

I. Brian Friel and His Works: An Introduction

Born on 9 January 1929 in Killyclogher, Brian Friel is a playwright and, more recently, director of his own works from Northern Ireland who now resides in County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. He was appointed to the Irish Senate in 1987 and served through 1989. In 1989, BBC Radio launched a "Brian Friel Season," a series devoted a six-play season to his work. In 1999 (April-August), Friel's 70th birthday was celebrated in Dublin. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the British Royal Society of Literature and the Irish Academy of Letters. On 22 January 2006 Friel was presented with gold Torc by President Mary McAleese in recognition of the fact that the members of Aosdána have elected him a Saoi.

Friel began writing short stories for *The New Yorker* in 1959 and subsequently published two well-received collections: *The Saucer of Larks* (1962) and *The Gold in the Sea* (1966). His first radio plays were produced by the BBC, Belfast, in 1958, and he later went on to write two plays for Radio Telefís Éireann as well. Richard Pine's discussion of Friel's six unpublished early plays remains the most thorough discussion of these otherwise unavailable works. While working as a struggling writer, Friel wrote fifty nine articles for *The Irish Press*, a Dublin-based newspaper, from April 1962 through August 1963; this diverse series included short stories, political editorials on life in Northern Ireland and Donegal, his travels to Dublin and New York City, and his childhood memories of Derry, Omagh, Belfast, and Donegal.

He struggled with little initial success to gain recognition as a playwright from 1958 through 1964; at one point the Irish journalist Sean Ward even referred to him in an *Irish Press* article as one of the Abbey Theatre's "rejects" (1962) and Friel later admitted in a 1965 interview that his play *The Blind Mice* (1963) nearly ruined Phyllis Ryan's Orion Company, while *The Enemy Within* was largely ignored by the

public and critics when staged by the Abbey Theatre for a week during the summer of 1962. Shortly after his return from a short stint as "observer" at Tyrone Guthrie's theater in Milwaukee from April through July 1963, Friel wrote *Philadelphia Here I Come!* (1964), the play that was to make him immediately famous in Dublin, London, and New York; this play retains its status as a turning point in Irish drama and one of the most important plays of the 1960s. *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (1966), and *Lovers* (1967) were both successful in Ireland, with *Lovers* surprisingly popular in America.

The Freedom of the City (1973) is an explicitly political work about the Troubles in Northern Ireland, while *The Mundy Scheme* (1969) and *Volunteers* (1975) are pointed, and in the first case bitter, satires of the Irish government. However, by the mid 1970s, Friel had moved away from overtly political plays to examine family dynamics in a manner that has attracted many comparisons to the work of Chekhov. *Living Quarters* (1977), a play that examines the suicide of a domineering father, is a retelling of the Theseus/ Hippolytus myth in a contemporary Irish setting; that play, with its focus on several sisters and serves as a type of preparation for Friel's more successful *Aristocrats* (1979), a Chekhovian study of a once-influential family's financial collapse and, perhaps, social liberation from the aristocratic myths that have constrained the children.

Many plays of this period incorporate assertive avant-garde techniques, like splitting the main character Gar into two actors in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*. Also portraying dead characters in "Winners" of *Lovers* or the dead and Brechtian choric figures in *Freedom of the City* and metacharacters existing in a collective unconscious Limbo in *Living Quarters*. These experiments came to fruition in *Faith Healer* (1979), a series of four conflicting monologues delivered by dead and living

characters who struggle to understand the life and death of Frank Hardy, the play's itinerate healer who can neither understand nor command his unreliable powers, and the lives sacrificed to his destructive charismatic life.

Friel co-founded The Field Day Theatre Company with actor Stephen Rea in 1980. In 1981, fellow Northerners Tom Paulin, Seamus Heaney and Seamus Deane joined an expanded Board of Directors for work beyond the narrowly theatrical, writing pamphlets and publishing an ambitious multi-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature*. Field Day staged his *Translations* (1980), *Three Sisters* (1981), *The Communication Cord* (1982) and *Making History* (1988), but he informally left the group to stage *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) at the Abbey Theatre where he formally resigned from Field Day in 1994. Especially during the period from 1980 through 1985, and in association with the Field Day cultural agenda, Friel advocated the idea of Northern identity, what he often referred to as "the Northern Thing", a nonsectarian identity that Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland shared based upon their common culture and history that is distinct from both banally British or Irish culture.

