

**Dancing and Remembering: A Contextual Reading of Brian Friel's Play
*Dancing at Lughnasa***

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Abstract

In Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), the Irish playwright describes the last joyful moments in the lives of five unmarried Irish sisters who live together in a poor cottage in the fictional small town of Ballybeg in North Ireland. The retrospective tale that is narrated by the adult Michael, who is also the illegitimate son of Chris –one of the five sisters- portrays the forces that led to the collapse of the family in the 1936 summer during the Lughnasa festival celebrations. The hybrid form of drama and storytelling is Brian Friel's device to escape the mega narrative and focus on the stories of individuals and small families. This de-familiarization of traditional literary conventions enables him to surrender the grand history to personal stories. Furthermore, Friel is experimenting with the memory play form as he believes that our memory anamnesis should not be trusted as factual. Furthermore, the concept of dance also plays a significant role in the play where almost all characters dance at a certain point, but it is how every character engages in this activity that illuminates him/her to the theatergoers. Indeed, dancing in the play is a release that connotes unfulfilled desires and hopes that cannot be expressed in words. In short, Brian Friel is the playwright who most probably defines Ireland to the outside world through analyzing the complexities of Irish culture.

Keywords: *Irish drama, dancing, memory play, Catholic Church, ritual.*

The Irish playwright Brian Friel is one of the main figures in contemporary drama writing scene. He has emerged as a major playwright since the 1980s. Critics have asserted that he has a style of his own in which he is able to describe the discords of a society and of human beings experiencing unparalleled moments of change. Indeed, he sharpens his audience understanding of their

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human conditions and the contradictory discrepancies of their age. Therefore, he is becoming the focus of much growing critical scholarship that attends to the interrelation between his dramatic texts and other fields such as history, politics, culture, religion and mythology. Nevertheless, the influence of the multi-contextual background of his works and its role in interpreting his plays still needs much scholarly work. His award-winning memory play *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) is a masterpiece which is set in a fictional local small town in Ireland in August 1936. It is a kind of memory anamnesis narrated by an adult narrative voice of a child who had been previously part of the events back in 1936 when he was seven years old. Despite a very little hope that looms over the child's family in the beginning of the play, Michael the narrator intermittingly escorts the audience during the action of the play to help them understand how things fell apart in the family. Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) keeps track of its characters in the midst of religious, economic, cultural, social and political uncertainty as they are trying to survive in their small secluded cottage at the outskirts of the fictional town of Ballybeg.

Despite the fact that *Dancing at Lughnasa* reproduces personal accounts and private tales of Irish individuals, the country has a long standing tradition of conflicts that make many kinds of contexts a requirement for understanding its literature. In fact, the past in *Dancing at Lughnasa* is retrieved and dramatized in an insightful way. Since dancing in the play is an expression of the aching hearts of individuals who are caught in the long standing influences of Irish historic trauma, hence, one believes that it plays a central role in understanding the text. Moreover, it unveils the gap between the personal desires and the unfulfilling reality of the Mundy family. Accordingly, the aim of this research is to cross examine the two notions of dancing and remembering and their significance in Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) in the light of Irish history and culture. My main preoccupation in this respect is to illuminate the relationship between the literary text and the reality it reflects, diagnoses and questions and how the playwright symbolically employs dancing to convey his message to the audience. Yet, it is not part of my chief preoccupation to provide a detailed survey of Irish history as it is beyond the scope of this research paper. However, there might be a need to make selective and occasional referencing to Irish cultural and sociopolitical background to meet the needs and serve the purpose of the research requirements.

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In the middle of the fluid moments of the 1936, the five unwedded Mundy sisters; Kate, Agnes, Rose, Maggie and Chris reside in a modest house at the center of a small farm cottage near the fictitious Balleybeg village in county Donegal, Ireland. The play simply tells the story of these five sisters and their brother, Father Jack, who has recently returned from missionary duties which he has started twenty five years ago in a leper colony in Ryanga, Uganda. The action occurs in the Mundy house, or outside the cottage in the garden with bits and pieces of news, gossip and small local stories reported or reminisced from the town. As the action unfolds at the start of the autumnal season, it turns out that Jack's seniors relieved him of his obligations for adopting African pagan rituals and practices and for going native. Other characters include Gerry Evans, the unreliable father of the child narrator who pays infrequent visits to Chris. He is Jack of all trades and an odd-job person who finds time for everything, but to see his son or marry Chris. And finally, the narrator Michael who is at the same time the illegitimate son of Chris and Gerry of a love relationship. The sisters whose ages range between twenty and forty are portrayed to serve diverse functions in the house. Though they are unmarried, we know that they had previous suitors. Kate is the oldest sister and she is the only profitably employed as a teacher in the parish school until she is dismissed because of her returning brother contentious attitudes. His dissident points of view have negatively dented her work relationship with the church- run school leaders. Maggie runs the house. Christina or Chris is a stay-at-home single mom who does not trust the marriage promises of Gerry, though she welcomes his unscheduled surprise visits. Rose and Agnes are needle workers who are trying to bring some money home by knitting handmade gloves, nevertheless a textile manufacturing facility opens up in Donegal and they despairingly moved to London where they have led a destitute kind of life. Regretfully, Agnes perished and Rose was about to when Michael searched the city later to find them out. Previously, we are told that Gerry had joined the Civil war in Spain (1936-1939), not because of any political leanings, but in pursuit of adventure. In the fullness of time and before the play comes to an end, Michael confides to the audience that his half-brother has told him that his father who has been wounded in the Spanish war has left another family in Wales before he passed away. Additionally, Michael tells us that he himself deflected and relocated to England when his time has come. Further, Father Jack, departed our earth after one year from his homecoming and Chris ended up getting a job in the local textile mill to make ends meet. With the absence of these three people,

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Michael believes that the spirit of the family has gone for good. The play winds up with a tableau of the family swinging in a dance with the narrator finally proclaiming that in a memory atmosphere “everything is simultaneously actual and illusory” (Friel, 1990, p.71). The play, all in all, revolves around three dances, three incoming outsiders, (Father Jack, Gerry Evans and a radio set) a number of memories, intermittent and sporadic interventions and ruminations voiced to the audience by the narrator. In order to create a Brechtian distancing effect in the play, Friel keeps the narrator constantly outside the action and disassociated from all characters. The question raised: why does Michael present his reminiscences to the audience? Three motivations may explain that. These are his desire to recall his family forth in a happy moment, feeling guilt for migrating to London and lastly being anxious and insecure about his illegitimacy as a love child. The invisibility of the child in some scenes may sound like a foreshadowing of the absence of the adult Michael from the family. The idea that Michael is embarrassed because he is an illegitimate child born out of wedlock is cared for by Friel's emphasis that “all these enacted events must have had an adjusting effect on him” (Cited in David Ward, 2014, p.22).

