.

The European missionary movement, as Sean Fallon states in *The Journal of Sierra Leone Studies*:

was encouraged by the huge emigration from Ireland that followed the tragic famines of the 1840s and which created large migrant communities in America and Australia, and also by European imperialist expansion into Africa and elsewhere across the globe.

Ironically, Father Jack came back from that mission endorsing paganism and losing his English language as his “vocabulary has deserted [him]” (39). Instead of speaking English or Irish, he uses “Swahili”, the native language of Uganda, all the time. Since English is decided by the Catholic Church to be its medium, Father Jack abandons Catholicism and forgets his English vocabulary to rebel against strict Catholic paradigm of the Irish Free State.

By Lughnasa that gives the play its title, Friel records the folk Celtic history of Ireland, and displays the conflict between paganism and Catholicism in Irish Free State. At Lughnasa festival, people in rural areas of Ireland, like the Mundy sisters, celebrate the harvest season by going to the back hills, picking bilberries, and “light[ing] a bonfire beside a spring well. Then they dance around it. Then they drive their cattle through the flames to banish the devil out of them” (16). Every August, the Mundy sisters eagerly wait for the harvest festival.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel records the constant dispute between Christianity and paganism in the Irish Free State. According to White, historians’ recognition of the fictive element in their narratives does not mean “the degradation of historiography to the status of ideology or propaganda.” On the contrary, this recognition serves as “a potent antidote to the tendency of historians to become captive of ideological preconceptions which they do not recognize as such but honor as the ‘correct’ perception of the way things really are” (*Tropics* 99). Kate, a national school teacher and the moral supporter of the Mundy family, represents strict Catholicism. Described by Michael as “a very proper woman,” Kate represents the family matriarch who tries to maintain the unity of her family and to keep its appearances (1).

Conservative as she is, Kate refuses to participate with her sisters in the Lughnasa festival. Moreover, she forbids their own participation reminding them of their reverent brother as she says: “And this is Father Jack’s home – we must never forget that –ever” (13). As a true Catholic, Kate rejects the pagan rituals of Lughnasa, and considers the participants of the festival “savages” for their sinful and non-Christian practices (17). Kate hates the wireless set that emits erratic music because it “[k]illed all Christian conversation in this country” (66). She forbids her sisters’ celebrating the pagan festival in the family’s Catholic home.

For Kate’s disappointment, Father Jack endorses anti-Christian rituals and becomes an advocate of polygamy as he advises his five sisters to share one husband. By doing so, Friel, like White, uses the fictive element in recording important historical and social conditions in de Valera’s Free

State. In his play, Friel highlights the social phenomenon of celibacy that prevailed Ireland in 1930s as a result of the Free State's economic decline. At that time, as Beverly I Strassmann and Alice L Clarke in "Ecological Constraints on Marriage in Rural Ireland" state, "delayed marriage and celibacy in Ireland reached an extreme," and "Irish men and 55% of Irish women between 25 and 34 years of age had remained single" (34). Therefore, Father Jack recommends a polygamous husband for all his sisters in order not to be judged as incompetent unmarried women in Irish Free State. In the patriarchal society of the Free State, women gain strength through marriage and motherhood; two blessings that are nonexistent in the Mundy household.

Since, according to Irish Constitution, family is one of the fundamental institutions in society, matrimony and maternity are highly evaluated as the basis of a healthy family life. Therefore, in the patriarchal society of the Irish Free State, the Mundy sisters are marginalized and estranged for their singlehood. Moreover, they undergo sexual repression and deprivation. In the opening line of the play, Chris, Michael's mother and the youngest of the Mundy sisters, examines her face in a tiny cracked mirror on the wall and inquires "When are we going to get a decent mirror to see ourselves in?" (2) Chris's inquiry underlines the Mundy sisters' lifelong frustration and their disability to express their repressed desires. The cracked mirror the Mundy sisters have symbolizes their distorted images and their fragmented selves as spinsters in the patriarchal society of rural Ireland.

