

EXPRESSIONISTIC AND BRECHTIAN VARIATIONS IN BRIAN FRIEL'S THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to examine Brian Friel's debt to two seemingly opposed theatrical movements, i.e., expressionism and Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre in his play, *The Freedom of the City* (1973). Friel was aiming to handle the multilayered, complicated and emotionally charged theme of the play in as emotionally detached a way as possible. Thus, he resorted to many expressionistic devices as well as various alienating effects from Brecht's epic theatre. The play is regarded in one way or another as a reaction to the events of "Bloody Sunday" at Derry, Northern Ireland in 1972, which resulted in the death of a large number of civilians by the time of the play's first performance. However, the play does not confine its concern to this particular historical event, but broadens its scope to include other political, economic and social predicaments in Ireland. Although expressionism reigns supreme in the play's form and its cinematic structure that teams with flashbacks and prolepsis, its tools are craftily subverted by Friel to culminate into a distancing ironical effect, which suits Friel's critical view of the main political parties in the Irish scene. Among the numerous alienating effects of Brecht's epic theatre that Friel manipulates is the excessive use of commentators and narrators and the episodic structure of the play. The study concludes that the ironical trait of the play and the detaching techniques of epic theatre that Friel used in handling a too emotionally charged event in the Irish history, undermined the play's reception on the Irish stage by both Republicans and Unionists.

Key Words: Brian Friel, Brecht, Expressionism, Irish Politics.

INTRODUCTION

The study of Brian Friel's total output reveals that in the 1970s, he has moved to a phase of his career in which his dramaturgy has acquired a more assured approach in terms of both form and content. As for the latter, Friel begins to widen the scope of his interest; to move from the realm of private selves and past memories into that of "collective experience and collective existence" as O'Brien puts it (1990, 76). Thus, Friel moved from the depiction of the private world and inner thoughts of single individuals (Gar in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, and Cass in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*), towards a more widely social outlook and an increasing concern for the workings of certain social institutions on the individual's life.

This "critical attention" in Friel's outlook is more elaborately explained by Friel himself who was seeking to get rid of "being silently exploited by the ease with which he could satisfy the taste for Irishness which institutions like the *New Yorker* and the Irish theatre had become so expert in establishing". He argues further that in spite of the worldwide success of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, it has been "virtuoso performance" and "fine writing" of the kind of "Irish eloquence, which had come to be expected from Irish playwrights in particular" (1996, 16). Friel wanted to cast this closely private formula of art and began to look forward to a more serious and a more relevant approach to the pressing issues of the present. Plays like *The Mundy Scheme* (1962), *The Freedom of the City* (1973), and *Volunteers* (1975), illustrate a growing tendency towards a satirical outlook of the political and social institutions in Northern Ireland. Of these, *The Freedom of the City* is the most powerful and the one that is characterized by a daring venture into supra-realistic realms.

A POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The Freedom of the City takes the British occupation of Ireland and its tense political drawbacks on the Irish politics as its backdrop. Northern Ireland was known to be among the areas where the conflict is most acute and where the Catholic majority was suffering from discrimination in employment and housing. In spite of the fact that it was inhabited by a Catholic Nationalist majority, the local government posts remained in the hands of the Protestant Unionists. Buckland indicates that "seventy per cent of the Corporation's administrative, clerical and technical employees were non-Catholics" and that Protestants "held nine of the ten best paid jobs" (1981: 116-17). The 1970s witnessed violent confrontations between the Protestant Unionists and the Catholic Nationalists. J. H. Whyte states that the government, in order to take measures against the operations of the I. R. A., resorted to internment as a means to control the violent wave of assassinations. However, "internment was used mainly against the Catholic Republicans although extreme Protestant Unionists had done as much to provoke the crisis" (1984: 346). The Republicans in turn, mounted demonstrations against internment. 30 January, 1972 (Bloody Sunday) witnessed one of these demonstrations which had violent bloody

consequences. Thirteen people of the marchers were shot dead by the British army, an act that “caused a wave of revulsion across Nationalist Ireland”, and the British embassy in Dublin was burnt down on 2 February, as Whyte indicates (1984: 346). George O’Brien argues that although it was not the first act of violence against civilians by the British army in Northern Ireland, “its scale shocked the country” (1990: 20). People’s emotions were further stirred after the “Widgery Report” of the British tribunal that exonerated the British soldiers who shot the civilians.