Translations was premiered in 1980 at the Guildhall in Derry, Northern Ireland by the Field Day Theatre Company, with Stephen Rea, Liam Neeson, and Ray McNally. Set in 1833, it is a play about language, the failed meeting of British and Irish cultures, the looming potato famine, the coming of a free national school system that will eliminate the traditional hedge schools, the English expedition to convert all Irish place names into English, and the crossed love between an Irish woman who speaks no English and an English soldier who speaks no Irish. Yet it was an instant success because of the play's deft ability to reference the Troubles and English-Irish relations without condemning or idealizing any side. The innovative conceit of the play is to stage two language communities (the Gaelic and the English), which have

few and very limited ways to speak to each other, for the English know no Irish, while only a few of the Irish know English. *Translations* has gone on to be one of the most translated and staged of all post-World War II plays, having been performed in many countries across the globe. On the performance of the drama *Translations*, Jenny Spenser says:

The plays' political significance should be measured against the playwrights' approach to Translation itself. Thus Friel's play seems the most conservative and Edgar's the most in tune with the liberal European politics of the time. Kushner's play, however, demonstrates a different understanding of the risks, limits, and possibilities of a postmodern Translation practice, one that would substitute uncertainty for mastery in its approach to the Other. (Spenser 389)

Despite his growing fame and success, the 1980s are often referred to as Friel's "Gap" because he published so few original works for the stage. *Translations* in 1980, *The Communication Cord* in 1982, and *Making History* in 1988. Privately, Friel complained both of the work required managing Field Day and of his fear that he was trying to impose a 'Field Day' political atmosphere on his work. However, this is also a period during which he worked on several minor projects that fill out the decade. Translations of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1981), Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1987), an edition of Charles McGlinchey's memoirs entitled *The Last of the Name* for Black staff Press (1986), and Charles Macklin's play *The London Vertigo* in 1990.

During the 1990s Friel was seen to return to a position of dominance of Irish theatre with the premiers of *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), *Molly Sweeney* (1994), and *Give Me Your Answer Do!* (1997), along with the less critically successful *Wonderful Tennessee* (1993). Friel had been thinking about writing a *Lough Derg* play for

several years, and his *Wonderful Tennessee* (1993) stages three couples in their failed attempt to revive a pilgrimage to a small island of the Ballybeg coast. We are reminded that during his early career he was largely a playwright of the Irish male experience. There were two plays before 1975 with all-male casts in *The Enemy Within* and *Volunteers*.

Friel's ability to transform himself into a playwright of strong female role is associated with the growth of his playwrighting relationship to actress Catherine Byrne, who had the lead in all four plays of the 1990s. This artistic dynamic eventually motivated Friel to direct his own plays for the first time in his career. Beginning with the Gate Theatre production of *Molly Sweeney* and continuing with the Abbey Theatre production of *Give Me Your Answer Do!* (1997).

The play, *Molly Sweeney* (1993) enjoyed considerable success on the stage, but it attracted little critical interest, perhaps because of its superficial similarities to *Faith Healer* (1979), another play comprising of a series of monologues. This play is about a blind woman in Ballybeg who constructed for herself an independent life rich in friendships and sensual fulfillment and her ill-fated encounter with two men who destroy her life. Frank, the man she marries who becomes convinced that she can only be complete when her vision is restored, and Dr. Rice, a once-renowned eye surgeon uses Molly to restore his career.

The other play, *Give Me Your Answer Do!* recounts the lives and careers of two novelists and friends who pursued different paths. One writing shallow, popular works and the other writing works that refuse to compromise to popular tastes. After an American university paid a small fortune for the popular writer's papers, their careers are cast into stark contrast when the same collector comes to review the manuscripts of the impoverished artist. They all gather for a dinner party as the

collector prepares to announce whether he will recommend the papers to his university, but at the last moment the existence of two "hard-core" pornographic novels based on the writer's daughter forces everyone to reassess his career.

Entering his eighth decade, Friel found it difficult to maintain the writing pace. Between 1997 and 2003 he produced only the very short one-act plays *The Bear* (2002), *The Yalta Game* (2001), and *Afterplay* (2002), all published under the title *Three Plays After* (2002). The latter two plays stage Friel's continued fascination with Chekhov's work. The former staging Chekhov's story *The Lady with the Lapdog*, the latter imagining a near-romantic meeting between Andrey Prozorov of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Sonya Serebriakova of his *Uncle Vanya*.

However, the most innovative work of this period is *Performances* (2003), a meditation on the fears of aging and the intersection of life, love, and art in a long one-act play that combines drama with a staged performance of Leos Janacek's *Intimate Letters* for string quartet. In this play Anezka Ungrova, a graduate working on the impact of Janacek's unrequited love for Kamila Stosslova on his work, playfully and passionately argues with the composer—more than 70 years after his death—on his life and her life, while players of the Alba String Quartet interrupt their dialogue, warm up, chat, and finally play the first two movements of his *Second String Quartet* in a tableau that ends the play.

