Dance in Ireland

Dance in Ireland: Steps, Stages and Stories

By

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To my Parents
Colm and Marie Phelan

There is something, a "gluaiseacht" stirring in all of us! A "gluaiseacht" that came through our parents, our grandparents, our neighbours – people we ate with, worked with, prayed with, sang with... A "gluaiseacht" shaped in the countryside of our hearts; a countryside that we can go back to, that can sustain us, nourish us, vision us, and motivate us, a countryside that houses our memories. And it may only take something as simple as the first call of the cuckoo or the smell of new-mown hay to waft us back to a thousand memories…

—Pat Ahern

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PREFACE

The 18th century Presbyterian minister, Reverend Thomas Campbell from Co. Down, is quoted in this book as commenting that the Irish, "moved on as if dance had been the business of their lives". A passionate enthusiasm for the "business" of dance is communicated by Dr Sharon Phelan who has brought an array of historical and theoretical perspectives to one of the major defining cultural forms of Irish life. Several themes link this rich text as it travels confidently through the complexities and conflicts that make up the story of Irish dance. They include storytelling, instability and subversion, the diasporic *céilí* tradition and the unique contribution of Pat Ahern and *Siamsa Tíre* to the renewal and rebirth of ancient forms. The Irish people have always recognised the truth of Philip Pullman's comment that "after nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world".

Story, song, mime and dance were seen by Pat Ahern as "arteries reaching deep into the heart of Ireland". Dr Phelan's homage to his founding of the Kerry *Tithe Siamsa* in Finuge, North Kerry and Carraig in the West Kerry Gaeltacht offers a personal heartfelt tribute. Her scholarship demonstrates the slow emergence of this new sense of a precious (and neglected) national treasure that has had to be carefully rebuilt at the end of the twentieth century. Ahern believes, like Rudyard Kipling, that "if history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten".

Another central theme is the pluralism of this tradition, relying as it often has, on European influences. Dr. Phelan notes the depth and complexity that imports from France, Britain have deeded to Irish dance; from the court and country dances of French Renaissance dance masters to the more recent popularity of British military two-step, waltz and foxtrot. This cross-cultural communication lives on in the *céilí* in houses of London and the Irish-American inheritance.

This is a remarkable book in that it succeeds in marrying pluralism and multiculturalism with an earned, widely-read understanding of what it means to be Irish, and from Kerry. Franz Fanon rubs shoulders with famed North Kerry dance master Jeremiah Molyneaux, the Gaelic League with Homi Bhabha, a deep understanding of cultural theory with a secure grasp of the centrality of dance to Irish identity. It remains a distinctively Irish

text - a peace-making text demonstrating the way in which assimilation can be a creative construct in the formation of a unique cultural narrative told through Irish dance in *Steps, Stages and Stories.*

Dr. Brian Coates

INTRODUCTION

A photograph of a crossroad dance at Knockmonlea near Youghal in County Cork in 1912[1]:

> Dance there upon the shore;
> What need have you to care
> For wind or water's roar?
> And tumble out your hair
> That the salt drops have wet…[2]

[1] Courtesy Cork County Library and the Horgan Family.
[2] Yeats in Rosenthal (ed.), *William Butler Yeats: Selected Poems and Four Plays*, 45.

When William Butler Yeats wrote "To a Child Dancing in the Wind", he linked the child's instinctive, spontaneous movements to dance. The child's movements were free and joyful and as she danced, she united with her natural surroundings.

The Irish have always been a nation of dancers. As they danced in barns, houses and crossroads, in halls and in theatres, their lively movement style and joyful expressions indicated an inherent love for dance. This book explores the evolution of dance in Ireland. It focuses on dance as part of the Irish culture and it also examines where dance signified historical and cultural change. While the book concentrates on native folk dance, it also highlights where other forms and styles of dance contributed to the native dance tradition.

The first chapter focuses on dance in Ireland during the colonial era. During this era, the British were viewed as "colonisers" and the Irish were viewed as "colonised". Such binary pairs can place systems in opposition to each other and one system usually occupies the hierarchical position. [3] Considering the British were the "colonisers", it is reasonable to assume that they occupied the hierarchical position in Ireland. However, "collective identities" such as "coloniser" and "colonised", often simplify and overgeneralise the past.[4] This notion manifested itself in dance. Although the British occupied a hierarchical position politically, British and Irish dancers paralleled each other, as they cross-fertilised their dance types and styles, in a relaxed and informal manner.