Being a Catholic living in Northern Ireland, Brian Friel was actively involved in the events, and according to Pine, Friel shared in the civil rights marches and was among the marchers in Bloody Sunday (1990, 106). In an interview with Fintan O’Toole in 1982, Friel recollects the terrifying experience:

To be there on that occasion and - I didn't actually see people get shot - but I mean, to have to throw yourself on the ground because people are firing at you is a very terrifying experience. Then the whole cover-up afterwards was shattering too. (1982: 22).

On the literary level, however, Friel had tried throughout the first phase of his career to adopt an objectively detached attitude to the troubles in Northern Ireland. He stated in 1971: “I have no objectivity in this situation; I am too involved emotionally to view it with calm” (Quoted in Hickey and Smith, 1972: 221). However, Friel was criticized by the Nationalist Catholic community for his “failure” to represent their plight throughout his art. Etherton points out:

The violence after 1969 was a direct challenge to Friel’s poetic vision and to his dramatic abilities.... Friel’s response was to overturn his “comfortable” drama, and find dramatic structures for the failure of the intellectual *petit bourgeoisie*, (1989: 165).

Although Friel stated that he wrote *The Freedom of the City* “out of some kind of heat and some kind of immediate passion”, as O’Toole (1989: 22) puts it, or perhaps because of that, he was at pains to curb the intensity of emotions related to the events and to produce as much a detached account of the troubles as he could. Hence his choice of the alienating methods of Brecht’s epic theatre to be the basic technique on which the play is built. He even subverted the expressionistic form and features that he manipulated in the play to serve the same purpose, i.e., emotional distance.

THE FREEDOM OF THE CITY: STORY AND THEMES

The action takes place in Derry City (the site of Bloody Sunday) at the Guildhall, the residence of the Unionist Government where three marchers in a civil right demonstration take refuge of the tear gas and water cannons used by the British Army to disperse the demonstration. Unaware, Skinner, a doing-nothing guy, Lily, a charwoman and a mother of eleven children, and Michael, an unemployed aspiring young man, find themselves in the Mayor’s parlour at Guildhall. Thus the three Nationalist marchers end up being inside the symbol of the Unionist government against which they are demonstrating. After the awe of the place fades away, they entertain themselves with the luxuries at the Mayor’s office. They remain there for a few hours waiting for disorder to be quelled in the streets. During those hours, rumours spread quickly that the Guildhall has been broken into and seized by fifty members of the I.R.A. Immediately, a formidable array of British forces headed by Brigadier Johnson Hansbury line up surrounding the Guildhall to face the “terrorists” inside. The British Brigadier speaks to them throughout the loudhailer asking them to lay down their arms and proceed to the front entrance with their hands above their heads. They obey the order having no idea of the ominous fate that awaits them; high-velocity rifles shoot them down immediately on emerging from the Guildhall entrance. A final report is issued by the British court indicating that the British forces were not guilty. Their story is turned into the myth of the three nationalist “heroes” who defied the British oppression.

The tragic sense of a hovering calamity prevails over the atmosphere of *The Freedom*. The humorous remarks of Skinner in his transgression of the Mayor’s private luxuries and the funny tales of Lily about her domestic life, arouse laughter and create a softening effect against the play’s tragic backdrop. Yet, the sense of doom is prevalent throughout.