Arnsberg and Kimball, (1968) argue that Ireland suffered from about four centuries of subjugation and domination as a full conquest of their territories took place in the 16th and 17th centuries. This only came to an end in 1921 when an agreement with the British government was signed. These long years of colonization resulted in the decline of rural communities, gradual erosion of Irish culture, many waves of departing emigration, and the fading of the native Irish language. Furthermore, the many strikes of famine that devastated Ireland in the 19th century played a great role in reducing the Irish population by diseases, starvation and emigration. This left the country in a state of economic depression, disorder and hopelessness. Furthermore, most of the 1930s social and economic state support went to married couples and left out unmarried women economically vulnerable (Arnsberg and Kimball, 1968, pp.224-225). It is remarkable that all the previously mentioned circumstances in addition to the dire poverty they have lived might have minimized the chances of marriage of the five Mundy sisters. Therefore, much of the critical scholarship about the play subjected the text to profound critical analysis taking into consideration the Mundy sisters' devastating experiences. It also underlines Ireland's failure to cater for rural single women. In fact, Brian Friel sets his play *Dancing at Lughnasa* in an obviously Irish rural

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underdeveloped area where twentieth century economic and sociocultural progress has been decelerated in materializing. In reality, the communal and local regions kept the pace and the life style of the 17th and 18th centuries. Therefore, in the play, the fictional county of Donegal is secluded and distant enough to create an impression that Celtic rituals such as the Lughnasa festival are still observed in a mode similar to the old- fashioned practices. Again, Friel's decision to make the five sisters unmarried is also an allusion to the factors that reduced the population and led to large migration levels and other socioeconomic and cultural circumstances.

Additionally, from ancient Celtic times, disunity is a characteristic of Irish reality. Based on Ireland's long history of colonization by the English, one can claim that Ireland has a few similarities with previously colonized societies. In Ireland, there are two types of populations; native and implanted, two faiths; Catholic and protestant, two cultures; Gaelic and religious, two political factions; unionists and nationalists. In fact, many of these dichotomies and polarities operate in varied guises and strengths in Friel's dramatic work. Joanne Tompkins contends that the theatre, "continues to be a site where the colonizer/colonized binary can be manipulated to disempower imperial inscriptions" (1997, p.502). Some of the devices used in this process of decolonization, she claims, is storytelling, dance, music and song. Her definition of the former British Empire territories include "settler colonies", "occupation colonies" and "Ireland" as well. Tompkins claims that what Friel is doing in *Dancing at Lughnasa* is trying to liberate the Irish identity from its ambivalence. The colonized subject can relocate his position in the binary imposed by the colonizer. Decolonization is simply a border crossing endeavor that playwrights are involved in to set their peoples free from the shackles of the site of ambivalence. Moreover, Denis Donoghue (1986) argues that the one distinctive experience of Ireland is that of division. This type of disunity has materialized in multiple forms. He writes: "At various times the division has taken these forms: Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist, Ireland and England, North and South, the country and the one bloated city of Dublin, Gaelic Ireland and Anglo- Ireland, the comfortable and the poor,...the visible Ireland and the hidden Ireland, landlord and tenant"(p.16).

O'Faolain (1949) argues that the Irish mind is fanciful and has an imagination that is overwhelmed by the other world. The Celtic culture, he believes, might

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have played a role in that, (pp.3-4). Many of Friel's fractured characters are products of this hybridity. Therefore, the blending nature of the Irish mind and being prone to accommodate unparalleled ideas and passions provide a socio-cultural context that can help a lot in the analysis of *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Furthermore, the tendency to combine pagan and religious elements is one of the competencies of this mind so as to assemble and embrace dual faiths. In Friel's work, these two faiths sometimes come to blows, but he seems to advocate a compromising balance between these two major components of Irish culture proclaiming that no one component of them should have hegemonic control over the other. Hence, the encounter between pagan Celtic and Christian perspectives is a major theme in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Additionally, Friel seems to believe that pagan Ireland is still enduring and surviving under a thin layer of Christianity. As Ireland is a country that is fractured in its historical experience, therefore, Friel is trying in *Dancing at Lughnasa* to find its own image and sense of national identity. The solution, he claims, is to look to the future and let go of the past; in other words, to find heterogeneity in the past. Otherwise, they will linger in the dilemma of memory and the pain of regret.

In fact, an important clue for understanding the play lies in the title as the notion of dancing offers a kind of framework for human expression. Brian Friel in effect builds up an awareness of gradual tension in the exposition of the play and later through the scenes until the action explodes into dancing in three different climactic points of convergence in the text. Instead of describing the collapse of the family, the play focuses on only two regular days in the life of the Mundy sisters in the summer of 1936. It also makes them flash with three elusive rays of hope to intensify the sense of loss and failure; the advent of the radio, the return of father Jack and eventually the infrequent visits of Gerry Evans, the rogue salesman. As the dramatic work is deficient in its eventfulness and tends to be a memory play, Wynn Rousuck contends that, "the dance is Lughnasa's most exuberant moment, but it too is tinged with Michael's knowledge that it was the sisters' final expression of exuberance" (1993, p.20). The play is profoundly a touching story about despair, disillusionment, loneliness, waste of human capabilities and also Ireland as it was making its entry to the age of modernity in the first half of the twentieth century. The irony is that the five Mundy sisters dance and dream before their life crumbles away in front of their eyes. Consequently, it is pointless to reiterate that dance in the play is employed to

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denote a symbolic effect. Michael states on behalf of the playwright that, dancing “was the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness” (Friel, 1990, p.71). In reality, dancing in the play has and speaks a language of its own.

M. Eliad claims that, “even before the dawn of history, human beings danced as a way to enter sacred time” (1971, p.28). In the past, this physical activity used to give the dancers the power to reconnect to life- energizing sources. Ironically, it is Michael who can imaginatively see this life- invigorating signifiance of the act of dancing. Moreover, Elmer Andrews remarks that dance in the play functions as the other side of the coin of the disenchanting and world-weary selves of the characters. In other words, dance symbolically underlines the tragic waste of the slowly diminishing human life. Yet, Andrews describes the play as renouncing pessimism especially in the third dance that sounds like a chirpy note for hope, aspiration and future change, (Andrews, 1995, p.232). From another point of view, Gagne contends that though the three dances are noticeably different, they form a kind of progression toward the evaporation of happiness from the Mundy family life. She argues saying:

They (the dances) are distinctly different, being a circle dance of women, a dance of lovers, and a dance in which the whole company, facing the audience, sways gently from side to side. They all point to mystery, I would argue, but represent successively deeper ways of experiencing the mysterious dimension of human life. Like precisely calibrated liturgical ceremonies, each of them resonates a specific place in the heart. Friel's interweaving of the dances with the narrative is so skillful that the audience only realizes at the end of the play that its movement has been toward a depth of heart that is transcendent (1995,pp.121-122).

Gagne maintains that in the play the rising movement toward transcendence is counter balanced by the falling movement toward tragedy. The theme that joins these two movements in the play, says Gagne, is homecoming represented by Father Jack himself. She asserts saying that, “The issue of staying or leaving the family home affects all the main characters, but its importance is rendered problematic by the stronger theme of alienation,” (1995, p.122). The internal feeling of loss that underlines the whole action combines with the dance schemes

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to create a picture of human life that is bewildering at its core. Gagne states that, "it is in the wild dance of the sisters in the middle of the first act that the power of life-force breaks out in the play," (1995, 124).