The information in the first chapter was largely sourced in the notes of British travellers. They toured Ireland during the colonial era. Their notes referred to occasions when British landlords danced with the Irish, when they attended their dance performances and where they hired the Irish as dance masters for their children. The British travellers' notes also reflected a genuine respect for Irish folk culture. This supports Albert Memmi's view that cultural dominion is low in most colonisers' priorities.[5]

The creation of novel dance types receives particular attention in the first chapter. Cultural theorist, Homi Bhabha, believes that cross-fertilisations of culture can be inspirational and beneficial.[6] This was apparent in Ireland, when the natives adopted and adapted British and French dances. Their effort to make the dances more challenging, by increasing the dynamic and complicating the footwork may have reflected

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[3] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

[4] Hall in Elay and Suny (eds.), *Becoming National: A Reader*, 342.

[5] Memmi, *The Coloniser and the Colonised,* 3.

[6] Bhabha in Marcus and Nicholls (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature, Volume 1*, Cambridge University Press, 738.

an inherent desire to make these dances "their own". Bhabha states that when colonised people adapt subjects it can often imply a deep-seated animosity towards the coloniser.[7] It is also likely that the Irish made the dances more complex in an effort to assert their superiority. This notion is reinforced by the fact the Irish also created a unique solo dance tradition. This first chapter concludes with information relating to dance events and dance music during the colonial era.

Chapter Two, is titled *The Dance Master Tradition* and it focuses on dance masters in Ireland, since the early eighteenth century. Frantz Fanon's concept of the "colonised writer" provides a useful frame of reference. Fanon identifies "colonised writers" passing through three "levels of resistance" and Irish dance masters are viewed as also passing through these levels in the second chapter.

On Fanon's first level, the writer aims to prove that he has absorbed the coloniser's culture completely.[8] Thus, he adopts the customs and the way of life of his ruler. Early Irish dance masters are identified as being on this level, when they adopted the garb, mannerisms, dance canon and fencing actions of British dance masters. As they copied their counterparts, the Irish dance masters strove to be equal. They even aimed to acquire the same type of pupil, when they entered the houses of the British gentry and adopted the position of dance master.

In reality, the landlords' majestic households were far removed from the Irish dance masters' rustic backgrounds and many returned to their native communities as the century progressed. Some dance masters had no choice, as their dance repertoires were limited and their technique was poor. However, others made a deliberate decision to return. These dance masters had entered Fanon's "second level of resistance". There, the colonised writer seeks to define himself from a cultural perspective. He strives to protect the uniqueness of his background and this causes a gradual separation from the coloniser.[9]

Analogies are also identified between the dance master and Rosi Braidotti's "nomadic figure". Carrying basic possessions Braidotti's "nomad" sets up house anywhere.[10] He avoids set ways of thinking, as he travels across society without "burning bridges".[11] Traditional dance masters also travelled from place to place. They avoided "burning bridges", when

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[7] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 86.
[8] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 178-179.
[9] Ibid., 178-179.
[10] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*16.
[11] Ibid., 4.

they retained imported dance material, but they also avoided set ways of thinking when they developed the material further. While dance masters protected their own unique dance material fiercely, their protective attitude usually relaxed towards the end of their lives. At this point, the masters considered it important that they passed on their dance legacy, to the next generation.

Having examined the traditional dance master system, the chapter moves on to explore the creation of another dance system at the turn of the twentieth century. It was established by the Gaelic League. Within the League, dance "teachers" entered Fanon's "third level of resistance".[12] At this point, the "colonised writer" aims to rouse his clan. He is ready to fight the oppressor.[13] As part of the League, dance teachers aimed to promote and preserve Irish dance as an inherent part of the Irish culture. They established formal *scoileanna rince* (dance schools) and standardised dance syllabi. Common teaching resources included a handbook, *Ár Rince Fóirne* (our team dances), and a quarterly titled *Céim* (step). All Irish dance teachers within the Gaelic League were expected to use these resources.

The dance masters, who remained outside the League, also receive reference in this chapter. Viewed as inferior, by dance teachers within the League, most of these masters were rural. Some dance masters were oblivious to the League's efforts to standardise dance, but others made a deliberate decision to remain outside the League. These dance masters considered it crucial that they would preserve their traditional style of teaching and their own unique step dances. In this way, they shared Braidotti belief that we need to move past the idea that "difference" is inferior to "sameness.[14] They continued to travel from place to place and they retained their traditional title of "dance master".

The chapter culminates by acknowledging one particular line of traditional dance masters, in North Kerry in the southwest of Ireland. It dates back to the turn of the nineteenth century. These dance masters epitomised Braidotti's "nomad". Travelling from one location to another they taught their own particular steps and styles of dance. This lineage directly influenced the works of Pat Ahern, founding director of *Síamsa Tíre*, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland. (Ahern's philosophy and works receive attention later in the book.)