EXPRESSIONISTIC STRUCTURE AND BRECHT’S STAMP

Expressionism prevails the form and structure of *The Freedom of the City*. Though formally divided into two acts, the play is structurally based on a highly complicated time scheme, including the retrospective technique, flashbacks and prolepsis that cover several scenes¹. Our initial knowledge of the tragic death of the three people is frequently foreshadowed in scenes of haunting prolepsis that cut through the main action; those include the tribunal, the Balladeer’s songs and the post-mortem report of the pathologist.

In a play like *The Loves of Cass Mc Guire*, the present is the point of departure, constantly haunted by past memories. In *The Freedom*, the future is the point of departure; the play begins by the actual death

of the three central characters and moves back in time in a circular way to reach the starting point. However, this is not achieved in a smooth way; the flow of events is incessantly interrupted by future events. This is found for example in the tribunal and the television coverage of the event. It is also interrupted by the commentators' accounts that take place in the present, i.e., during the trio's stay at the Guildhall (the soldiers' radio signals, the voices spreading rumours, the Balladeer). Moreover, the entries of Dodds in the midst of all this are completely out of time and place. The play's structure is comparable to that of a cinematic film in which the regular sequence of time is shattered. All these elements testify to the expressionistic stamp that is conspicuous throughout the play.

In *Freedom*, the trio's death is established from the first moments. As Niel puts it, "the maximum cruelty represented in the play appears without any forewarning in this opening scene and one is constantly aware of it during the rest of the play." (1987: 353). This serves as a distancing trick that blocks the gradually heightening sympathy with the tragic hero, which may culminate in shedding tears in realistic drama, or the sense of cathartic effect of a Greek play. Concerning this point Michael Etherton compares the audience's "unquestioning behavior" in this play to that of the Athenian audience at a performance of Sophocles' *Oedipus*. (1989: 168). In both cases, the audience has full knowledge of the outcome of the flow of action, which the characters themselves are ignorant of. No doubt, a sense of irrepressible fate hovers over the three characters whose death is certain, an element that is first presented by Friel in *Winners* and that is to recur later, especially in *Living Quarters*. However, introducing the cruelest act at the starting moment creates a matter-of-fact attitude in the audience's perception of it and baffles empathy, thus distancing the audience emotionally.

THE AFTER-DEATH EPISODE AS ADISTANCING DEVICE

One of Friel's most overriding devices that caused controversy among critics which George O'Brien regards as "one of the play's most arresting strokes", (1990: 80) is that scene in which he allows his three dead characters to speak to the audience from the after world telling them about their thoughts and impressions at the very moment preceding death.

In fact, this stylized sequence remains a queer tissue within the whole texture of the play, no matter how non-realistic the play might be. This is owing to the fact that throughout the whole play, the three central characters are distinguished from the rest of the dramatic personae by real human properties, in a way that makes it baffling to have them on stage, in the middle of action, as spirits, speaking, as Friel stipulates, "calmly, without emotion, in neutral accents" (1996: 149).

In this scene, Brian Friel assigns the task of a Brechtian "Commentator" to each of the three characters to comment on his/her own feelings and attitudes toward the events after death. This device is closely related to Brecht's *Gestus*, a style of acting that requires actors to create a distance between themselves and the roles they are performing. They should play the characters without convincing either the audience or themselves that they have "become" the characters. Michael, Lily and Skinner literally step outside themselves and start to analyze their life, a device that remarkably serves the alienating effect that Brecht was at pains to teach the actors. In a dialogue quoted in *Brecht On Theatre*, he gives the example of the servant in *Oedipus* while announcing Jocasta's death. Her "dead, dead" was announced "in a wholly unemotional and penetrating voice. Her "Jocasta has died" without any sorrow, but so firmly and definitely..." (1978: 28). Such a technique aims at both targets: to capture an attitude rather than delving into empathy, and to introduce the character as a representative of a social type rather than an individual.