The play's action starts with an invitation to dance from Maggie to her other four sisters so as to take part in the Lughnasa dance festival that is held on an annual basis up the hills. Kate, the eldest sister and the school teacher, calls them to their senses, evokes their sense of responsibility and reminds them of being Father Jack's family. Then, the newly purchased radio set, that works intermittently, plays a local song which almost excites the five sisters to dance in widely individualized styles. The music could not be ignored, rather it corresponds to a lingering and long-standing craving for life force and power. From this point on, the attitudes, desires, fears, dreams and conflicts of the characters make themselves audible and visible to the audience. In the epilogue of act one, Michael the narrator recalls the tale and outlines the influence of the radio in the Mundy family and how it is used to unveil their yearning for otherness saying: "We got our first wireless set that summer- well, a sort of set; and it obsessed us," (Friel, 1990, p.1). The presence of the radio in the life of the Mundy sisters - which seems to have triggered their dance drive- was their only way to connect with Celtic Irish culture, the external world and at the same time, a symbol of the encroachment of technology on their alienated lifestyle in the early decades of the 20th century. Furthermore, both the Lughnasa festival, and the radio provide an outlet of the suppressed liminal desires of the sisters and function as antithetical tool to oppose the stifling authority of both the church and family life. In fact, they wanted to incorporate the radio into the pagan culture of Lughnasa and its rites by calling it Lugh; the pagan Celtic deity of reaping the crops. Nevertheless, Kate, the oldest of the five aunts, says the narrator, took exception to the idea of giving the radio a holy name because it is blasphemous to, "christen an inanimate object with any kind of name, not to talk of a pagan god. So, we just called it Marconi because that was the name emblazoned on the set," (Friel, 1990, p. 1). Instead, the sisters have singularized the wireless as they thought it has a sacral power so as to provoke their dancing in that summer and therefore they have developed a type of ritualistic listening habit to it despite its intermittent reception of waves (Friel, 1990, p.4). In fact, this ritualistic devotion to the radio foreshadows the silent speechless dancing of the sisters in the third dance which sounds like a reverie. This Marconi, says Russel, "signifies the necessity for paganism that Friel has

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affirmed using in the play,” (2014, p.207). It seems that the radio prompts the nostalgia of the past and is associated with the modernization of the country which brought the factory in the local community and killed the handmade gloves of Agnes and Rose. Paradoxically enough, it announces the death of the period to which the nostalgia is expressed, (F. C. McGrath, 1999, p.238). However, though technology can make the individual closer to the community, it seems that it sometimes turns him/her down as the poor transmission of the radio cuts off the girls' spontaneous bursts into dance. Life grounded in technology only must fail. The first hope of change is thus dashed out in front of their eyes.

Friel, at the outset of the play, presents the two contradictory mindsets of Kate on one side and her other four sisters on the other side. When Agnes suggests going, “To the harvest dance...Just like we used to. All dressed up,” (Friel, 1990, p.12). Kate immediately takes a condemnatory attitude to the very idea and reproves her sisters. However, Agnes fires back in an offensive bunch of statements that unveils the despair and repression that looms over the Mundy family. She says: “How many years has it been since we were at the harvest dance? at any dance? And I do not 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 am only thirty five. I want to dance,” (Friel, 1990, p.13). Agnes is referring to the audience who usually frequent the Lughnasa festival who Kate describes as savage. Stubbornly enough, Kate does not back off, but keeps justifying her rejection of the whole idea and emphasizes her refusal by summoning the village community looks and views to the conversation. She says: “Do you want the whole countryside to be laughing at us? - Women of our years? - Mature women, *dancing*? What's come over you all?” (Friel, 1990, p.13).

In spite of the fact that dancing is brief, it is central for understanding the play. *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) incorporates traditional pagan practices as an antitoxin counter measure to curb the long standing influences of the historic trauma. The stage directions state that the dance is grotesque. That is to say, it is weird and peculiar as it is deficient in the flexibility of motion that is characteristic of regular dance. It seems that there is an inhibitive energy that averts the Mundy sisters from basking in the passing moment. This unseen power seems to turn their endeavor into a parody or a travesty. The circle in which they dance is a symbol of confinement. R. Cave (1999) thinks that the play is a fictional reproduction of

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a culture which failed to recognize the affinity between fleshly and immaterial needs and awareness, (pp.118-119). Even Kate who is doing whatever she can to conceal and lock up this binary could not but outburst in dancing when the music ignites her senses. Additionally, in the first dancing scene, the order that Kate is keen to maintain is threatened to dissolve. The stage directions describe this moment as follows:

Kate dances alone, totally concerned, totally private; a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic; a weave of complex steps that takes her quickly round the kitchen, past her sisters, out to the garden, round the summer seat, back to the kitchen; a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time ominous of some deep and true emotion...Kate makes no sound. With this too loud music ...there is a sense of order being consciously subverted, of the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves, indeed of near- hysteria being induced (Friel, 1990, p.22).

The dancing of the Mundy sisters is characterized by their frenzied movement and energy. They “shout-call-sing-to each other”, (Friel, 1990, p.22). On their side, dancing is a kind of celebration of their suppressed fleshly mortality. Nevertheless, though dance was a folk ritual in the past, Friel describes Kate as dancing alone (Friel, 1990, p.22.). Most probably, Kate is refusing to admit any power the Lughnasa festival may have over her and at the same time she is also showing herself as independent in her mindset from her sisters. In fact, Russell seems to believe that all the sisters’ dancing is a kind of deploring the absence of men in their lives and at the same time a foreshadowing of the collapse of any thoughts they may harbor about local men wooing them in the near future, (2014, p.211). Furthermore, taking into consideration the tendency of the Irish Catholic Church to rate women in correspondence to their relationship to men, the dancing scene connotes the sisters’ realization of their status as social pariahs being unmarried women. The idea is that their dancing is an expression of their desire to be counted, recognized and considered. The play seems to give them voice in a social environment that seems to marginalize and silence that voice. Thus, dancing is not at all celebratory in the play, on the contrary, it is an expression of disappointment and frustration. Furthermore, one can claim that it is a kind of caricature of their status and a modified sort of keening. It is also a revelation of frustration for the lack of men in their lives. This is revealed through shedding

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light on the sisters' interest in uninterested suitors. Unfortunately, they are socially regarded as outcasts for being unmarried

As dance depends on the personal initiative of the participants and does not require a mediator, the religious institution then decided to curb it, to put a hold on its energies and rather to regulate the places and times of this seemingly uncontrollable activity, (Whelan, 2006, pp.142-145). Therefore, in 1935 a dance halls act was passed to guarantee the moral appropriateness of the Irish people through monitoring and regulating their dance gatherings. The excessive enthusiasm of the Mundy dance can be also a sign of rejecting the church dance-regulating act. Further, the broken pace and tempo of the sisters' first grand dance is a sign of despair and rebellion against this act as well. Additionally, the first grand dance scene as critics like to call it reveals the tension and anxiety that lie unseen under the calm surface of family life. The hearts of the sisters can no longer experience fear. The submissive spirit is now revived. Ritually speaking, the women's dance is an attempt to reconnect with life's primitive joy. If one's situation is somewhat oppressive, linking to the mystery of life can free one's spirit of fear and helps one see his situation in a new light and that may lead to conflict. Gagne argues:

Kate is right, it seems, to take up the dance of the sisters defensively. The power of coercive authority is broken once spirit has been awakened... in people who have been subject to it. So while the circle dance of women resolves one tension in the play (the rejoicing heart has no room for fear and fascination), it also creates the condition that will lead to another. The awakened spirit is the restless spirit. The second half of Act One portrays the tension inherent in the hearts longing (1995, p.125).