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[12] The title changed from "master" to "teacher".

[13] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 178-179.

[14] Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: an Essay on Women in Contemporary French Philosophy*, 214.

The book progresses onto Chapter Three. This chapter, titled *The Pantomimic Dancer*, traces the evolution of pantomimic dance in Ireland. Farley Richmond defined "pantomimic dance" as the acting out of a story. The focus is on the final performance and body language, costumes and make-up are central. [15] Irish pantomimic dancers are viewed fulfilling these criteria during the chapter, and another framework, Nancy Stein's "stages in storytelling", categorises turning points in the pantomimic dance tradition.

At Stein's first stage, there is a "state-event-state" story-type, where the story is devoid of a goal.[16] Irish pantomimic dancers are viewed at that stage, when they assumed a static position or "state". Then they entered the "event" as they imitated work or warlike actions. Finally, they resumed the static position, or "state", once more. Irish dancers entered Stein's second stage, when their stories involved the solving of issues and the characters had an end-goal, which was successful or unsuccessful. [17] The Irish "Buckock" dancers, the "biddy boys", the "wrenboys" and the "*Bealtaine*" (May Day) dancers provide examples. Finally, the Irish pantomimic dancers are placed at Stein's "third stage of storytelling". Then their goals were extraordinary versus ordinary and an unexpected event was liable to occur at the end of their tales. [18] This usually occurred when the pantomimic dancers used dance to tell sagas and folk tales.

Having explored the pantomimic dance tradition, the book moves on the fourth chapter. Titled *Dance during the Gaelic Revival – Conflicts of Consciousness*, this chapter focuses on developments in dance at the turn of the twentieth century. Then, there were massive efforts to nationalise Irish dance. Gaelic Revivalists aimed to devise a purely "Irish" dance repertoire, to establish exclusively "Irish" events (*feiseanna* and *céilithe*[19]) and to create completely "Irish" dance costumes.

However, few changes are visible in dance among the Anglo Irish during the era. In reality, while they supported efforts to preserve the native dance tradition, they rarely became involved. It is a common trait in countries seeking freedom. It is at this point, that the works of W. B. Yeats

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[15] Richmond in Richmond, Swann and Zarrilli (eds.), *Indian Theatre: Traditions of Performance*, 41.

[16] Stein in Mandel, Stein and Trabassco (eds.), *Learning and Comprehension of Text,* 497.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] A *feis* was an Irish folk festival or convention which was modelled on the ancient *feis* and it had competitions in traditional Irish storytelling, music and dancing. The Irish *céilí* was a social evening which involved music and dance.

also receive attention. Initially, his literary references to dance are cited. Then, Yeats's use of creative movement as a tool of expression in his "Dance Plays" receives attention.

The chapter culminates with a case study. It focuses on developments in dance in a typical garrison town during the Revival. In this town, as in Dublin, different class groups are viewed paralleling each other, through dance types, and dance events.

Dichotomies are identified in dance in Ireland in the fifth chapter. These include the male-female dichotomy and the clergy-laity dichotomy. Similar to the colonisers, the males and the clerics often assumed a hierarchical position and this is identified through dance in the chapter. However, just the coloniser-colonised opposition could be less apparent at times, there were also instances where the clergy-laity and male-female dichotomies were less obvious in dance. These also receive reference.

Chapter Six, focuses on developments in *Dance during the Post-Colonial Era*. At this stage, nationalist and religious boundaries were starting to relax and international modern dance types were becoming more common. The "Public Dance Halls Act", in 1935, receives particular attention, as it failed to curb the erection of modern dance halls. In reality, the number of dance halls increased and the showband era further internationalised the traditional dance scene. By the early fifties, the rural youth were travelling to dance halls in urban areas in their cars and the social scene in rural areas had declined. This growing indifference towards traditional folk culture resulted in a second Gaelic Revival from the early fifties. The chapter culminates by focusing on these new Revivalists' efforts to preserve and promote Irish folk culture and folk dance.

The final chapter is titled *Siamsóirí na Ríochta and Siamsa Tíre* and it focuses on the works of the founder of both groups, Pat Ahern.[20] Ahern grew up in the small village of Moyvane in North Kerry and he perceived a general indifference towards Irish folk culture among urban people during the nineteen fifties. Removed from rural areas, they rarely received opportunities to experience traditional storytelling, festivals or art forms, and he aimed to counteract their growing indifference towards traditional folk culture.