In some transparent ways, *Performances* suggests Friel's personal concerns since the composer Janacek is portrayed as Friel's age at composition (74 years), and he expresses his anxiety over not being up to the challenges of scaling for a final time 'the mountain' of creating a full-scale work.

The final, full-scale work that Friel had in mind while writing *Performances* was *The Home Place* (2005), his final play set in Ballybeg. Although Friel had written

plays about the Catholic gentry, this is his first play that directly considers the Protestant experience, and in this work, he considers the first hints of the waning of Ascendancy authority during the summer of 1878, the year before Charles Stuart Parnell became president of the Land League and initiated the Land Wars. The play focuses on the aging Christopher Gore, who struggles to maintain his authority over maturing son David and restive peasants, the latter under the growing influence of local Fenians. Gore's ability to claim legitimacy as one of the region's model landlords is threatened by the arrival of his cousin Richard, who demeans the servants by seeking to advance his phrenological research, and the crisis that results places his son in the unresolved position as one who both usurps and submits to the paternal authority upon which the Gore family authority rests.

Brian Friel was awarded an honorary doctorate by Rosary College, River Forest, Illinois in 1974. Most of Friel's plays have been performed extensively in Dublin at the Abbey, Gate and Olympia theatres and in many West End theatres in London and on Broadway. Friel's plays are often characterized by very heavy stage directions, from which much information is alluded to, and can be gleaned about the setting, characters and meaning. Friel uses a lot of foreshadowing in many of his plays, sometimes subtly and sometimes more heavy handedly. His works does express an abiding interest in the interaction between nature and the individual like in *The Enemy Within*, *Crystal and Fox*, *The Gentle Island*, *Wonderful Tennessee*, and *The Home Place*.

Dancing at Lughnasa, by Brian Friel, one of Ireland's most important playwrights, was first performed at the Abby Theater in Dublin in 1990 and won the 1991 Oliver Award and later has received many critical responses since its first production.

Commenting on the play, David Krause criticizes it, “for being (a recreation of) the aura of an idyllic past, an indulgence in nostalgia that ... does not lead to a very complex or profound experience” (Krause 372). He explains that the audience is meant simply to “float along with Michael’s sentimental reverie.”(372), and has got problem with the language. Parapassaree Kramer views the play as “reading of Lughnasa as an experience in nostalgia making the narrator’s role passive.” In this regard, she says:

That Michael is engaged in a reconstruction of his childhood experiences as a way of expiating the guilt he feels for having abandoned his mother and aunts as soon as he came of his age. He interprets the play in two aspects which she seems to misread. The first is the fact that Michael doesn’t play the role of his childhood self in the events portrayed, but rather, delivers the boy’s lines from the narrator’s position downstage left. (Kramer 171)

Another evidence to support the view that Michael is actively reconstructing his past is what seems to be her own reconstruction of the play’s epilogue. She claims that Michael finally acknowledges the truth about memory in his closing speech when he says, “What fascinates me about (...) memory is that it owes nothing to fact.”(171) Another critic Kathleen Hughes, writes:

Celtic oral tradition was called ‘filid,’ generally translated as ‘poets’ or ‘seers’” (166). Filid functioned as “guardians of Ireland’s past, its historians, the men who remembered, recited, and taught genealogies, lore of various kinds, methological and heroic tales, antiquarian tradition” (165), but rather, what was ‘amusing’ ‘beautiful’ or enchanted about some past time (Hughes 165).

He interprets dances as ‘dream music’ which closes the play as signifying a mysterious libidinal energy, a force for change, which though it may threaten the ‘safe’ world of childhood, is also the ground of hope and aspiration. Phenomenologist Mircea Eliade views it from religious dimensions and says, “Even before the dawn of history, human beings danced as a way to enter sacred time. Ritual dancing made the members of their tribe contemporaneous with the time of origins, not only of the tribe but also of the cosmos”(28). Commentator Andrew Elmer has noted that the dance act as counterpoint of *Lughnasa*’s themes of shattered dreams and disillusionment. He remarks:

The play would seem to emphasize lost opportunities, tragic waste, failure, a gradually diminishing life. And yet, the feeling one is left with is not at all as simple as that. The play refuses pessimism. It is a play about growing up, about the transition from innocence to experience in which the antidote to loss and disappointment is the ever-recurring upsurge of the life force. (Elmer 232)

This study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with an introductory aspect of the study. It incorporates the thesis title clarification, hypothesis elaboration, introduction to the playwright’s background, his works, themes, techniques, etc. The five Mundy sisters and other Male characters take resort to the Irish Pagan Dance as it offers them the redemptive energy to overcome their frustration, burden of life and mores and convention of the society, which is my point of departure.