The irony is that the more Kate sticks to her rigid worldview, the more the family moves downward the dissolution trajectory. In fact, life was too much to bear to the Mundy sisters. When Kate brings up the issue that her two knitting sisters do not bring any money in the house, they burst out in her face for the first time:

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Kate...I thought what you and Rose earned knitting gloves was barely Sufficient to clothe the pair of you.

Agnes: This isn't your classroom, Kate.

Kate: Because I certainly don't see any of it being offered for the upkeep of the house.

Agnes: Please, Kate-

Kate: But now it stretches to buying a new wireless. Wonderful.

Agnes: I make every meal you sit down to every day of the week-

Kate: Maybe I should start knitting gloves?

Agnes: 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.

Rose: And d'you know what your nickname at school is? The Gander!

Everybody calls you the Gander! (Friel, 1990, pp.23-24).

In the light of this attack on the "the damned righteous bitch" (Friel, 1990, p.34) as Maggie calls Kate later, the Mundy's life would have been like hell without the few moments of dance which brings them closer to life energizing wells. The scene also exhibits the challenge her two submissive sisters show to her coercive authority at home. When the spirit is revived, the intimidating authority power is broken to the people who were subjected to it. Donal Ward (1998) argues that the play is a cry against the failure of religion in early twentieth century Ireland. He says:

Friel's award-winning play, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which unfolds in the late nineteen-thirties, is a story of the effect of industrialization on the lives of the rural poor in the West of Ireland. Much more, however, than an exposition of growing economic deprivation and the dehumanizing effects

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of the industrial revolution, it is a study of the spiritual wasting away that takes place when religion ceases to fulfil its proper function in human life. *Dancing at Lughnasa* expresses the need for celebration and ritual to affirm humanity and its relationships; it decries the destructive force of a religion that separates itself from these fundamental human needs (p.391).

Kate, therefore, represents the power of the Catholic Church of Ireland in her recurrent endeavor to inhibit and erase the physical needs of her sisters. She simply made their female bodies dysfunctional and incapacitated, (Russel, 2014, p.218). When Chris wears Father Jack's surplus and folds it over her head, it is Kate that objects to her sister putting on the vest as it is nonconformist to do that, (Friel, 1990, pp.21-22). Kate perceives then that there is an order that is being subverted. She tells her sister Maggie that:

You work hard at your job. You try to keep the home together .You perform your duties as best as 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, Maggie (Friel, 1990, p.35).

Indeed, Kate is turned into a masculine figure despite her femininity. Further, she is described as agamic and asexual. Being a teacher who elevates mental work, she wants to make the whole family forget their bodies. Donal Ward comments on the Mundy sisters' very repressive context and Kate's role in that stifling atmosphere saying: "The lives of the sisters and little Michael are poor but well-ordered. Order is represented in the household by Kate, the school teacher. But the order that she brings is not that of the mind which one might expect from a teacher, but the order of the Church. As Friel sees it, it is the limited, impoverished, death-dealing pattern of respectability and conformity" (1998, p.391).

The diverse manifestations of dance in Friel's play alludes to a suppressed traditional spirituality that is lurking dormant under the surface. Friel seems to be reconciling the uncanny elements of the Irish Celtic history with the realist world of Ballybeg. Catriona Clutterbuck contends that the sisters' dance is revealing their ritual-based spirituality which is set in opposition to their suppressed selves.

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Dancing according to her is nothing more than entering into a state of liminality where they feel temporarily different. When places become momentarily dysfunctional or lose the function they once had, they become liminal spaces. Liminality is transitional and can also take a nonphysical or mental form. Furthermore, it can be introspective and may sound like an initiatory rite where one is standing between two states of being. It is a gateway to something different. Dancing to her is simply their liminal space and a form of longing for a partner, (1999, pp.105-108).

In fact, Lughnasa is an occasion where the sun-god Lugh gets married to Ireland, the land of Erin. This time of marriage and union was thought to be suitable enough for casual and temporary human dating of undignified nature. In Celtic mythologies, Lugh is also the deity of passion, libido and sexual drive. The very rigid attitude and piety that Kate adopts towards out of marriage sex is part of the dominant culture then that required this sensuous activity to be part of marriage. Early in act one Michael draws his audiences attention to the “shame mother brought on the household by having me-as it was called then-out of wedlock,” (Friel, 1990, p.9). Again, Friel states that the five Mundy sisters have no choice to remain single. In fact, they have healthy sexual desires. Kate gives her orders to Chris to make Gerry sleep “in the outside loft. And alone” if he wants to stay overnight, (Friel, 1990, p.26). Furthermore, Maggie likens her crave for smoking Wild Woodbine cigarettes as an unsatisfying substitute for having sex. She confesses saying, “Wonderful Wild Woodbine. Next best thing to a wonderful, wild man. Want a drag, Kitty,” (Friel, 1990, p.23). Later near the end of act two, she informs Kate she is losing hope to find a man in her life. She says: “God, I am really getting desperate”, (Friel, 1990, p.62). Agnes develops a kind of psychic headache when Gerry comes to visit Chris as she secretly has a private crush on him. Friel is saying that despite the rigid social and political mores of sexual conduct, privately many defied the conventions. In fact, the play itself is a statement of protest about the social and political discrimination practiced against Irish women now and then. He portrays the unfulfilled life, and existence of those women in *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

One may claim that in Friel's dramatic world, modernity, place, community and religion are usually used as backdrop to the tales or incidents and events narrated in the play. Additionally, many of the conflicts in the play are sparked by

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outside factors; community, Father Jack's return, church, Gerry, and change or internal anxieties such as the chasm between the unfulfilled desires of the sisters and their realization. Kate for example wants to keep the status quo while others seek change. Over the course of the play's action and despite the efforts of the sisters to keep the family intact, we witness the family's disintegration under the blows of multiple internal and external forces. With the retrospection of Michael, the brief joyful moments of the Mundy sisters are fashioned in ritualistic guise.

The dancing of the four other sisters at home creates a unity against Kate's attempts to turn them into masculine entities and brings the Lughnasa festival home in part. Hence dancing helps them to re-empower their bodies in the place. Indeed, all their routine daily activities take the form of rituals and take them back to place. Edward Casey is in the belief that a body takes people to places, thus it is the doer of the act and the witness of being in place at one and the same time. Both places and their inhabitants mutually influence each other and share traits as well. These places become sites of memory, (1993, p.48). Thus, the daily routine activities of the Mundy family and their despair-combating dances leave their unseen inscription in the spaces in which they take place. This means that, "their bodies have marked the interior of the house and its yard, making them sites of memory that can be accessed in the future, as indeed older Michael does when he concludes the play with his dreamy, mesmeric monologue," (Russel, 2014, p.220). The idea Russel is proclaiming is that dancing and the existence of the Mundy sisters in place made county Donegal, the cottage and its yard re-inscribed, sacralized and memorable so as when people revisit them, literally or figuratively, such as Michael, they can re-experience their power once more. Additionally, what Russel is advocating is that places have the ability to gather not only thoughts, but also experience and histories. When we recall these places with their past events and people's life in them, we may entertain a feeling that these reminiscences have been safely stored in place and preserved intact as they were.