Chris is the only one of the Mundy sisters who escapes the traditional rules of the patriarchal society by loving Gerry Evans and having an illegitimate child. In the Catholic Irish Free State where matrimony is a prerequisite of a reverent, stable family life, Chris's sexual transgression is highly stigmatized. After the shame Chris brings to the family, the Mundy sisters hope to restore their respectability by Father Jack's venerable position in the parish of Ballybeg.

For Kate and her sisters, Father Jack is no longer the respectable priest who affords for his family reverence and an honorable position, he is rather an insane figure who has gone over to non-Christian practices, and, as a result, is kept apart from the Christian community. When Kate inquires about performing liturgy, he enthusiastically discusses his participation in Ugandan ceremonies such as ritual dance, painted faces, drinking palm wine and animal sacrifice, maybe that's why Rose's pet rooster found slaughtered; an incident never justified by Friel in the narrative.

Moreover, Father Jack considers Chris lucky for having a "love child," and asks his other sisters if they have "other love children" because, according to Ryangan traditions, "the more love children [they] have, the

more fortunate [their] household is thought to be” (40-41). For Father Jack, the Ryangans are “remarkable people” because “there is no distinction between the religious and the secular in their culture.” (48) As an advocate for Celtic Ireland, Father Jack disapproves the predominance of Catholicism in Irish Free State. It is not astonishing then that he adopts paganism and endorses African rituals.

Hayden White states that histories “gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles” (*Tropics* 83). Following White’s theory, in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel records de Valera’s Free State’s history through the everydayness in the Mundy household. As a result of Father Jack’s disapproval of strict Catholic doctrine of the Free State, he is sent home after a twenty-five year service as a chaplain in the English army in Uganda, and Kate loses her job as a parish school teacher a few months after his homecoming. Like other members in the Mundy household, Father Jack is exiled and estranged in the homeland as his alienation and diaspora correlate to his homecoming.

With reference to White’s theory, Friel, in the narrative of his play, displays the disastrous effects of economic modernization as well as socio-political changes in de Valera’s Free State on the members of the Mundy family. Friel portrays the repressed lives of six single siblings in the Mundy household; five sisters and their brother Father Jack, whose marriage becomes unaffordable as a result of the Free State’s economic decline. Maggie says to her brother: “We are all in the same boat, Jack, we’re hoping that you’ll hunt about and get men for all of us” (40). While dancing, she hugs the turf bucket to fill the void of the long overdue husband.

Maggie expresses her desperate need for a man as she says “If I had to choose between one Wild Woodbine [her favorite cigarette] and a man of – say-fifty two- widower-plump, what would I do, Kate? I’d take fatso, wouldn’t I? God, I really am getting desperate.” Then she eagerly asks her brother Father Jack “Could you guarantee a man for each of us?” (62) The single Mundy sisters express their need for a man to escape their miserable void life. When Gerry Evans is seen coming up the lane, the sisters are thrown into chaos, and each one of them “dashes about in confusion-peering into the tiny mirror, bumping into one another, peeping out the window, combing hair” (24). Despite their desire for love and marriage, the Mundy sisters remain single.

Even Rose Mundy, the “simple” sister, elopes with a married man who has three children to the back hills where they spend the whole day and go for a picnic on the lake with his father’s boat. Rose’s attitude aggravates Kate as the latter angrily asks “What has happened to this house? . . . Will we ever be able to lift our heads ever again . . .?” (59) Even Kate, the conservative matriarch of the family who is an example of strict Catholicism, is in love with Austin Morgan, a businessman in Ballybeg, and is teased by her “simple” sister Rose for loving him “you wanted to see

Austin Morgan! . . . Why are you blushing then? She's blushing, isn't she? Why-why-why, Kate?" (10) As a matter of fact, matrimony which is essential for the stability of the family is never found in the Mundy household.

In the Irish Free State, the stability of the family which is the most important institution in society is based on marriage. As subsection 3.1 in *Ireland's Constitution* confirms, "The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the family is founded, and to protect it against attack" (35). No wonder then that the five unmarried Mundy sisters are estranged and exiled in a society where the stability of the family as well as the welfare of its members is based on wedlock. This perspective conforms to the principles of the predominant Catholic Church in Irish Free State. Therefore, Kate repudiates Father Jack's approval of polygamy, and furiously says "I don't think it's what Pope Pius XI [head of the Catholic Church 1922-39] considers to be the holy sacrament of matrimony" (63). As aforementioned, due to the economic decline in the Free State, marriage became unaffordable, and, as a result, singlehood prevailed.