At times, these urbanites even adopted a condescending attitude towards traditional folk culture and this was resented by their rural counterparts. They felt their background was viewed as less important. Such people often re-emerge in differing contexts using other forms of

[20] *Siamsóirí na Ríochta* translates into "merrymakers of the kingom", whereas *Siamsa Tíre* translates into "merriment of the land".

expression.[21] They aim to "subvert the authority of those who have hegemonic power." [22] Having observed a growing indifference towards his native folk culture, Ahern made its re-emergence possible, when he placed it into theatrical contexts. Inadvertently, this was to challenge the growing indifference towards Irish folk culture within the mainstream.

Ways in which Ahern reflected his ancestors' attitudes towards dance receive particular attention in the final chapter. For instance, Ahern included all dance types in his productions and he developed them further. He was also open-minded to novel dance types and styles. Similar to his ancestors, Ahern also considered it his responsibility to hand on traditional folk customs and art forms. Subsequently, he set up training centres, the *Tithe Siamsa* (houses of *Siamsa*). There, children were introduced to the way of life of their ancestors and they learned traditional music, song and dance.

Particular works, composed by Ahern, receive attention. His first show, *Fadó Fadó*, reflected traditional farm life. Subsequently, traditional dance types, associated with the way of life were included in the dance repertoire. Particular attention is given to the pantomimic dance tradition in his second full-length show, *Sean agus Nua*, (old and new). The show used dance as a primary tool of expression and it conveyed a variety of tales – traditional, local, ancient and abstract. Finally, Ahern's show, *Ding Dong Dederó-Forging the Dance*, receives attention. There, Ahern acknowledged the dance master tradition, when he told the story of Kerry dance master, Jeremiah Molyneaux.

The book concludes with an epigraph, which pays homage to the source of inspiration behind the writing of this book. I was inspired by the training system I experienced as a child at the *Teach Siamsa* in Finuge, North Kerry. There, I developed an intrinsic appreciation of my folk culture and my dance tradition. Similar to my predecessors, I have inherited the same responsibility, to preserve and develop dance. In "*Dance in Ireland: Step, Stages and Stories*", the tool of expression is the written word.

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[21] Lawson, *Making Development Geography*, 35-39.
[22] Bhabha in Garcia-Moreno and Pfeiffer (eds.), *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, 192-197.

CHAPTER ONE

DANCE DURING THE COLONIAL ERA

As there are no references to dance in early Irish literature, it is often assumed that it did not exist in early Ireland. However, this is unlikely as primitive dance had existed on mainland Europe for thousands of years. When the Neoliths travelled to Ireland around 3,000, they left behind a tradition of rock painting which often depicted dancers. In addition, the Celts also left religious and pre-battle dances behind. [1] As the Neoliths and the Celts danced prior to their arrival in Ireland, it is reasonable to conclude that they continued to dance afterwards.

The fact that there were Neolithic and Celtic musicians in Ireland also supports the notion that there were dancers. If the Neoliths and the Celts were prepared to use manmade musical instruments, then it is likely that they also used their bodies to express themselves. Both groups held music in high esteem; the Neoliths had bells, horns and trumpets and the Celts had harps, pipes, and stringed and wind instruments.[2] In reality, it would have been strange if these people had no knowledge of dance as it preceded music in other cultures. It is also significant that the relationship between dance and music has always been strong in Ireland.

Dance theorist, Nigel Allenby Jaffe, identifies basic reasons for the absence of early dance recordings and they are relevant to the absence of dance records in early Ireland. Firstly, he states that the early Europeans simply did not bother. Their "indolence" prevented the creation of dance archives.[3] While "indolence" is a strong term, the Irish have always had a similar attitude towards the recording of dances. Even today, they continue to pick up dances in an informal manner.

Allenby Jaffe also believes that difficulties in describing dances impeded the recording of early dances in Europe.[4] This theory is also

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[1] Allenby Jaffe, *Folkdance of Europe,* xiii.
[2] Music also featured in the ancient sagas. Characters used it to put people to sleep or to change their mood.
[3] Allenby Jaffe, *Folkdance of Europe*, xiv.
[4] Ibid.

applicable to Irish dance as the Celts' primitive alphabet, Ogham, was a slow, laborious method of writing.

Finally, Allenby Jaffe refers to dance theorist Thoinit Arbeau.[5] In his book, (first published in 1589), Arbeau stated that the "perils" of "fashionable dance", caused the loss of many dances, even within a hundred years.[6] Like the dancers on mainland Europe, the Irish were lovers of fashionable dance. They readily adopted popular French and British dances during the colonial era. In fact, the earliest dance recorded in Ireland was a French *carole* (carol) dance.