Casey asserts that "The lived body is the material condition of possibility for the place- world while itself being a member of that same world", (1996, p.24). Hence the grand dance of the five sisters serve two purposes; it seems to identify the remaining features of the phasing out Celtic pagan culture that is seemingly lingering despite the aggressive power of both the Catholic Church and British imperialism. Second, it is an attempt to return to the abandoned fleshly bodies and

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to emphasize the desire to anchor themselves in their physical living place, the cottage. Dancing at home is a symbolic attempt to participate in the dance celebrations in the back hills. Places draw and connect their occupants together within their boundaries and make them visible. Furthermore, places also maintain other things such as thoughts and memories. Indeed, Friel puts together four types of places on the stage. These are; the living quarters, the back hills, the fictional county Donegal and finally, the African village of Ryanga in an endeavor to portray the conflict between Catholic Ireland and paganism in the remote back hills. The potential objective is not to show Catholicism rejected, but encompassed into a larger pagan context. In doing so, he is adding more emphasis to his belief that paganism is necessary in the lives of human beings. Friel had previously claimed that paganism is essential in Ireland.

In fact, dancing for this short time to the music of the radio, made them oblivious of their cruel society and willing to adopt even if momentarily to heathen otherness. That sounds like otherness that Father Jack ran into in the course of his stay in Uganda. The narrator informs his audience that Uncle Jack was viewed as a hero in Ballybeg when he took up missionary duty in Africa twenty-five years ago and that the whole family took pride in that. Michael says: “it gave us a little bit of status in the eyes of the parish and it must have helped my aunts bear the shame mother brought on the household by having me-as it was called then- out of wedlock”, (Friel, 1990, p. 9). As soon as he gets familiar with Michael being a love child, he informs everybody that in Ryanga, local women favor love children since they believe that they are a blessing and can be a sign of good omen. Father Jack's African narratives are associated with the still living traditional practices in pre-modernity Ireland to unveil the endurance of folk beliefs and customs. As he is caught between the hard rock and the blue sea, being unable to return to the Christianity of his earlier days, nor enjoy his African new faith and experience, he left his sisters in astonishment as he was trying to describe the insights and revelations he discovered in Africa. Kate's opposition to Father Jack's new mindset and worldview and Gerry's encroachment on the family's private zone is a fear of what she does not know. She cannot click with what does not go with her orthodox Catholic worldview. She even complains to her sister Maggie that Jack “{has} completely changed. He's not our Jack at all. And it's what he has changed into that frightens me”, (Friel, 1990, p.49). Further, when Jack brings up the issue of cohabitation in the enlarged families of Ryanga, it is his sister Kate that opposes

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and further rebukes him for bringing these unchristian narratives to an obviously Christian household. She tells him that, "It is not what Pope Pius XI considers to be the holy sacrament of matrimony. And it might be better for you if you paid just a bit more attention to our Holy Father and bit less to the Great Goddess...Iggie," (Friel, 1990, p. 6). Jack's acceptance of African pagan cultures has distanced him from the church which has a strong hold on the lives of the local people of Ballybeg. In short, the "spark of hope brought home by Jack to Ballybeg from Africa is just as elusive as the promise of a better life held out by the wireless, "Marconi" says Donal Ward, (1998, pp.392-393).

Fionola Meredith argues in *Irish Times* that we need, "to look at the character of Michael, the narrator, how he articulates who these people were, and he only has language as his tool. But you can't frame them like that, you can't confine them. People are more than the facts of their lives" (2015, p.2). Bursting out spontaneously into dance is an attempt to reject the restriction of language. Dance for Friel is a type of self-expression that can substitute language itself. It exhibits the wild aching hearts of the five sisters. The tragedy of the tale is that they were always trying to hold up their family life intact despite all odds. However, the dream fades like a fallen flower that was gradually losing its smell and color.

Surprisingly enough, as the narrator recalls his memories, he finds out that he was not present in the master dance scene in the Kitchen. Brian Friel makes Maggie ask Chris after the dance ends about the child to emphasize the fact that his memory is creative and reconstructive. She says:

Maggie: ... (at window) Where's Michael, Chrissie?

Chris: Working at those kites, isn't he?

Maggie: He is not there. He's gone.

Chris: He won't go far.

Maggie: He was there ten minutes ago.

Chris: He'll be all right.

Maggie: But if he goes out to the old well.

Chris: Just leave him alone for once, will you, please?

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(Friel, 1990, p.23).

One feels that the dance is an invention of Michael's memory to underline their individuality. The narrator in the play is actually a developing character who improvises while recalling his memory to know the reasons behind the family collapse. Friel also makes use of devastated and shattered characters to clarify the dramatic conflict. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the narrator is apparently torn out between his past and his present and his child and adult identities. Friel insists that young Michael should be invisible and has no physical reality in the play. The stage directions assert that, "No dialogue with the boy Michael must ever be addressed directly to adult Michael, the narrator", (Friel, 1990, p.7). The conversations, and actions of other characters provide an imaginary impression of his presence on the stage. The invisibility of the child narrator reassures the notion that our past reminiscences are most probably kind of fiction revived by imagination rather than fact.

Other dances in the dramatic work are usually ignored in the play's scholarship. The dances of Chris and her good for nothing Gerry Evans can be regarded as different in nature and significance from the Mundy sisters' grand dance. The couple's dance in the garden sounds more joyful than the bizarre dance of the five sisters in the kitchen. Their outdoor dance is short and transient as opposed to the first Mundy dance that took place in the house. The disappointment of the former is set against the wish for freedom of the latter. Moreover, the arrival of Gerry Evans marks the third elusive hope in the play and drives the narrator to be involved in the dramatic nature of the play. The other two elusive hopes are the radio and Father Jack. It is from this point on that the idea of Michael's illegitimacy becomes more significant to the plot. The scene that follows and which features Chris and Gerry dancing together makes it clear that Michael the child has never met his father before. The "marriage dance", as one calls it, is described to have taken place in silence between Gerry and Chris. The audience is not allowed to watch their dance, but it is reported by the narrator. Gagne claims that "listening to Michael remembering the dance, the audience realizes that this image of his mother and father was the carrier of his most cherished dreams and hopes," (1995, p.126). Later at the end of act one, Michael clues that we might have a marriage celebration in the coming act. He says:

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And although my mother and he didn't go through a conventional form of marriage, once more they danced together, witnessed by the unseen sisters. And this time it was a dance without music; just there, in ritual circles round and round that square and then down the lane and back up again; slowly, formally, with easy deliberation. My mother with her head thrown back, her eyes closed, her mouth slightly open. My father holding her just that little distance away from him so that he could regard her upturned face. No singing, no melody, no words. Only the swish and whisper of their feet across the grass. I watched the ceremony from behind that bush. But this time they were conscious only of themselves and of their dancing. And when he went off to fight with the International Brigade, my mother grieved as any bride would grieve. But this time there was no sobbing, no lamenting, and no collapse into a depression (Friel, 1990, p.42).