As subsection 2.1 in *Ireland's Constitution* asserts, "The State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" (35). Therefore, in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel emphasizes the rules of the patriarchal norms at that time in rural Ireland showing women's commitment to domestic duties. Accordingly, most action of the play is set in the Irish country kitchen of the Mundy household that takes "more than half the area of the stage" (*DL Set*).

Overwhelmed and dissatisfied with excessive domestic duties imposed on women in the patriarchal society of Ireland, Agnes expresses her frustration towards the depressing life in the Mundy household as she complains to Kate: "I wash every stitch of clothes you wear. I polish your shoes. I make your bed. We both do – Rose and I. Paint the house. Sweep the chimney. Cut the grass. Save the turf, what you have here, Kate, are two unpaid servants" (24). As this quote shows, Agnes revolts against the domestic duties of women sanctified by the Constitution of Irish Free State.

As a matter of fact, de Valera's Free State failed to protect the institution of the family or to prevent the devastation of its domestic economy. The Free State's modern industrialization restrains the domestic sphere of the Mundy sisters and marginalizes them as working women in domestic domain. They struggle to survive the consequent financial privation. Rose and Agnes are extremely frustrated as their hand-knitted gloves could not be bought anymore because "a new factory started up in Donegal Town. They make machine gloves more quickly there and far more

cheaply. The people Vera used to supply buy their gloves direct from the factory now” (52-53). Rose and Agnes lose their job as glove-knitters to the knitting machines in the newly built factories. The Mundys’ domestic craft is deteriorated because “The Industrial Revolution had finally caught up with Ballybeg” (59). The industrial invasion and economic stagnancy in the Free State result in very low marriage rates. Therefore, the five unmarried Mundy sisters undergo emotional as well as sexual deprivation.

It is interesting to point out that the Mundy sisters find in dancing an escape from privation and repression. Dancing becomes a vital part of the sisters’ life. They are so pleased with Marconi, the wireless set, that gives vividness and gaiety to their dull life by filling the Mundy household with Irish dance music. Through narrative memory, Friel demonstrates in his play an important phenomenon in Irish Free State. In 1920s Ireland, dancing was officialized. Yu-chen Lin states:

The Gaelic League of Ireland was restructured as the Irish Dancing Commission in 1929 to focus on directing the course of Irish dance. To this end the Commission regulated the dance by publishing a series of guidelines on dance steps included in its repertoires, and by imposing the requirement of a license for dancing masters, who were expected to be Gaelic speakers. (200)

As this quote shows, dancing is a deeply rooted tradition in the history of Ireland. In his play, Friel records this important social phenomenon by emphasizing the effect of dancing on the repressed lives of the Mundy family members.

According to White, as revealed in *Tropics of Discourse*, history “has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal” in the interest of appearing “scientific and objective.” Moreover, as he states, “history as a discipline is in bad shape today because it has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination” (99). In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel follows White’s theory in using his literary imagination to record important events in the Irish Free State. Through recalling the past and conjuring memories, Friel’s characters refer to important events in 1930s Ireland. Maggie remembers when she used to dance with her friend Bernie O’Donnell, and she won the second prize in the dancing competition on “the Best Military Two-Step” (20). Also, Gerry Evans gives dancing lessons in Dublin and has “thousands of pupils – millions” because, as he explains, everybody wants to dance (28). He advises Agnes to teach dancing in Ballybeg.

As a matter of fact, dancing serves as a metaphor and a central image in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. At the outset of the play, Michael vividly remembers the Mundy kitchen “throbbing with the beat of Irish dance music,” and how his mother and her sisters “suddenly catching hands and dancing a spontaneous step-dance and laughing-screaming! –like excited schoolgirls” (2). For the Mundy sisters, dancing signifies rebirth and

transformation, and keeps them "in touch with other forces" (66). The traditional Irish music invigorates women's bodies, and helps them to rebel against their sexual repression and to express restrained desires and eruptive emotions.