Nicholas Grene objects to this highly stylized device and regards it as "a mistake": "In dramatic context this seems like a false note. Friel as dramatist has taken over the role of interpreter denying to the characters their dramatic sovereignty, and substituting his own more articulate more self-conscious voice for theirs" (1986:67). Likewise, Andrews believes that this scene of Michael's Skinner's and Lily's speech is a less "skillfully deployed break with the conventions of naturalism" than the framing technique of the play" (1993: 36). Niel, however, maintains that this supra-realistic device, "give(s) new insights into the characters, into aspects of their personalities, which cannot be deduced from their behavior" (1987, 353)

Whether this device is successful or not, we cannot judge Friel's play according to the limits of realistic drama, since it is made clear from the very beginning that the author has freed himself from the conventions of realistic characterization and plot. Friel's stylized soliloquies are perhaps the "knot" that Brecht recommended to separate the episodes of action in order to give the audience, as Brecht indicates, "a chance to interpose their judgment, an activity that seems unlikely, were the episodes made to "succeed one another indistinguishably." (1987: 201).

In order to check the emotional flow attached to *Bloody Sunday* as an emotionally charged event for the Irish, Friel resorts to many techniques in Brecht's epic theatre. These primarily include the use of

many interruptions of the main action by commentators, witnesses and singers, and the cutting of the action into disconnected episodes and sequences, a method that is typical also of expressionistic drama. Moreover, Friel handles many moments of high intensity in as detached a way as possible. For example, the moment of the trio's death is not presented in the traditional melodramatic way that usually promotes the flow of emotion. While the three characters stand still in the dark with spot lights beaming on their faces "... the air is filled with a fifteen- second burst of automatic fire. It stops. The three stand as before, staring out, their hands above their heads. Black-out"(1996: 169).

Thus, that moment acquires a supra-realistic dimension and a timeless significance that supports the case of the three killed people and surpass its immediate, local and historical relevance. The dating of the events in 1970, i.e., two years before the events, is another alienating device. Dantanus prefers that no date should have been given, "since it hardly matters when it happened, only that it did" (1988: 134). Still another important point is the fact that, apart from the tribunal proceedings and the Balladeer's song, the play does not include the aftermath details of the tragic events. For example, we as audience are told nothing about Lily's invalid husband and her eleven after her death, a device that reduces sentimentality and bathos.

IRONY AND SATIRE AS FRIEL'S ULTIMATE GOAL

A persistent sense of irony is running through *The Freedom of the City*, especially those scenes presenting the various official and public commentaries on the events. There is a glaringly poignant contrast between what we see before our eyes and what we hear from the various commentators including the Judge, the Priest, the Balladeer, Mr. Dodds, and O'Kelly the television commentator. Ruth Niel significantly remarks: "the comments in this play do not help to clarify the situation, they are turned into a critique of the political situation in Northern Ireland (1987, 354).

On the political level, Friel's play is a plea against the British interference, injustice, discrimination and the division of Northern Ireland into conflicting sectors; Unionists and Republicans, Catholics and Protestants. Friel's background as a Catholic Nationalist shows itself in the poignant satire he directs at the exaggerated British military forces facing three unarmed people. The play is also an indignant cry at the judicial system where the tramping up of accusations, and unverified hasty condemnation of innocent people victimized the three marchers. Two at least of the trio were condemned for carrying and using arms, an accusation whose groundlessness is verified. Friel's criticism is also directed at overzealous Nationalists who turn any ordinary event into a dignified unreal myth to play on the mob's sensation; this is clearly deducible from the drunken Balladeer's songs.

Corruption in Northern Ireland's economic system is another target of criticism. As it is clearly shown in Professor Dodd's sociological theorizing: "... in my own country of "magnificent affluence", the richest country in the history of civilization, twenty percent of the population live in extreme poverty." (163). Michael, Lily and Skinner belong to this proportion. The two young men are workless and Lily is a charwoman. Their poverty is demonstrated by their awestruck reaction to the luxurious furnishing of the Mayor's parlour. Skinner's speech includes satirical allusions to governmental extravagance on trivial matters including parties, trips, festivals and animals' rights.