The second chapter delves into the theoretical modality carnival, which is to be effectively applied in the analysis of the drama. The third chapter of the dissertation presents an analysis of the dramatic text at considerable length on the

theoretical modality defined and developed in the second chapter. It quotes the necessary extracts from the drama to support and justify the hypothesis of the research work. The fourth chapter concludes the research work. Standing on the firm foundation of the analysis of the text done extensively in the third chapter, it tries to prove my hypothesis stated in the thesis proposal.

II. Carnival and the Celebration of Life

Carnival is a festival season and literally means 'farewell to the flesh.' It occurs immediately before Lent; the main events are usually during February or March. It typically involves a public celebration or parade combining some elements of a circus and public street party. People often dress up or masquerade during the celebrations. Carnival is mostly associated with Roman Catholic and, to a lesser extent, Eastern Orthodox Christians. Protestant areas usually do not have carnival celebrations or have modified traditions, like the Danish Carnival. The world's largest carnival celebration is held in Brazil but many countries worldwide have large, popular celebrations, such as Carnival of Venice.

The origin of the name "carnival" is disputed. It comes from Latin *carrus navalis* (ship cart), referring to a cart in a religious parade, such as a cart in a religious procession at the annual festivities in honor of the god Apollo. It suggests that the name comes from the Italian *carne levare* or, "to remove meat," since meat is prohibited during Lent. The word comes from the Late Latin expression *carne vale*, which means "farewell to meat," signifying that those were the last days when one could eat meat before the fasting of Lent. Its translation depicts *carne vale* as "a farewell to the flesh," a phrase embraced by certain carnival celebrations that encourage letting go of your former self and embracing the carefree nature of the festival. Joseph Dumas writes about the celebration of carnival in Germany as:

Germany's pre-Lent carnival, or *Karneval*, is called the Fifth Season and has been celebrated since the Middle Ages. German *Karneval* celebrations vary by region and most are concentrated in the country's Catholic strongholds. Unlike Mardi Gras, Germany's main celebrations occur on Rosenmontag, or Rose Monday. (Dumas 165)

The carnival may last from a few weeks to several months. While its starting day varies, it usually ends on the day before Ash Wednesday, which is the beginning of Lent. In the Ambrosian rite of Milan (Italy), the carnival ends on the Saturday after Ash Wednesday, and in the area of Eastern Christianity, it ends on the Sunday seven weeks before Easter, since in Eastern tradition lent begins on Clean Monday. Most commonly the season begins on Septuagesima, the third Sunday before Ash Wednesday, but in some places it starts as early as Twelfth Night or even in November. The most important celebrations are generally concentrated during the last days of the season. An inspiration for the carnival lies in the fact that during Lent, traditionally no parties may be held and many foods, such as meat, are forbidden, the forty days of Lent serve to commemorate the Passion of Jesus. It is natural for people to have the desire to hold a large celebration at the last possible opportunity before fasting.

Carnival is an annual celebration of life found in many countries of the world. And in fact, by learning more about carnival we can learn more about accepting and understanding other cultures. Hundred and hundreds of years ago, the followers of the Catholic religion in Italy started the tradition of holding a wild costume festival right before the first day of Lent. Because Catholics are not supposed to eat meat during Lent, they called their festival, *carnevale*- which means 'to put away the meat.' As time passed, carnivals in Italy became quite famous; and in fact the practice spread to France, Spain, and all the Catholic countries in Europe. Then as the French, Spanish, and Portuguese began to take control of the Americas and other parts of the world, they brought with them their tradition of celebrating carnival.

Parts of the carnival traditions, however, likely reach back to pre-Christian times. The ancient Roman festival of the Saturnalia is a probable origin of the Italian

Carnival. The Saturnalia, in turn, may be based on the Greek Dionysia and Oriental festivals. While medieval pageants and festivals such as Corpus Christi were church sanctioned celebrations, carnival was a representation of medieval folk culture. Many local carnival customs are also based on local pre-Christian rituals. For example, the elaborate rites involving masked figures in the Swabian-Alemannic carnival.