The Mundy sisters find in dancing, in Justyna Dabrowska's words, some kind of "sexual satisfaction" and "a kind of orgasmic pleasure" that are only affordable in the state of marriage (65). By dancing, the Mundy sisters momentarily forget their suffocating lives and restrained society. Through dancing, they defy the authoritarian paradigms of Church and State. As a result of the strict Catholic doctrine in Ballybeg, Lughnasa ritual dance is held in the "back hills" away from the eyes of the parish.

As a strict Catholic, Kate objects her sisters' participation in Lughnasa pagan festival criticizing those who participate as "savages." To Kate's criticism, Agnes replies "I don't care how young they are, how drunk and dirty and sweaty they are. I want to dance, Kate. It's the festival of Lughnasa. I'm only thirty-five. I want to dance." Kate fiercely refuses saying "Do you want the whole countryside to be laughing at us? –women of our years? –mature women, dancing? What's come over you all?" (13) Although the Mundy sisters are forbidden by Kate to join in the pagan festival of Lughnasa, they burst into joyous circular dance within the confines of their kitchen which, as Laurie Brands Gagne states, is "ritually significant as a celebration of life" (124). Through dancing, the Mundy sisters long for a life void of misfortunes and frustration.

In their dance, "the movements seem caricatured; and the sound is too loud; and the beat is too fast." Their dance is "grotesque" because "instead of holding hands, they have their arms tightly around one another's neck, one another's waist." While dancing, a sense of order is being "consciously subverted, of the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves, indeed of near-hysteria being induced" (21-22). When the Mundy sisters, in Ines Praga Terente's words, join in this "frenzied dance," they overstep "forbidden boundaries" (83). As a matter of fact, through the sisters' dance, Friel demonstrates their longing for a male partner, and expresses their physical as well as spiritual privation in the Irish Free State.

Even Kate whose Catholic principles prevent her from joining her sisters and has been watching the dancing scene "with unease, with alarm," suddenly "leaps to her feet, flings her head back, and emits a loud 'Yaaaah!'" Though her sisters are shouting and singing to each other while dancing, Kate makes no sound. She "dances alone, totally concentrated, totally private, a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic." Kate's dance is "a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time ominous of some deep and true emotion" (22). Kate's character is thoroughly reflected in her dance. Her way of dancing signifies the

conflicting parts of her character that are “controlled” and “frantic” at the same time.

It seems that each of the Mundy sisters, in Kramer’s words, “is provided with custom-made choreography, strongly suggesting that the dance has been created to characterize them individually” (176). By their ritual dance, the Mundy sisters feel attached to their Irish roots. Like his sisters, Father Jack finds in dancing an expression of his repressed desires and a remuneration for his losses. He celebrates an African pagan festival for “Obi”, like Lughnasa, by ritual dancing. While dancing, Father Jack “begins to shuffle - dance in time to his tattoo -his body slightly bent over, his eyes on the ground, [and] his feet moving rhythmically” (42). In his play, Friel underlines the potentiality of the dancing bodies to challenge the institutional repression of the time.

It is interesting to point out that the sisters’ endorsement of the pagan ritual dancing of Lughnasa coincides with that of Father Jack’s ritual dancing of pagan Obi. This coincidence underlines their rebellion against strict Catholicism of de Valera’s Free State and their revival of the pre-Christian Irish culture. Through dancing, the Mundy family members express their nostalgia for pre-colonial Celtic Ireland that was free from the authoritarian Catholicism, and for a past when they were younger and had better opportunities for love and marriage.

In addition to the sisters’ ritual dance of Lughnasa, a romantic dance is performed by Chris and Gerry Evans, Michael’s father. The dance is recalled and described by Michael who watches them from behind a bush. For Chris, this dance serves as the long-desired wedding ceremony. When Gerry leaves after the dance to fight with the International Brigades, she “grieved as any bride would grieve” although they “didn’t go through a conventional form of marriage” (42). Theirs is a dance without music as their movements and expressions reflect their feelings better than words.