Moreover, the passive role of the church is represented by the Priest who changes his attitude according to the authorities' instructions. His remoteness from the people is suggested by placing him high up the battlements, ironically the same place of the British Judge. Mass media including pressmen and R. T. E commentators do not escape Friel's satirical campaign for circulating rumours and uncertain news. On the human and universal levels, the play shows how the perception of facts is coloured by social and political prejudices. Each of the different voices commenting on the events avoid confronting the truth and present a false interpretation to serve certain prejudices. As Andrews observes: "the confrontation of ideals with reality is the central theme and Friel exalts the present physical experience over the static iconography of the mythical (1995, 135).

CHARACTERS AS EXPRESSIONISTIC TYPES WITH A BRECHTIAN TINCTURE

As Elmer Andrews states, the play includes "two different moods of characterization employed for the personal and public lives (1993, 35). On the public level, there are the commentators and narrators who are presented as lacking in the human characteristics of those found in realistic drama. The characters in *The Freedom of the City* are stamped by the expressionistic technique that apparently diverges with Brecht's idea of the epic theatre. As in most expressionistic plays, we have types of characters with nameless designations such as the Judge, the Priest, the Balladeer, the Soldiers as well as speaking corpses. Regardless of the three main characters, almost all other characters are "strongly dehumanized"; Dantanus attributes this partly to their brief and intermittent appearance, which can never establish them fully as real characters (1988: 138). Friel uses all these characters to serve his

satirical purpose. The Judge represents justice from the point of view of the oppressors. In his symbolically high position on the battlements, he is utterly isolated from the reality of suffering people. His biased attitude is apparent from the start as he discards all the details that suggest the good intention of the trio and accepts only the evidences that condemn them. Similarly, the Priest represents the passive accomplice man of church, who is definitely remote from people and facts. In his first sermon, he flatters the mob's emotions by his sensational speech. In his second one, apparently being goaded by the authorities to change his attitude, he betrays the three victims by insinuating that they have been misled by a terrorist movement. The drunk Balladeer represents the ignorant propagandists who transform any simple event into a dignified myth to arouse the mob's sensations. The journalist, the press officer and the television commentators embody the media men who spread inaccurate and undocumented news and who unforgivably discard the truth while flattering either the public or the elite. Among all these the truth is hopelessly lost.

Professor Dodds, the American sociologist, has nothing to do with what is taking place on-stage; he enters to recite to the audience his own theories on the cultural, sociological and psychological characteristics of the poor. And he exits without interfering with action. For all the redundant effect that his existence may arouse, his words may have some relevance to the behaviour of the trio inside the Guildhall. Unlike all the other public interpretations of the event, Dodds' theories on the psychological behavior of the poor may seem pertinent to Skinner's playful gestures. For example, immediately on finishing his statement about the "people with a culture of poverty (who) often have a hell of a lot more fun than we have"; Skinner flings open the dressing room door in a splendid mayoral robe, quoting Shakespeare: "you're much deceived; in nothing am I changed/ but in my garments!" (135).

In a Brechtian play, it is always the figure of the narrator or the commentator that clarifies the action and expresses the author's perception of the reality. In *The Freedom of the City*, however, the various official commentators turn out to be targets of the author's criticism, since they represent opposite biased attitudes. None of the different voices that narrate or comment on the events represents the truth. In this way, Friel subverted the function of a Brechtian commentator and presented those figures as a target for criticism.

On the other hand, Michael, Skinner and Lily are presented as common people from the working class who happen to be marchers in a civil rights' march and whose misfortune leads them to take shelter from the army attack in a building that turns out to be the Guildhall. Ironically, it is made clear through their speech and behaviour in the parlour that they have nothing to do with politics; none of them belong to any of the sectarian political divisions in Ireland.