In Christianity, the most famous traditions, including parades and masquerading, attested from medieval Italy. The carnival of Venice was for a long time the most famous carnival. From Italy, carnival traditions spread to Spain, Portugal, and France. From France, they spread to the Rhineland of Germany, and to New Orleans. From Spain and Portugal, they spread to Latin America. Many other areas have developed their own traditions. The dynamic economic and political histories of the Caribbean are indeed the ingredients of festival arts as we find them today throughout the African and Caribbean Diaspora. Once Columbus had steered his boat through Caribbean waters, it was only a few hundred years before the slave trade was well established. By the early 19th century, some six million slaves had been brought to the Caribbean. About the carnival festivities in Brazil, Isabel Vincent writes:

For Brazilians, samba and Carnival, which were popularized by the African slaves that were brought to the country, are about community and a way of life. In many shantytowns, residents spend the entire year rehearsing and preparing for the annual Carnival celebrations. It teaches people to have happiness as resistance. (Vincent 7)

Important to Caribbean festival arts are the ancient African traditions of parading and moving in circles through villages in costumes and masks. Circling villages was believed to bring good fortune, to heal problems, and chill out angry

relatives who had died and passed into the next world. Carnival traditions also borrow from the African tradition of putting together natural objects like bones, grasses, beads, shells, fabric to create a piece of sculpture, a mask, or costume with each object or combination of objects.

Feathers were frequently used by Africans in their motherland on masks and headdresses as a symbol of their ability as humans to rise above problems, pains, heartbreaks, illness, to travel to another world to be reborn and to grow spiritually. Now days, we see feathers used in many, many forms in creating carnival costumes. African dance and music traditions transformed the early carnival celebrations in the America, as African drum rhythms, large puppets, stick fighters, and stilt dancers began to make their appearances in the carnival festivities.

In many parts of the world, where Catholic Europeans set up colonies and entered into the slave trade, carnival took root. Brazil, once a Portuguese colony, is famous for its carnival, as is Mardi gras in Louisiana, where African-Americans mixed with French settlers and Native Americans. Carnival celebrations are now found throughout the Caribbean in Barbados, Jamaica, Grenada, Dominica, Haiti, Cuba, St. Thomas, St. Marten; in Central and South America in Belize, Panama, Brazil; and in large cities in Canada and the U.S. where Caribbean people have settled, including Brooklyn, Miami, and Toronto. Natasha Pravaz chronicles the celebratory mood of Brazilians as:

The historical normalization of carnival parades and samba performances in Rio de Janeiro, are the progressive standardization of audiovisual imagery fueled by a nationalistic project based on cultural appropriation. Afro-Brazilian performance traditions have come to stand for Brazilian national identity since at least the 1930s, and

practices of visual consumption such as shows de mulata have elevated "mixed-race" women to be icons of Brazilianness. (Pravaz 98)

To put a carnival band together, it takes many weeks of welding, sewing, gluing, applying feathers, sequins, foil papers, glitter and lots of creativity, energy, and patience. The first step is to come up with a theme or overall concept for the band and to develop costume illustrations for each section of dancers. Costumes are then sewn, decorated, and fitted to each individual dancer. All this creative activity takes place in what are referred to in the Caribbean as 'mass camps,' where teamwork and organization are crucial to creating an award-winning production.

The larger costumes are usually more difficult to design and build. Huge frames are created by bending wire into shapes, then covering with paper mâché, foam, and other materials. Physics play an important role, as the costume must be able to move and dance across stages and streets, and not fall apart. Many different forms of decorations and materials (natural and man-made) are used to transform the costume into a dream of the mind's eye.

Carnival offers all a dynamic tool for self-expression and exploration, a tool to seek out roots and a tool to unite the world, to discover what all have in common, and to celebrate what makes them different. The power and creativity that underlies these art forms can transform lives.

It is a common assumption that carnival traditions were brought to colonies in the New World by Europeans. It is partly true of course, but the inspiration flowed even stronger from another part of the world. When looking at today's street carnivals it is quite clear that ancient African traditions have had a very strong influence. The history of the carnival can be viewed from different angles, but one thing is sure: it is a result of a cross-cultural exchange that started centuries ago. On the transformation

of the carnival, Colleen Ballerino Cohen comments:

Carnival and its elements are subject to change and contestation, they are also valued commodities. The various forces that historically and contemporarily shape Carnival as event, ideology, national culture, and commodity, view Carnival through a single analytical lens. Indeed, they never yield a picture of a singular Carnival, a particular mass player. Rather, they show how specific Carnivals, specific masqueraders, and specific Carnival controversies are in motion, and circulate through the population everywhere. (Cohen 58)

One track back in time will lead us to the countries in southern Europe, which have had masquerades and processions as part of their catholic traditions since Middle Ages. The church and rulers had trouble controlling the masqueraders from acting immoral. In a period of time it was even strictly forbidden to wear masks at the carnival in Venice. Still today many carnivals are held in February, which traditionally is the time of Lent. The carnivals in Venice, some parts of Germany and Holland are still celebrated in the European style