Unlike the erratic ritual dance of the Mundy sisters, the couple’s movements come “slowly, formally, with easy deliberation.” Michael describes his mother “with her head thrown back, her eyes closed, her mouth slightly open.” His father “holding her just that little distance away from him so that he could regard her upturned face.” In their romantic dance, there is “[n]o singing, no melody, no words. Only the swish and whisper of their feet across the grass” (42). Unlike the sisters’ ritual dance that takes place within domestic barriers, Chris’s dance is performed in the garden. This venue underlines her sexual transgression, as an unmarried mother, as she could break herself free and transgresses home confines as well as patriarchal and Catholic doctrines.

Unable to fit the norms constructed by Irish Free State, the two sisters Agnes and Rose escaped from home in September 1936. They refused to be estranged and exiled in their homeland. Therefore, like thousands of Irish people at that time, they emigrated from Ireland to search for better

opportunities. They settled in London where they worked as “cleaning women in public toilets, in factories, in the underground,” and “took to drink; slept in parks, in doorways, on the Thames Embankment” (60). When they were tracked down by Michael after twenty five years, Agnes was dead of exposure and Rose was dying in a hospice. After a diaspora-like leave, the two sisters confront their tragic end away from the confines of home. Their hope of liberty and openness leads to loss and destruction. This underlines the Free State's failure to support single women or to protect their domestic economy.

After her sisters' departure, Chris spent the rest of her life working in a knitting factory in Ballybeg to sustain her family financially although, as narrated by Michael, she “hated every day of it” (70). After his inauspicious homecoming, Father Jack is estranged in Catholic Ireland, and refuses to say Mass as Michael states “he never said Mass again. And the neighbors stopped enquiring about him. And his name never again appeared in the Donegal Enquirer” (60). Though his health improved, and his vocabulary was recovered, Father Jack died suddenly of a heart attack within a year of his homecoming in the evening of the following Lughnasa. By Father Jack's death, the disintegration of the Mundy family becomes inevitable.

Although his sisters Chris and Maggie mourned him sorely, Kate, as a strict Catholic, was inconsolable. By Rose's and Agnes's departure as well as Father Jack's death, as Michael states, “the heart seemed to go out of the house” (70). According to Yu-chen Lin, in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Michael commemorates “a lost home along with its strangers at home as well as naturalized diasporans who practiced a gift economy which triumphs over power, be it state, religion, or industrialization” (211). As a matter of fact, the social, economic and religious changes in Irish Free State turn the family members self-alienated, strangers, physically and metaphorically exiled, and bring about the disintegration of the Mundy family. This dissolution is foreboded by the “crude, cruel, grinning” faces that are painted on Michael's kites which symbolize, in Kramer's words, “the ominous fate that surrounds the family,” and represent “flight and escape from a restrictive Catholic ideology” (179).

As the play opens with a delightful memory of dancing, it concludes with a special dance in which the whole company participates. As stated by Michael, in this memory of dancing “everything is simultaneously actual and illusory.” In spite of his authority over the past, Michael refrains from giving an explicit picture of the present by retreating of his memory which, as he decides, “owes nothing to fact.” In this last dance, everybody moves to the “dream music” in “complete isolation.” All the characters dance in a “wordless ceremony” in which “language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary.” For the characters, “the very heart of life and all

its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements.” In this last dance, language is replaced by movement. This body language “is the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness” (71). The non-verbal rhythms of this last dance express repressed desires and emotions of the Mundy sisters, and convey a strong desire for integration.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, through false memory, according to O’toole as revealed in “The Truth according to Brian Friel,” the characters try to escape the “tyranny of history” and “the relentless grip of time.” It seems that this last dance signifies, in Andrew’s words, “a mysterious libidinal energy” and “a force for change,” and revives vigor and hope in the repressed lives of the unmarried Mundy sisters (233). The wordless tunes of this traditional Irish music signify the sisters’ lifelong repression and their rebellion against the ideological restraints imposed on them by Church and State.