Michael is an unemployed young man who aspires to ascend the social ladder through hard work and honest means. He aspires to be appointed in the Gas Board and is studying economics, business, administration and computer science to improve his social position. He is a devoted conformist, and he, as Andrews puts it: "doesn't want to change the system at all, only his place within it. He has all the respectable middle-class susceptibilities, including an exaggerated respect for authority." (1995:130). He believes that through discipline and peaceful means people can get their rights "that's what we must show them – that we're responsible and respectable; and they'll come to respect what we're campaigning for" (129). The irony of his grossly innocent and perhaps foolish attitude is revealed when he tries to rehearse the moderate way the authorities will receive them, when they emerge from the Guildhall:

...they take our names and addresses, that's all they're entitled to ask for and that's all you're expected to give them. That's the law...Okay Lily? And if they try to get you to make a statement, you just say you're making no statement unless your solicitor's present" (157).

Even at the moment of death; unlike his two fellows, his attitude remains the same and he dies believing that "a terrible mistake had been made". As he puts it, he died "...in disbelief, in astonishment, in shock. It was a foolish way for a man to die" (150).

Unlike Michael, Skinner is a non-conformist who has a more correct insight of the political situation. But he does not belong to any of the movements or sects in his country. Ironically, his satirical wit and his "defensive flippancy" as he puts it, is all he has got in the face of oppression, discrimination and injustice. He is an orphan, workless guy who lives on his wits. He is the most daring of the three in making use of the Mayor's amenities and clothes. He is described by Friel as "very lean, very tense, very restless...a quick volatile mind driving a lean body" (105). Although Friel describes him as "glib", critics objected to the English linguistic fluency that such a homeless, uneducated "guttie" is granted. He articulates for Lily the reasons behind her participation in the civil rights' marches:

Because you exist on a state subsistence that's about enough to keep you alive, but too small to fire your guts. Because you know your children are caught in the same morass.... That's what it is all

about, Lily. It has nothing to do with doctors and accountants and teachers and dignity and Boy Scout honor. It's about us – the poor – the majority – stirring in our sleep (154).

Michael Etherton objects that Skinner "has come into the fabric of the drama from right outside it, as it were, and he has a privileged register of linguistic communication within it." (1998: 170). This is perhaps why many critics regard him as the spokesman of Friel. Skinner's last thoughts before the moment of death are centered upon:

... how seriously they took us and how unpardonably casual we were about them; and that to match their seriousness would demand a total dedication, a solemnity as formal as theirs (150)

Unlike Michael, Skinner's last moments before death add to his recognition and heighten his sense of "seriousness" and "dedication". Before he dies, he regrets leading a vacant purposeless life and we have the impression that had he been given a chance to live, he would have "mended (his) ways" and become totally devoted to the cause of his country.

It is noteworthy that Brecht, in plays like *Mother Courage* (1941) and *The Three Penny Opera*, does the same thing; he allows certain characters to express his own attitudes and viewpoints, as for example when soldiers philosophize on war, articulating Brecht's own message. As Ronland Hayman notes about Brecht's dialogue, "What the characters say has little to do with what their real life equivalents might have said in similar circumstances." (1984: 58). The same argument applies to Lily's after-death speech.

Unlike Michael and Skinner, Lily is satisfied at her sordid social and economic conditions. Her impoverished surroundings are graphically delineated through her tales about her neighbours, her husband and her mother-in-law. Her tragedy acquires a touchingly human shimmer when we become aware that she is the pillar of her family, "D'you see my wanes? if I'm not there, not one of them would lift a finger" (139). She manages to win our sympathy through her motherly attitude towards both Michael and Skinner. In spite of her poverty, she offers to receive Skinner at her house. "And you'll call in any time you want a bite to eat" (166). Lily's political awareness turns out to be nil. Although she marches every Saturday, she cannot state clearly why. When Skinner encourages her, she tells him her special reason: she marches for Declan, her Mongol child, a reason she regards as "stupid". As Andrews puts it, she is "the most dramatically appealing character in the play" (1995, 132). However, Lily's speech competencies are ultimately transformed in the supra-realistic episode. She becomes able to articulate her thoughts and to make abstract and moralizing judgements about her life, something she has been utterly unable to do when she is still alive.