There are other reasons why dance was probably present in early Ireland. Sometimes people believe that the lack of a specific dance term indicated an absence of dance. However, as Judith Hanna points out, the absence of a term does not necessarily mean that dance was non-existent. It was common that societies used an array of words for dance, without having a specific term. [7] It is worth mentioning that it is often assumed that dance appeared when the terms "*rince*" and "*damhsa*" came into the Irish vocabulary. In reality, these terms were European - the term "*rince*" was a derivation of the British term "rink" and "*damhsa*" emerged from the French term "*danse*."

In fact, the early Irish may have used other terms to describe dance, terms that we do not associate with dance today. A possible first reference to dance is present in a Medieval Latin manuscript, which describes the history of the Isle of Man. Titled "*Chronica Regvm Manniae et Insvlarvm*", it refers to the "demonstrations of joy" which the ruler, King Godred experienced, as he disembarked from his ship in 1157.[8]

> In the year 1144, Godred began his reign, and reigned thirty- nine years. Many things worthy of note might be related of him, which we have omitted for the sake of brevity. In the third year of his reign the people of Dublin sent to request him to reign over them. Whereupon, assembling a great number of ships, and a large army, he went to Dublin, where he was received by the citizens with great satisfaction and demonstrations of joy.[9]

As visitors were usually welcomed by musicians and dancers on mainland Europe, it is likely that the Irish also played music and danced to express

[5] The latter is most famous for his book "*Orchésographie*", which was a study of late sixteenth-century French Renaissance social dance.

[6] Arbeau in Allenby Jaffe, *Folkdance of Europe*, xiv.

[7] Hanna, *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication*, 18.

[8] This translates into "Chronicle of Man and the Sudreys"

[9] Munch and Goss (eds.), *The Chronicle of Man and the Sudreys* at Website: http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/manxsoc/msvol22/index.htm

their "joy" at the arrival of Godred. It was a common custom during the colonial era. Then, the Irish sang and danced when British visitors disembarked from their ships.

There is another potential reference to dance in the thirteenth century. It transpired in a homilist's translation of an excerpt from "St. John the Baptist". It was from Latin into Gaelic and in it he stated that Herod's daughters took part in "*cleasaíocht, léimneach agus opaireacht*" (juggling and feats of leaping and active exertion). Basically, he used three action words to replace the Latin word "*saltare*" (dance) in the Bible. Breandán Breathnach believed that these generic terms represented dance. He went further when he stated that the homilist could have used these words to define a particular type of dance, a type with which the readers were unfamiliar. [10]

In reality, the Irish have always used non-specific terms in relation to dance. This tradition continues today. When an Irish dancer dances, people say that he is "doing" a "step" or a "set". The dance type, "set" or "step", replaces the term "dance". Other times, the titles of tunes replace the term "dance". The dancer "does" a "jig" or a "reel", a "hornpipe" or a "slip-jig". Even when Irish dances have specific titles, the term "dance" is usually absent. For example, the dancer "does" the "Sweets of May" or "The Waves of Tory".

This concludes the first section of the chapter. It is unfortunate that dance records are sparse in Ireland. Still, systems of recording Irish dance have become more established since the early twentieth century. The Gaelic League, "*An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*" and *Siamsa Tíre* have archived dance and their extensive fieldwork has supported undergraduate and post-graduate theses in third level colleges and universities nationally and internationally.[11]

Early Literary References

The first reference to dance in Ireland emerged in a Norman French poem titled "*Rithmus Facture Ville de Ross*" ("The Entrenchment of New Ross").

> Then the youths advanced in turn,
> And the town they made it ring
> With their merry caroling;
> Singing loud and full of mirth.[12]

[10] Breathnach, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*, 35.
[11] *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* translates into "The Irish Dance Commission".
[12] Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature 1200-1582*, 24.

The poem refers to women and children helping to build the town of New Ross in 1265. They danced and sang French *caroles* on the way to work, during lunch breaks and after work. [13] These *caroles* were prevalent in France and in Britain at this time and the Normans brought them with them when they entered Ireland. The cross-cultural exchange would have been aided by the fact that the Normans became more and more absorbed into the Irish culture as time progressed. The *carole* was a round dance. The leader stood in the middle and he sang a love song. The dancers responded, as they sang and danced in a circular pathway around him, holding the hands of their suitors.