This image of mother and father dancing together sounds like an elusive hope to the child. The "yes" of Chris to Gerry's unfaithful marriage proposal is always opposed by the "No" of Kate who refuses his visits and calls him "The animal," (Friel, 1990, p.33). The root of her animosity to Gerry is fear of otherness, says Gagne, (2007, p.127). The scene underscores her fear of the unknown. Agnes comments on Kate's disapproval of her sister's involvement in the dance by saying that she does not understand many things. Michael's description of his dad and mum dancing in silence may be an attempt to sugarcoat their passions despite the pain he feels for being an illegitimate child. Even the righteous Kate cannot miss out the joy of the moment. She says: "And look at her, the fool. For God's sake, would you look at that fool of a woman? Her whole face alters when she is happy, doesn't? They dance so well together. They are such a beautiful couple," (Friel, 1990, p.33). Gagne argues that by narrating his parents' marriage dance, Michael "has brought his listeners to an understanding of home as whatever roots the heart in its quest for love...A child can be an outsider like Michael, but if he holds in his heart an image of enduring love, he is free to roam the world with confidence," (1995, p.128). In contrast to this fantastic description of the narrator, Friel in lieu presents a parting picture of the anticipated bridegroom. Furthermore, he makes the characters underline Michael's absence in many parts of the play to intensify his narrator's unreliability. Part of the spell of the play is the playwright's employment of Michael as both a detached narrator from the action and present at the same time through the play to voice the dramatic lines of his childhood self.

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In fact, Friel goes far in challenging the conventions of the dramatic art in disclosing the end of the work to the audience from the start.

Once more Michael introduces his third dance recall which he repeatedly claims “owes nothing to fact”, (Friel, 1990, p.71). This time it is an inaccessible reality by means of our senses. Faith gives evidence of things that are felt, but unseen. Gagne comments on the child's faith in the mystery of love and life saying:

If it is a child's wonder at the mystery of life that is remembered in the first part of Act One, and a child's hope in the mystery of love that concludes the first act, it is a child's faith in the mystery that surrounds life and love that comes to the fore in Act Two. The narrator introduces his account of the third dance he remembered from the 1936 by saying “it owes nothing to fact” (p.71) ...The third dance concludes the play, indicating that Lughnasa's ritual trajectory is meant to encompass the narrative, in the same way, it would seem, that the reality which surpasses comprehension encompasses the known reality. The narrator leads up to his closing memory with scenes that depict the breakdown of life patterns that had been meaningful for the family, (1995, pp.128-129).

For as long as Michael could recall, life with its recognizable patterns was falling apart in front of his own eyes. Later, Michael tells us of his father's duplicity and the sudden departure of his two aunts to London where they passed away there and finally his own departure to England when his time has come. In fact, the last dance materializes from his awareness of this unseen reality and which sounds to contain regular reality. Indeed, the narrator leads the action to the last memory through dramatic scenes that unveil the forces that led to the family breakdown. When the picture that carries hope is shattered and torn out, the house is left unshielded in the encounter with all the destructive forces that brought it down at last. Darkness took the place of hope. Michael, unlike Kate whose fear of the unknown, and her inability to open herself up to the mystery of life, argues Gagne:

has changed his image of romantic love for a vision of eternal life... {and} a willingness to wait in the darkness that surrounds the familiar life for the greater life to manifest itself. That Michael had this gift, even as a child is what makes his final memory of that long ago Lughnasa time a mystical

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one...Nothing could be more stark than the contrast, at the end of the play, between Kate's despair and Michael's peacefulness, (1995, p.130).

Kate's sobbing at the death of Father Jack indicates that she still lives in the memories of the past. She cannot let go of the bygone bright images of her family; Father Jack's heroic picture, and a family fully committed to her self-invented notion of right order. Therefore, she seems destined for a life of emotional longing for the past. The whole family, the narrator says, took part in the final dance in silence and in complete isolation. He says: "everybody sways very slightly from side to side-even the grinning kites. The movement is so minimal that we cannot be quite certain if it is happening or if we imagine it", unfortunately, he asserts, "But much of the spirit and fun had gone out of their lives", (Friel, 1990, p.71). Nevertheless, his final speech assures the audience that he has reached at self-peacefulness as opposed to Kate's despair. Unlike him, she could not embrace the greater life circle he decided to take part in. Gagne describes Kate's tendency to live in the past saying:

A perpetual outsider, she will return again and again to these images from the past, able neither to let go nor to take full possession of them. If Michael is serene, while his aunt is abject, it is not because he has acquired a special knowledge which she lacks. The image of everyone dancing in the final scene indicates that the unconscious mind of all human beings, as Mircea Eliade's work suggests, participates in the greater life. What differentiates Michael from his aunt is that he is conscious of participation, (1995, p.131).

The final dance seems to shed more light on the other two ones. It seems that the celebrations-of love and life- in which all human hearts can find joy and delight are means to an end. That is to say, they are the criteria of the spiritual journey which leads up to eternity and longevity. No despair of ours can change the real nature of things, says Gagne, (1995, p.131). Donal Ward argues that despite the poverty, and confinement of the Mundy family that is both financial and spiritual, there are: "three tantalizing but ultimately frustrating rays of hope arrive. The first is the new temperamental 'wireless' that functions only sporadically; the second is brother Jack, a priest, who has but recently returned from twenty- five years in the African missions; and the third is Gerry Evans. Chris' never -do- well lover, the father of young Michael" (1998, pp.391.392). Unfortunately, the three elusive

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rays of hope that Ward is referring to have finally let the five sisters down respectively. In fact, life itself let them down.

In an attempt to interpret the opposition between the narrator's entertaining memory of the 1936 summer and the biting reality that looms over his final speech, Edward Casey theorizes on how the recollection of traumatic memory can be made delightful. He delineates this process in terms of what he calls the condition of the 'afterglow'. He writes: "{this} refers to the process in which some quite traumatic body memories-which may have been devastating at the moment of origin-will come in the course of time to seem acceptable and even pleasurable to remember", (1987, p.156). The idea is that human beings usually have the competency to convert these psychic stresses into recollectable memories and are also empowered to develop a self-mechanism that enables the rememberer to retrieve them in benevolent guises. Casey also contends that taming these memories by way of repeated contemplation and recalling them to ourselves or to others empowers the traumatized person to reproduce them in a less upsetting way, (1987, pp.156-157). Hence, Russel argues that Friel's narrator has been through all, "this process of rumination, then reminiscence, then additional rumination, thus leading him to literally recreate the memory of the famous dance scene as a pleasure narrative that he relates as an artist," (Russel, 2014, p.239). Michael artistically rebuilds his family's dance as tranquil and equalizing when in reality it was broken into pieces. The objective is looking for a remedy to his own traumatic pain and to set up a sense of togetherness with the audience after showing the ironically swaying picture of the family that accompanies his last speech. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a thoughtful and careful cogitation upon love for dance, family, ritual, music, words, particular place and time. This happens, he says, "all in the face of despair," (Russel, 2014, p.240). Gaston Bachelard has remarked that when people fantasize about their childhood homes, they may not be real historians, on the contrary, they can be poetic daydreamers and their emotions most probably are nothing less than poetry that was not immediately written at the site of memory, (Cited in Russel, p.241).