... in the silence before my body disintegrated in a purple convulsion, I thought I glimpsed a tiny truth: that life had eluded me because never once in my forty- three years had an experience, an event, even a small unimportant happening been isolated and assessed and articulated. And the fact that this, my last experience, was defined by this perception, this was the culmination of sorrow. In a way I died of grief (150).

The three speeches of Michael, Lily and Skinner are comparable to a soliloquy by a Shakespearean tragic hero about to die. Antony's death speech is one example:

The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at, but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I lived: the greatest prince o'th' world,
The noblest; and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman.
(Antony and Cleopatra, 175).

Here, unlike our trio, Antony has the time enough, after falling on his sword, to state his final evaluation of his life, before breathing his last. Moreover, their limited scope of culture, especially that of Lily, makes it impossible for them to articulate such thoughts in such an elaborate and clear style; hence the significance of Friel's supra-realistic trick. Through that trick, he managed to create the exact effect that Brecht aimed at from theatrical performance, which should be "Witty. Ceremonious. Ritual" The actors and audience "ought not approach each other, but to move apart. Each ought to move away from himself." (1978, 26)

To conclude this section we may state that Brian Friel managed to weave the expressionistic technique of characterization that is usually meant to convey a subjective view, with the Brechtian narrator figure to achieve a sharply detaching effect of alienation and distance and to highlight his themes. Michael, Skinner and Lily are not meant to present authentic and genuine human individuals as much

as they are presented as abstract Brechtian prototypes created by the author to highlight an intended message that carries over into the form.

LANGUAGE AS SIGNIFYING NOTHING

Friel's language in *The Freedom of the City* encompasses a wide range of registers and tones, as various as the variety of voices the play embraces². The judicial register marks the proceedings of the tribunal; it is apparent primarily in the Judge's language that is marked by precision, exactness and clarity of expression. The military register is apparent in the language of soldiers and officers. The medical register marks the language of pathologists and experts. All these demonstrate Friel's wide range of culture shown in his facility with forensic, military and medical terminology. Besides those formal registers, there is the colloquial everyday language of the three central characters. The juxtaposition of all these speech forms reinforces the falsity of the formal speech that represents the official concoction of lies, and the authenticity of the three characters with whom we sympathize. As Andrews significantly puts it, "Language is now seen as the vehicle not only of personal illusion, but of public misrepresentation of the facts" (1995, 134).

Michael, the least talkative of the trio and the most reluctant to ridicule the authority, speaks a language that lacks the humour and vigour of Lily's and Skinner's language. Lily's language is rich with vivid and spontaneous images in the manner of an Sean O'Casey character. Her excessive use of interjections and whoops and exclamations, ("OJesus, Mary and Joseph", "Oooops!") enlivens the theatrical effect of her performance and suggests her limited scope of culture. Skinner is far more eloquent than both. His speech is inspired by wit, humour and his satiric genius; he is reminiscent of Private Gar in *Philadelphia Here I Come!*. In one of his deftly rapid speaking turns, Skinner parodies a meeting of the corporation, with unfailing satiric attack on the trivial concerns of the governments:

Have we a quorum? We have. Councilor-alderman... Item 1. Request for annual subscription for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I suggest we increase our sub to a hundred pounds. Agreed? Agreed... Item 4. Invitation to us all to attend the first night of the Amateur Opera Society's season and buffet supper afterwards. Of course we will (160).