Most summer carnivals, however, seem to have other roots even further back in time and from another continent. The colorful the street parades, the masks and feathers can all be traced back to ancient African festivals, of which many are still being celebrated. Similar ideas seem to have evolved in different parts in the world, like an event that breaks the daily life with music and costumes. Like in Europe, the festivities originated from religious events, celebrations of harvest or in honor of spirits. Where European masks often were meant to hide a person's identity, the African masks have another purpose, to represent and bring alive some kind of spirit

There are many more differences and equalities between the African and European mask/costume celebrations, but South America and the Caribbean are the places where traditions finally met and merged to some degree. Descendants of slaves kept the African traditions alive to keep in touch with their roots. Europeans brought their religious festivities and masquerades and added the common label 'carnival'. Some places like the Bahamas actually use their local name "Junkanoo" which surely has more of an African ring to it. The world map of the greatest carnivals quite clearly points out where the catholic Europeans settled and met with slaves from Africa. The carnival certainly comes from a mix of cultures and still develops like this. It is a way to get in touch with the roots and a chance to get in touch with each other.

For Bakhtin, *carnival* is associated with the collectivity. Those attending a carnival do not merely constitute a crowd, rather the people are seen as a whole, organized in a way that defies socioeconomic and political organization. According to Bakhtin, all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. At carnival time, the unique sense of time and space causes individuals to feel they are a part of the collectivity, at which point they cease to be themselves. It is at this point that, through costume and mask, an individual exchanges bodies and is renewed. At the same time there arises a heightened awareness of one's sensual, material, bodily unity and community. David Hayman comments on Bakhtin's approach as:

In fact we must thank Mikhail Bakhtin for having treated the traditional representations of disorder and anti-social outrage as aesthetic phenomena with recognizable patterns and conventions.

Through his analysis of the carnival, he has located their source and

justified their presence while throwing light on their positive function.

They belong to the same tradition which spawned the circus, the symposium and the menippean satire. His discoveries are too important to be clouded by the limitations of his perspectives. (Hayman 109)

Carnival is both a general sense of the world and of language and a specific literary form. In *Rabelais and His World*, carnival is a way of life and a mode of language opposed to the official norms of church and state and as a binary opposition is perhaps at odds with concepts such as polyphony and heteroglossia. As a way of life, it is an expression of freedom. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. As a mode of language, carnival is specifically an expression of freedom from official norms and values, a special type of communication impossible in everyday life, with special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. Best characterized as a general tone of laughter, the carnivalesque language is an expression of freedom from official norms. The language of laughter builds its own world versus the official world, versus the official church, its own state versus the official state. Rather, it is an invitation to become a part of a complex unity, a bodily collectivity. In this whole the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself; it is possible, so to say, to exchange bodies, to be renewed through change of costume and mask. At the same time the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community.

Mikhail Bakhtin, was a Russian theorist in the 1930s. Bakhtin's immediate

point of departure is François Rabelais, a French writer during the Renaissance. Bakhtin insists that within the scatological writing of Rabelais exist the necessary evidence to discover the history of folk humor, as well as the shocking practices of the Renaissance carnival. The immediate goal of *Rabelais and His World* is to uncover the peculiar language and practices of the carnival environment. Bakhtin is quick to distinguish the carnival culture of old from the holiday culture that exists now. The carnivals that exist today pale in comparison to the unbridled lusting, crazed bingeing, and even physical mutilation that occurred in the carnival environment of days past. The carnival that Rabelais wrote about is quite unlike the modern carnival. In fact, so distinct are they that they share little more than just their common name. The Renaissance carnival culture involves the temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men. Those that lived the carnival immersed themselves in the frolicking physical mutilation, bingeing and primordial gaiety that were the carnival.

The term "carnavalesque" refers to the carnivalizing of normal life. Bakhtin divides the carnivalesque into three forms, ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and various genres of billingsgate or abusive language. Although Bakhtin separates the forms of the carnivalesque, they are often connected within the carnival. The book *Rabelais* offered the provocative notion of carnival as a quality to be identified with the development of the novel. Carnival is connected, for Bakhtin, with laughter, travesty, parody, comedy, improvisation, and the breaking down of hierarchy. Writing about the breaking down of the canon, just like in a carnival, Bakhtin writes:

The novelization of literature does not imply attaching already completed genres a generic cannon that is alien to them, not theirs. The

novel, after all, has no canon of its own. It is, by its very nature, not canonic. It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questioning, ever examining itself and subjecting its established form to review. (Adams 855)