As a result of the turbulent changes of the new Republic, all characters of the Mundy family, even those who are confined within barriers of home, undergo diaspora and a severe feeling of exile. In his essay “Marking Time: From Making History to *Dancing at Lughnasa*,” O’Toole states that in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, “[t]ime cannot be stopped, history cannot be escaped” (213). Friel’s narrator in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, like a historian, “experiences a degree of enlightenment and attempts to present what he considers causes and effects of the family breakup” (Kramer 176). As can be understood from this quote, in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel’s narrative is deliberately mingled with historical events of the time.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel examines the plights of self-estrangement, of emotional and sexual repression in Irish Free State that is plagued with famine, emigration and decline. As Yu-chen Lin states, the play is “an exercise of poetical ethics which, heralding the kind of stories Mary Robinson [an Irish independent politician who served as the seventh president of Ireland (1990-1997)] delighted in, amounts to a counter-history to fulfill its responsibility for the dead” (211). Like a historian, in his memory play, Friel, by re-visioning history, sets his literary imagination free in order to “emplot” the main historical events in 1930s Ireland. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel presents a vivid panorama of everyday life in a rural Irish household whose members struggle to fit the norms of modern industrialization and to cope with the socio-economic conditions of Irish Free State.

الملخص:

إعادة رؤية للتاريخ من خلال الذاكرة في مسرحية بريان فرييل "الرقص في لوناसा" أمال سعد ابوالليل ضاحي

يعتبر براين فرييل (1929- 2015) كاتباً إيرلندياً بارزاً في مجال المسرح والقصة القصيرة. استمر عمل فرييل خمسون عاماً وامتدت شهرته خارج حدود إيرلندا. "الرقص في لوناسا" (1990) هي واحدة من أبرز مسرحيات فرييل الخاصة بالذاكرة. نسبة الي "لو" "لوناسا" هي الشعائر الوثنية لأحتفال الحصاد الكيلتي في التاريخ الشعبي الايرلندي. من خلال الذاكرة القصصية سجل براين فرييل في مسرحية "الرقص في لوناسا" سلسلة من الاحداث التاريخية واثراها علي شخصياته الحيوية. بدلا من اقامة احداث مسرحية في عام 1990 قام فرييل بوضعها في الثلاثينيات من القرن العشرين ليتتبع الاحوال الاجتماعية والاقتصادية وكذلك الاحداث التاريخية في ايرلندا في دولة ايمون دي فاليرا المستقلة.

من وجهة نظر مابعد الحداثة يعتبر التاريخ مثل الذاكرة امرا ذاتيا فقد ذكر هايدن وايت المؤرخ الامريكي المنتمي لنظرية ما بعد الحداثة في كتابه "مدارات الحديث" ان "القصص التاريخية تعتبر تماما ادوات لفظية ومن الممكن ان تصنف عن طريق الحديث المجازي التي توجد فيه"94 وحسبما يصرح هايدن وايت " المؤرخ من الممكن ان يصوغ الاحداث التاريخية كقصة ويصيغهم علي شكل قصص وبهذا فهو يقصد صياغة الحقائق التاريخية علي انها مكونات لانواع معينة من بناء الحكمة الروائية" (83) ولهذا فان الاحداث التاريخية من الممكن ان تعامل علي انها روايات قصصية وهذا يعني انها تخضع للتحليل والتفسير والاهم من هذا انها مثل الذاكرة تخضع لوجهة نظر الراوي او المفسر.

ان الهدف الرئيسي لتلك الورقة البحثية هو بحث كيفية تعامل براين فرييل مع التاريخ – طبقا لنظرية هايدن وايت – علي انه ذاكرة شخصية قابلة للتغيير ومعتمدة علي الخيال والاحداث القصصية اكثر من اعتمادها علي الحقائق. في مسرحيته الخاصة بالذاكرة يحاول فرييل ان يقدم إعادة رؤية واضحة للتاريخ لكي يحوله الي سلسلة من الاحداث الروائية ليوضح اثرها علي حياة شخصياته.

الكلمات الدالة: براين فرييل- الرقص في لوناسا- الذاكرة- إعادة رؤية للتاريخ- هايدن وايت

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