While the *carole* was the first round dance recorded in Ireland, it is probable that other round dances preceded it. Norwegian and Danish Vikings had been invading Ireland from the eighth century and as the native Irish adopted Danish and Norwegian folk customs it is likely they adopted their round dances too.[14] In addition, the Norse and Danish round dances resemble the Irish "*Bealtaine*" dance, a round dance which is recorded in Ireland since the eighteenth century. In both dances, the people move round a fire, they approach it, they retreat backwards and the men leap over the fires.

The short Middle English lyric poem - "*Ich am of Irlaunde*" ("I am of Ireland") provides the next reference to dance in Ireland. The exact date of the reference is not known, but the poem was recorded during the fourteenth century and like most Middle English lyric poems, it was anonymous.

Icham of Irlaunde
Ant of the holy londe
Of Irlande.
Gode sire, pray ich the,
For of saynte charite,
Come ant daunce wyt me
In Irlaunde. [15]
(I am from Ireland,
And from the holy land
Of Ireland.
Good sir, I beg of you,
For holy charity,
Come and dance with me
In Ireland.)

[13] Ó Tuama, *Repossessions: Selected Essays on the Irish Literary,* 135.
[14] The Irish adopted their coinage, construction and trading.
[15] Silverstein (ed.), *English Lyrics before 1500*, 82.

In reality, it is uncertain whether the dancer in "*Ich am of Irlaunde*" actually existed - she is rather dramatic as she "begs" the poet to visit her "holy londe". In addition, the term "holy" has mythical connotations, as it can imply an imaginary world, an "Otherworld". On the other hand, the poet's use of the term "begged" could also imply a native enthusiasm for dance. John Anthony Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre support the latter notion. They pictured the Irish dancers in the poem singing the refrain (chorus) as they danced their *caroles* in circles. [16] It is also significant that American Professor Theodore Silverstein referred to this poem as a song, as well as a dance, and one of the first earliest *carols*, in his compilation of *English Lyrics before 1500*.[17]

As a point of interest, Yeats visited this lyric poem, when he included "I am of Ireland" in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* in 1933. It was ironic that he used the lines from the lyric-poem, as a chorus between the verses, in an effort to emphasise the nationalistic theme of the poem:

> "I am of Ireland,
> And the Holy Land of Ireland,
> And time runs on," cried she.
> "Come out of charity,
> Come dance with me in Ireland." [18]

Chroniclers and Dramatists

The next recordings of dance were made during the colonial era. At this point, the British occupied the hierarchical position from a political perspective. The British landlords, travellers and soldiers, were viewed as land owning and empowered, whereas the native Irish were considered poverty stricken and powerless. However, this was not always the case from cultural perspectives. This section pays homage to the positive attitude of many British travellers towards the Irish folk culture, including folk dance. It was evident in the many notes they compiled for the British aristocracy.

For instance, when British Lieutenant Sir Henry Sidney toured Ireland in 1659, he described the female dancers from Galway as "magnificently dressed, very beautiful and first–class dancers", in his letter home to Queen Elizabeth.[19] Rev. Dr. Thomas Campbell also admired Irish female

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[16] Burrow and Turville-Petre, *A Book of Middle English*, 235.
[17] Silverstein (ed.), *English Lyrics before 1500*, 82.
[18] Yeats, *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, 81.
[19] Sidney in Whelan, *The Complete Guide to Irish Dance,* 10.

dancers as he travelled Ireland. In a letter to "John Watkinson MD", titled "Philosophical Survey of the South of Ireland", he commented:

> The Irish girls are passionately fond of dancing, and they certainly dance well, for last night I was at a ball and I never enjoyed one more in my life. There is a sweet affability and sparkling vivacity in these girls which is very captivating. [20]

While Campbell admired the dancing, he also placed the Irish women in a favourable light. He went further in his admiration for Irish dancers when he insulted his fellow dancers in Britain.

> We frog-blooded English dance as if the practice were not congenial to us but here they moved as if dance had been the business of their lives. The Rock of Cashel was a tune which seemed to inspire particular animation.[21]

Campbell was aware of a perfectionist attitude among the Irish in relation to each other's dancing skills. He commented: "I have seen the whole room in a convulsion at a false step made by one of the dancers" [22]

When humanitarian, Sir John Forbes, toured Ireland during the famine in 1852, he shared his predecessors' admiration of female Irish dancers. As he watched a man and woman dance in Leenane, County Galway, he remarked:

> If she had not been long and strictly drilled in her vocation, she must have been born with all the aptitudes of original genius in this harmonious art. It was really wonderful to see how perfect her execution was on her rough platform, and with her naked feet; though I cannot but think that the nakedness of the feet added not a little to the charm of the whole.[23]