Mikhail Bakhtin described the carnivalesque as something that is created when the themes of the carnival twist, mutate, and invert standard themes of societal makeup. Bakhtin made contemporary theory aware of how much popular culture in early modern Europe involved flourishing traditions of carnivalesque that mocked those in authority and parodied official ideas of society, history, destiny, fate, as unalterable. With its masks and monsters and feasts and games and dramas and processions, carnival was many things at once. It was festive pleasure, the world was turned topsy-turvy, destruction and creation; it was a theory of time and history and destiny; it was utopia, cosmology, and philosophy. The pleasures of carnival were at the same time philosophical modes. The extravagant juxtapositions, the grotesque mixing and confrontations of high and low, upper-class and lower-class, spiritual and material, young and old, male and female, daily identity and festive mask, serious conventions and their parodies, gloomy medieval time and joyous utopian visions. Those that lived the carnival immersed themselves in the frolicking physical mutilation, and primordial gaiety that is the carnival.

Bakhtin sees forms of the carnivalesque emanating beyond the Renaissance carnival into literature, art, and everyday life. The carnival has been forever immortalized in the famed literature of Goethe, the fine arts, and in vernacular that is used today. More broadly, the aesthetic trends of artistic humanism are a reaction against the universal self-image that dominated the carnivalesque. Lastly, one can see vestiges of the carnival in the everyday life of modern times. Bakhtin writes that the

formulation of humor took place within the carnival. Indeed the whole idea of bringing life "down to earth" is concept that was a central to the carnival.

Bakhtin argues that by being outside of a culture, one can understand his own culture. It opens new possibilities for each culture, reveals hidden potentials, promotes renewal and enrichment and creates new potentials, new voices, that may become realizable in a future dialogic interaction. Thus, the neglect of groups marginalized by a dominant ideology within non-carnival time not only gain a voice during carnival time, but they also say something about the ideology that seeks to silence them. Thus, two voices come together in the free and frank communication that carnival permits and, although each retains its own unity and open totality they are mutually enriched.

Carnival and its accompanying components represent a theory of resistance, a theory of freedom from all domination. Carnival is the place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals. There is a motivation during carnival time to create a form of human social configuration that lies beyond existing social forms. Thus Bakhtin's carnival theory is not reducible to terms such as anarchic, nor irresponsible, but, a diverse tactic, one that may be implemented and sustained wherever there is a dominant regime. Bakhtin describes the carnivalesque as something that is created when the themes of the carnival twist, mutate, and invert standard themes of societal makeup.

Bakhtin's carnival is surely the most productive concept, it is a revolution in itself. Carnival must not be confused with mere holiday or, least of all, with self-serving festivals fostered by governments, secular or theocratic. The sanction for carnival derives ultimately not from a calendar prescribed by church or state, but from a force that preexists priests and kings and to whose superior power they are actually deferring when they appear to be licensing carnival.

Carnival does not know footlights, it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. It is not a spectacle seen by the people but they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws of its own freedom and has a universal spirit. It is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. The essence of carnival is vividly felt by all its participants. The tradition of the Saturnalias remained unbroken and alive in the medieval carnival, which expressed this universal renewal and was vividly felt as an escape from the usual official way of life.

The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance. Rank was especially evident during official feasts. Everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling and to take the place corresponding to his position. It was a consecration of inequality. On the contrary, all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong.

The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world. This is one of the essential differences of the people's festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times. The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction. The people's ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world. He who is laughing also belongs to it. Celebrations of a carnival type

represented a considerable part of the life of medieval men, even in the time given over to them. Large medieval cities devoted an average of three months a year to these festivities.

Thus, according to the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, the carnival of the Middle Ages and Renaissance played a significant role in medieval culture because it permitted the expression of the carnival spirit, a fundamental tendency of humanity that was hidden from public view in daily activities. In contrast with the ordinary life of mankind, the carnival world was a “second world” and “upside-down world” where laws, social structure, and religious authority ceased to exist. It was a place for unadulterated passion where free and familiar contact between individuals and exceptional creativity promoted the formation of new modes of communication and personal relationships. The expression of carnival spirit was necessary for the survival of humanity such that, upon the demise of the carnival, the same passionate desires of the carnival were transferred to the domain of literature and art.