As above-noted, his high fluency and facility with formal speech arouses the critics' objections. Etherton argues: "Friel sees nothing inconsistent in giving this "guttie" Skinner an intellectually fluent English register and making him quote from Kipling and Shakespeare" (1989: 169).

In general, concerning language in *The Freedom of the City*, it has nothing to do with expressionistic plays in which language is characterized by ambiguities, difficult allusions and unusual linguistic patterns. Friel manipulates language, not to delineate inner thoughts and feelings as in expressionistic plays, but to serve his ironical goal. It manifests Friel's developed concept of spoken language as an inadequate means to convey meaning.³ It is here used cleverly to incarnate the state of division and polarization that pervades the Irish society on the political, social and religious levels. It manifests the fact that in such a politically and socially divided society as that found in the Irish case, each party plays a different cord. The judicial authority, the army, the mass media, the nationalists – all have different false versions and interpretations of the events; Among all of these voices, the truth is distorted, twisted and lost.

CONCLUSION

Dantanus observes: "In many ways, *The Freedom of the City* is a most difficult play to deal with" (1988, 139). This remark is true on the thematic level owing to the historical and political thematic bifurcation of its content. It is also true on the technical level owing to the play's affirmed tendency to stylization in structure and characterization and its complicated time scheme. Friel's increasing tendency to lay more importance on stage lighting and off-stage sounds, adds to the play's theatricality among other Friel plays and affirms the expressionistic streak that runs clearly throughout. Etherton comments on that prominent feature of the play by saying: "The very theatricality of the play enhances the dramatic structure and conceals it. The audiences are made to confront their passivity". (1989: 167) Despite its artistic significance and its bold supra-realistic ventures, the play was met by "a hostile reception" as Etherton indicates (1989: 166). Political bias may have ruined the play's evaluation by several parties. It did not receive a warm welcome on the Broadway stage where it closed after nine performances. Understandably, the British critics dismissed the play as a political agitprop against the British rule. Dantanus refers to the fact that many British reviewers discarded the play as demonstrating "an over-zealous determination to discredit the means and motives of English in the present Ulster crisis." (*Evening Standard*), and as "an entertaining piece of unconvincing propaganda." (*Daily Telegraph*) (1988: 140). The Irish audience did not hail it either. Directing a sharp criticism to all Irish political parties, Friel ended up winning none of them. He wrote the play, as Parker indicates, "as a

response to the failures of nationalist and unionist politics, Irish and British governments to fulfil their responsibilities to the peoples of Northern Ireland since the state's inception." (Parker, 1999: 48). Friel did not mean to side with either of the two major conflicting sects in Ireland, i.e., the Protestant Unionists (who sided with the British authorities) and the Catholic Nationalists whose sense of revulsion at the Bloody Sunday events was not properly satisfied by the cynical tone of the play. Friel's main aim was to check the flow of emotionalism that is joined in the Irish sensibility with Bloody Sunday, which is still fresh in their minds, a fact that ruined the play's reception on the Irish theatre. As Dantanus puts it, "there is nothing in Friel's play to match the sense of outrage that swept Catholic Ireland after Bloody Sunday." (1988: 134). Thus, the clash between the play's tense political theme, on the one hand, and the cynical detaching Brechtian techniques that Friel handled it with, on the other, was the reason why it failed to win support. Ironically, while *The Freedom of the City* is regarded by Peacock as "a necessary coming to terms with contemporary history" (1993: XII), Friel's satirical talent blocked his "coming to terms" with either parties in the Irish political scene.

NOTES

1. Michael Parker counted about thirty-four "scenes." (1999, 49)
2. Parker states that the play includes "over twenty-two different voices" (1999, 66).
3. For more on Friel's developed concept of language, see my "Towards an Aesthetics of Belief in Covid19 Pandemic Time: Performatism in Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*". *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies (IJAES)* Vol. 21, No.2, 2021.

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