Brian Friel's objective in rebuilding his communal consciousness through drama is based on re-narrating the particular tales of common people who went through the grand moments of Irish history as a kind of resistance to what Andrej Pilny calls the master or meta narrative. The aim of this replacement is simply

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giving an outlet to the power and voice of individualized experiences, (2000, p.34). In fact, postmodernist writing is marked by a suspicion of grand narratives since they intentionally ignore and underestimate the diversity of human life and existence. Furthermore, master narratives are formulated and enhanced by power structures and hence are unreliable. One argues that master narratives are a construct of modernity and should concede to the more humble tales of the local people. The aim is to push aside the grand narrative and centralize the individuals' tales that are more truthful and trustworthy.

Dancing at Lughnasa also explores the possibility of the pagan remnants living side by side with divine faith. Pagan rituals unveil the longing of the bodies and souls to be fulfilled and be more catered for. The famous dance scene underlines the pressures of the established religion on human souls. Friel asserts that spirituality is based on pagan and divine grounds, (Russel, 2014, p.196). He, in *Vanity Fair*, states that, "*Dancing at Lughnasa* is about the necessity of paganism", (1991, p.143). He claims that both cultures of paganism and Christianity need equal space in people's life. Hence, the play acknowledges that Christianity remains embedded into a larger pagan worldview in remote areas such as county Donegal. The dramatic reproduction of pagan celebrations in Ireland and Africa implies that Christianity was merged into a broader conception of life in its material and spiritual aspects. Both Christian values and Celtic practices seem to have coexisted shyly and with many misgivings in county Donegal in 1930s. Russel contends that: "The fluidity with which characters such as Rose and Father Jack move between Celtic and Christian worldviews represents Friel's model of religion generally in which characters oscillate between worldviews. Something like this dynamic process is needed, Friel suggests, for religion generally to become once more an enriching process in our lives" (2014, pp.228-229).

Donal Ward argues that ritual can operate side by side with the real. It plays a very important role in enabling us to come in touch with ourselves, with our surroundings, with others and with our creator. It helps human beings be human. Though, it can be described as a province and interest of religion, however there are moments when the guise or the guiding spirit of a religion may become fossilized and suffocating and of no avail to the faithful or the believers.

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Nevertheless, the need for ritual never fades away. He elaborates on the issue of ritual in *Dancing at Lughnasa* saying:

If ritual is denied, there cannot be human life because ritual is one of the essential qualities that define humanity. Without ritual, there can only be alienation and death. Ritual is action, it is motion, and it is dancing. It is also word. It is both action and word. Like two sides of a coin, there cannot be one without the other. The word is identified with reason and because reason can enter into conflict with ritual, it is possible to conclude that the perfect expression of ritual is ritual freed from the need of word, (1998, p.394).

Ward believes that Christianity from its early days holds ritual in its arms to celebrate its life and uses reason to illuminate its meaning, however, he claims:

In the world of *Dancing at Lughnasa* the church fails. The ritual of the Church seems to function no longer. Its use of reason has become dominating, oppressive and stultifying. Instead, it is the religion of an earlier dispensation, be it Celtic or African, or the simple act of dancing that offers hope. And then, apparently, because the word has become oppressive, there is hope only when even the word is left behind: 'dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary' (1998, p.394).

Ward argues that drama, entwining word and action together, is also ritual. Drama originally was ritual and is still thus today. *Dancing at Lughnasa*, due to Donal Ward is a ritual play that discourses well in many ways. He comments on the play being ritualistic in its nature saying:

It underscores the unity of religion in its many faces and its importance to human life. It is a challenge to the Church in Ireland to reexamine its presence to the people. It celebrates the value of family life and the relatedness of human beings through love, however, imperfect. It cautiously applauds the innovations of technology and warns of the pitfalls of indiscriminate industrialization. Most significantly *Dancing at Lughnasa* underlines the importance of ritual for human existence. And in doing this, Brian Friel serves his audience so very well. But the ritual he defends is finally a ritual without words. Friel makes his argument in a play, one of

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the most ancient of rituals, and he argues it carefully-with words, (1998, p.394).

Given the point that both ritual and myth are symbolic operations and undertakings, Katherine Burkman claims that ritual is, “a system of object and act symbols”, (1987, p.14). Consequently, one can argue that the playwright has demonstrated ritual in *Dancing at Lughnasa* at least in three guises. These are; ritual as pagan African and Celtic celebrations including sacrifices, ritual as present-day routine practices and activities and finally ritual as drama. The Lughnasa ritualistic festivals are not dramatized on the stage, on the contrary they are reported to happen “up the hills” in a conversation between Kate and Rose. While the latter regards them as regular and worldly activities, the former discredits them as savage and unchristian. Similarly, Father Jack’s remembrance of Ryangan pagan ceremonies are described by him in some detail but are not also performed in front of the audience. He also asserts that these celebrations involve some sacrifices as well. He says: “that what we do in Ryanga when we want to please the spirits –or to appease them: we kill a roaster or a young goat....You have ritual killing. You offer up sacrifices. You have dancing and incantations”, (Friel, 1990, p.39).

As the sisters are prevented to attend the festivals up the hills, they transfer the ritual dance to their home. Dance is a light activity, but it has a ritualistic sense and connotations in the action. Friel seems to be saying that the regular everyday routine practices of our life sometimes take the guise of ritual and that the ritual can grant the secular acts meaning as in Africa. Burkman argues that habit is a great killer of suffering, and that when it falls short of doing that it acquires a ritualistic sense. Also, it can be a way to get over and get on as well, (1987, pp.13-14). Friel makes use of this technique in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. There is a kind of repetition of a number of routine activities in the Mundy sisters’ home life so as to mitigate the hardships of life and as a way to get on with life as well. The five sisters get involved in daily routine activities such as chicken feeding, ironing, eating, talking, house cleaning, laundry washing and listening to the radio. This creates a sense of superficial enduring and securing in their life which in reality lacks these qualities. These daily practices and simple tasks help them ignore the disappointments and deprivation of their life. Hence, dancing seems their own resistance technique to dance out stress, worries and anxieties that have

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accumulated over their shoulder and in their consciousness. The purpose of Friel in presenting all these rituals on the stage is to seduce the theatergoers into accepting his ideas and verdict on the historical reasons that led to the ambiguous dividedness of the Irish identity. He makes his audience aware of the notion of sacrifice so as to draw their attention to other unmentioned life sacrifices which Ireland has to make. Father Jack is expelled from his missionary service since he has gone native. He is literarily sacrificed. His inability to accommodate his pagan and Christian views left him with a fragmented mind when he is faced by his new reality. Father Jack maybe representing Ireland that is failing to reconcile her two antithetical outlooks of life. Rose and Agnes have also sacrificed their lives and fled to London so as to spare their sisters of their responsibilities. They finally passed away.

Michael's conclusive thoughts of the memories that the play is born of, places dance over language. He tells the audience that,

when I remember it, I think of it as dancing- as if language had surrendered to movement- as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. Dancing as if 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. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary, (Friel, 1990, p.71).