Some traveller chronicles also revealed an easy relationship between the Irish natives and the British landlords. For instance, British traveller Thomas Dineley cited all class groups participating in a "*Rinnce Fada*" (longways dance). He commented that all the "masters, mistresses, and servants "had indulged in the event.[24] Given the fact the British settlers seemed to be dancing effortlessly, it is reasonable to conclude they often joined the natives at their dance events. In addition, the fact the dance title

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[20] Cited in Kenrick (ed.), *The London Review of English and Foreign Literature,* 189.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Forbes, *Memorandums Made in Ireland in the Autumn of 1852*, 267.
[24] Dineley in O'Keefe and O'Brien, *A Handbook of Irish Dances*, 16.

was in Irish, "*Rinnce Fada*", implied that it was an Irish dance. Therefore, the settlers would have needed lessons from the Irish to dance it.

Another chronicler, John D'Alton, referred to British settlers receiving Irish dance lessons in his book, *The History of the County of Dublin*, in 1838. There, he cited "Sir Thomas Kent" and "Sir William D'Arcy of Platten" receiving harp and dance lessons, from servant "John Harper", in the house of "Philip Bermingham" in 1519. (The latter was the Chief Justice of the Kings Bench.) D'Alton noted the British settlers' pride, as they executed their newly adopted dances.[25]

Dance historians, Seamus O'Keefe and Art O'Brien identified "Middleton, Marston, Massinger, Heywood, Dekker and Shirley" as the chief critics of Irish dance in their book, *A Handbook of Irish Dances*, which they compiled at the turn of the twentieth century.[26] Dramatist, Thomas Middleton, was viewed as particularly negative. In *Women Beware Women*, Middleton linked Irish dance with whorish behaviour, from which women would become pregnant. Ward, (a central character), comments:

> For of all creatures I cannot abide a splay-footed Woman, she's an unlucky thing to meet in a morning; her heels keep together so, as if she were beginning an Irish dance still; and the wriggling of her Bum, playing the tune to't": But I have bethought a cleanly shift to finde it; dab down as you see me, and peep of one side, when her back's toward you; I'll show you the way. [27]

However, Middleton's negative attitude was probably prompted by his middle class values rather than by any particular prejudice towards Irish dance. This notion is affirmed further later in the play, when one of the characters associates specific dance types with the lower classes.

> Plain men dance the measures, the cinquapace the gay;
> Cuckolds dance the hornpipe and farmers dance the hay;
> Your soldiers dance the round, and maidens that grow big;
> Your drunkards, the canaries, your whore and bawd, the jig.[28]

It is worth mentioning that some British dramatists were positive towards Irish dance. For instance, musicologist and historian W. H. Grattan Flood identified a reference to an Irish dance in William Shakespeare's *A Winter's*

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[25] D'Alton, *The History of the County of Dublin*, 9.
[26] O'Keefe and O'Brien, *A Handbook of Irish Dances*, 13.
[27] Middleton in Frost (ed.), *The Selected Plays of Thomas Middleton*, 210.
[28] Ibid., 226.

Tale.[29] The dance was titled “The Fading”. Although, Shakespeare was probably unconscious of the fact that the dance was Irish, his disposition towards it was positive. References to the “fading” by other dramatists, Beaumont and Fletcher, were also favourable.[30]

Adopting and Adapting

> For the good are always the merry,
> Saved by an evil chance,
> And the merry love the fiddle,
> And the merry love to dance. [31]

When British traveller, Arthur Young visited Ireland between 1776 and 1779, he commented: “Besides the Irish jig…minuets and country dances are taught, and I even heard some talk of *cotillions* coming in.” [32] At this time, the Irish experienced British and French dances in a number of ways. They received British country dances from the British dance masters in Ireland and when they visited Britain as labourers. The Irish were also exposed to French dance, when they fought for Napoleon, and when French soldiers came to Ireland. Bhabha believes that once binary oppositions are de-stabilised between cultures, they can interrelate and transform each other in a complex manner. [33] It is arguable that dance helped to de-stabilise the binary oppositions between the British and the Irish and that this had a direct influence on the native dance tradition as the natives adopted and adapted British dances.

In Britain and Ireland, the people danced when a mood for carousing and fun descended. This happened on similar occasions in both countries. In Britain, the dances were “enjoyed upon the slightest excuse … at weddings, fireside *ceilidhs*, *Bealtaine*, New Year, or simply on dry moonlight nights at some favourite part of the road or green.”[34] An anonymous British traveller in Ireland commented that “every village has a bagpiper, who every fine evening after working hours, collects all the

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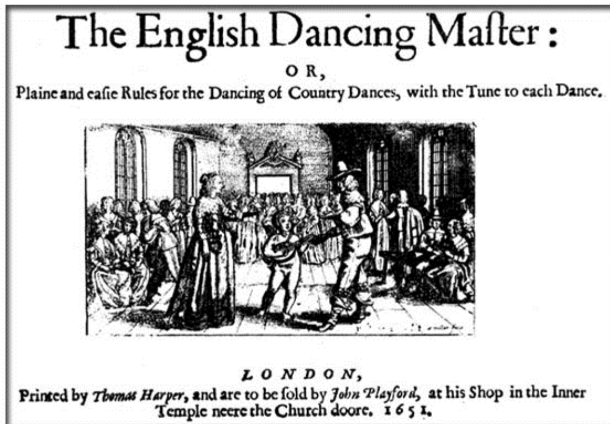
[29] Grattan-Flood, *The Story of the Bagpipe*, 99.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Yeats in Finneran (ed.), *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 74.
[32] Young in Harrington, *The English Traveller in Ireland*, 183.
[33] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 296.
[34] Emmerson, *Rantin' Pipe and Tremblin' String: A History of Scottish Dance Music*, 71.

young men and young maids in the village about him, where they dance most cheerfully".[35]

Dancers were well respected in both countries. In Britain, Queen Elizabeth observed "admiringly from an upstairs window, while local villagers or townsfolk danced below … at Warwick in 1572 and Cowdray in 1591, 1600 and 1602".[36] In Ireland, dance masters were held in high esteem. When they arrived to teach dance in a particular region, the native folk often fought to house them.

Group Dances



The English Dancing Master published in 1651[37]

Similarities in British and Irish group dances can be identified in John Playford's book *The English Dancing Master: Plaine and easie Rules for the Dancing of country dances with the Tune to each Dance.* Published in 1651, the book identifies group dances which existed in Britain at that time. On one level, while the dances were specific to the British educated classes, certain titles, "The Irish Trot" and "Irish Lady", suggest that these tunes were composed in Ireland.

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[35] Grattan-Flood, *The Story of the Bagpipe*, 152.
[36] Rippon, *Discovering English Folk Dance,* 30.
[37] Playford, *The English Dancing Master: Plaine and easie Rules for the Dancing of country dances with the Tune to each Dancer*, Front Cover.

In addition, there were many technical similarities between Playford's country dances and Irish country dances at this stage. One of the most basic similarities lay in his categorisation of group dance types – similar to Ireland there were "longway", "round" and "square" dances. In addition, like many Irish country dances, Playford's dances often had amorous underpinnings and this influenced the pathways. For instance, like Irish dancers, Playford's male and female dancers advanced towards each other and they adopted alternate positions as they chained in and out of each other.

Longway dances are the most common dances in Playford's book and longway dancers feature on the cover. There, the dancers are accompanied by a child musician. Dances noted included the "Slip", the "Daphne", the "Goddesses" and the "Bonny Bonny Brome". As an example, the latter had eight participants and the men danced opposite the women. Dancers stood still, as other dancers moved; they advanced towards each other and retreated into position twice; they caught hands and danced into new positions and they moved sideways to each wall.[38]

Although Playford recorded the dances, and the dances had British titles, it is debatable whether this longway dance type originated in Britain. Seamus O'Keefe and Art O'Brien highlighted a reference to Irish and Scottish longway dances in John Leydon's *Complainte of Scotland* written in 1648. There, Leydon stated that "the name and repute" of Irish longway dances had disseminated into Scotland by the mid-sixteenth century and that the longway dances in both countries were similar.[39] Technically, there were usually eight or six dancers in the British and Irish longway dances, although some were open to more. During the dance, the men stood in one row and the females faced them in another row, dancers stood still as other dancers danced and lines of dancers advanced towards and retreated back from each other in unison.

As mentioned previously, "The Irish Trot" and "The Irish Lady" were cited in Playford's book and these longway dance titles implied Irish connections. Another dance, the "Sir Roger de Coveney", as highlighted in *The Story of the Bagpipe*, also bore an Irish flavour. There, William Henry Grattan Flood emphasised that the dance was of Irish blood and similar to other Irish longway dances, the dancers were accompanied by a bagpiper.[40] Later, the Irish retitled the "Sir Roger de Coveney" and it became "The Kerry Dance".

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[38] Ibid.,74.
[39] Leydon in O'Keefe and O'Brien, *A Handbook of Irish Dances*, 16.
[40] Grattan Flood, *The Story of the Bagpipe*, 97.