In fact, language is giving in to the power of movement and dancing. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, dance as a repertoire of movement, aesthetic energy and value, is frequently occurring at seasonal traditional festivals. In other words, it is associated with the uncanny other as seen by modernity. Lughnasa is a Celtic pre-Christian crop reaping festival in which the first ear of corn is chopped up and presented to the harvest deity. The play assures us that these practices are still existing side by side with Christian values and practices. The pagan festival is still observed with other accompanying social activities such as matchmaking, dancing, tale telling and music. In short, Friel creates tension among multiple elements in the play. Communicative dialogues are keeping pace with movements as if they are in a contest, the divine with the pagan, recalling events with dismembering, and current temporality with ritual and heritage. What is obvious is that the play left many of these competitive dichotomies questionably

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unconcluded. The most remarkably outstanding strain is that between what the playwright manifests and what the unreliable narrative voice harks back to. Friel assertively states that Michael is narratively looking back at memories that he might not have full hold on to. Michael states that: "But there is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me most often; and what fascinates me about that memory is that it owes nothing to fact. In that memory, atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusionary", (Friel, 1990, p.71).

In conclusion, the play leaves the particular behind and appeals to something deeper in the Irish psyche. Brian Friel is the playwright who undeviatingly mirrored the metamorphosis that Ireland underwent. The narrator of *Dancing at Lughnasa* may be regarded as an imaginative writing figure for his beautifully elegant reproduction of the Mundy dances via which they momentarily wedded soul and body together while deploring their disempowerment in a society totally controlled by a radical religious authority. Additionally, the play is a balanced combination of human pliability, pain, and nostalgia. The tragedy of the Mundy sisters in *Dancing at Lughnasa* is put forward not as an outgrowth of a specific historical archive that could be repaired despite the multiple references to identifiable Irish history, but as an allegory for a global gap between aspiration and fulfillment. Fintan O'Toole contends that in the plays of Brian Friel, "the times and reason, the historical context, matter hardly at all. What matters is the image" (O'Toole, 1993, p.203).

No one can overlook the impression today that Ireland, and unequivocally as it looked true in the 1930s of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, remains at a pensive and diverging juncture. Irish individuals pay occasional and seasonal visits to pagan sites following weekly church ministrations. That poses the Irish on a dual plane; temporal and spiritual at one and the same time. They neither live exclusively in the present, nor entirely in the past. Obviously enough, they have one leg in the here and now and another in the past. That dual time mindset expands the horizon of experience, and creates a flexible art of life that is always capable of scrutinizing the past heritage and building up a dialogue with it. The goal is a hopeful search to understand Irish temporality.

As a previous colony developing into a new fledgling nation, Ireland has always been the focus of a global concern. The relationship between literature and

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society is largely sophisticated, but in the case of Ireland, it is profuse and unrestrained. In fact, my research idea and work has originated from an attempt to understand the symbolic and ritualistic significance of dance and the act of remembering the past in Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa* by exploring the sociopolitical, and economic context of the work. Though *Dancing at Lughnasa* narrates personal stories, and ignores grand narratives, in Irish literature all stories are political. As the text and context of the play illuminate each other, so my analysis of the text is largely framed by its multiple contexts. As *Dancing at Lughnasa* is set in county Donegal, it echoes the clashing issues between past and present, religious and pagan, real and unreal worlds and the possessed as opposed to the desired. In fact, the dividedness of the Irish mind and its ability to hold opposite world and life views provide a framework that is beneficial for understanding the play.

In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, a combining and collaborative ability manifests itself in the binary of paganism and Christianity. Sometimes these beliefs clash, other times coexist and integrate harmoniously. Friel advocates a balance between the two with no full control of one over the other. This ambiguous solution defeats the attempts to find a decent resolution to the conflict in his play. Paganism is seen by Friel to live with a thin veneer of Christianity in Ireland. The message in *Dancing at Lughnasa* is that Ireland like Michael the narrator needs to find out its own image as a single unified nation and let go of its past experience. Like the narrator, the only way to get rid of the traumatic loss of the past is to look to the future and wash hands of it. There must be a recognition of the past and its heterogeneity and there should be more work to build a homogeneous image of the nation in the future. Irish people have to acknowledge and let go of the fragmented past, otherwise they will live to feel sorry for not doing this as early as possible to save what they can.

Dancing at Lughnasa, dramatizes a frozen and paralyzed reality in a bittersweet tragi-comic mode. It is also a ritualistic drama. Again, dancing is used as a surrogate to language. In the play, communication is unusually done through movement and ritual and not language. Furthermore, at three crucial moments of truth in the play, the dialogue gives in to movement and the downhill path of the family's momentum is temporarily stopped and the audience are taken back to the ritual dances of old Celtic culture. Since dance is ritually a way to get into non-

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secular holy time, the three dances of the play can be regarded as memory provokers that incite Michael to recall his old days in the family house. Tribal dances are historically acknowledged to have always helped local people to reconnect to their ancient ancestors and indigenous culture. Hence, the three dances of the sisters are their methods to link to life endowing sources. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is also a cry about the unfulfilling reality of five individual human beings in a former era via the device of the memory play. Also, it is an attempt to describe their ritual-based spirituality that is set in opposition to their suppressed selves.

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الملخص

الرقص، التذكر، وإعادة النظر: قراءة نقدية سياقية لمسرحية براين فرايل "الرقص في لونازا" يقدم الكاتب المسرحي المبدع بريان فرايل Brian Friel في مسرحية "الرقص في لونازا" وصفاً للأيام السعيدة الأخيرة في حياة خمس سيدات أيرلنديات غيرمتزوجات في صيف ١٩٣٦ أثناء الاحتفالات التي تواكب مهرجان لونازا للحصاد في أيرلندا واللاتي يعيشن معا في بيت صغير في قرية معزولة ونائية بالقرب من بالي بج Bally Beg في مقاطعة دونجال Donegal في أيرلندا الشمالية. وقدم بريان فرايل الحكاية من خلال حكايا من بين شخصيات المسرحية، هو مايكل Michael ابن كريس - إحدى السيدات الخمس - من علاقة غير شرعية مع جيرري إيفانز Gerry Evans. يحكي مايكل الحكاية من ذاكرته عندما كان صبيا في السابعة يعيش مع أمه وأخواتها في هذا البيت المنعزل في ظروف بالغة الصعوبة حين كانت الكنيسة الكاثوليكية مع زحف موجات التصنيع يبددان الآمال ويحبطان الرغبات الشخصية والإنسانية للأسرة الصغيرة ويحيلان حياتهم المحبطة إلى جحيم لا يمكن احتماله. ويسرد مايكل الحكاية وسياقاتها بعد أن شب عن الطوق وترك أسرته مهاجرا كغيره من الشباب والشابات إلى لندن وغيرها من بلدان العالم. ويلجأ برايان فرايل إلى استخدام مسرحية الذاكرة Memory Play وأدواتها الفنية كشكل مسرحي هجين وغير تقليدي يجمع فيه بين فن الدراما والسرد هروبا من سطوة التاريخ الجمعي إلى التركيز على حكايات الأفراد والأشخاص العاديين في محاولة لشرح تعقيدات الحالة الثقافية الأيرلندية عبر قرون عدة. ويدعو كافة الأيرلنديين إلى ضرورة تجاوز التشظي الثقافي والتاريخي في محاولتهم لصنع هوية أيرلندية جديدة متماسكة تعبر بهم آلام الماضي وحيرة الحاضر وصولا إلى مستقبل أكثر إشراقا وتفاؤلا.

الكلمات الرئيسية: المسرح الأيرلندي، الرقص، مسرحية الذاكرة