The basic postulate of psycho analysis the concept of dynamic unconscious grew out of Freud’s observation, the physical symptoms of hysterical patients tended to disappear after apparently forgotten material was made unconscious. He saw the unconscious as an area of great psychic activity which influenced every action but operated with material. This revolutionary discovery brought a new level of self awareness which altered the pious image of man kind permanently. This therapeutic technique for the treatment of hysteric patient’s unconscious mental activities and as psychotherapy for the treatment of neurotic, perverse and psycho pathetic patients. These bodies of thoughts have been evolving branching and proliferating since their beginning. Page retains Freud’s three-fold meanings of psychoanalysis in the following lines in abnormal psychology:

It is, first, a school of psychology that emphasizes the dynamic, psychic determinants of human behavior and the importance childhood experiences in molding the adult personality secondly, psychoanalysis refers to a specialized technique for investigating unconscious mental activities. Psychoanalysis is a method of interpreting and treating mental disorders, especially psychoneurosis. (Freud 1917)

Especially normal and abnormal activities of the human being or human mind is testified or cured by this method. Through the analysis of dream, psychopathological actions, hallucinations, delusions and psychic attacks of all kinds which we find in the abnormal spheres while talking its development. Brill writes that, it was originally developed by working with the so called borderline cases of mental diseases such as hysteria, obsessions and phobias (Brill 1917).

Superego is the equivalent of conscience. It is partly conscious and mainly unconscious and much attached with society and consists of inherited and socially acquired controlled Mechanism. Its primary function is to create high quality of life and order. So it is the internalization of standards of morality and propriety and the ego which tries its best it can to negotiate the conflicts between the insatiable demands of the id and impossibly stringent requirements of the superego. Embracing both conscious and unconscious conscience Freud considered the ego as the part of the id modified by contact with the external world. So according to Freud, consciousness is created by the dynamic tension and interaction between the id and superego. Thus it is regarded as an executive personality which reconciles their conflicting demands with reality. "The ego is the national governing agent of psyche. It regulates the instinctual drives of id so that they may be released in non destructive

patterns” (Freud 130).

Freud recognizes two fundamental forces – Eros and Thanatos. The first one denotes the force of life instinct in human life. In psychoanalysis Freud presents two basic modes of thinking namely primary and secondary process. The primary process is directly rotated to life instincts or pleasure principle and secondary process belongs to reality or ego.

Freud has given more emphasis on hostility and aggressiveness of human behavior. Life and death instincts are closely related with each other. Some traits of death instincts and life instincts are interrelated and inseparable. Pleasure and pain, love and hate, hostility and tenderness are motives of life and death, which seem mutually antagonistic but often these two are inseparably fused in human activities. It creates ambivalence of instincts. Always sexual violence is the result of sexual repression on the mind or psyche of person human being is much stricter in the context of sex. Suspect, is the main bad force is conjugal life husband and wife both of them cannot be free from suspicion. They can not believe each other because they think of each others immoral sexual behavior.

The person who is aware of event is called conscious in this state mental events and memories are also included can be called preconscious. On the other hand, it is the store house of memories and desires that are readily recallable for they can appear in conscious at wish. Unconscious is the repository of repressed thoughts and impulses which are chaotic, infantile and primitive in nature. Its present is revealed by the slips of tongue, dreams, inner conflict, and neurotic symptoms. Freud claims that our mental proven are essentially unconscious.

Repression is the selective material associated with conflict and stress.

Repression serves as a defense because if a person is not aware of the conflictive and

stressful material the conflict and stress will not exist for the person. There are three important things. First, repression is motivated by selective forgetting. Second, repressed material is not lost but rather stored in the unconscious. The first type was primal repression which invalids a denial of entry in to consciousness of threatening material. In this type of repression it appears as if the individual did not even of repression proper or after expulsion, the material is repressed no longer aware of the material. In introductory lecture in psychoanalysis Freud defines repression as, “The process by which mental act capable of becoming conscious is made unconscious and forced back into unconscious system. Repression can also be described as reversion to an earlier and lower stage in the development of mental act” (Freud 63).

Repression is undoubtedly one of the most important concepts in the areas of personality and psychopathology. The existence of repression is a pre-requisite for the development of an unconscious because apart from Carl Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious, it is through repression that material supposedly enters the unconscious. Repression begins from childhood as it is the age from when the growth of super ego ensues more or less strong according to familial environment. In *Essentials of Psychoanalysis* Freud writes:

The function of his mechanism is however, the tentative solution of the mental conflict and anxiety. Because there resend instinctual drives as an energy form is not and cannot be destroyed when it is repressed so Freud says “that the essence of repression lies in pushing something away and keeping it at distance, from conscious mind. (Freud 437)

For it continues to exist in unconscious from where it exerts a determining force upon conscious mind. If a person continues to repress the sexual urges for long without giving them vent either through sublimation, dream or direct sex and other

many slips falling victim of the social taboo. Those repressed wish have pathogenic manifestation in his behavior. Either they out burst even temporarily or take the path of symptom formation or both may happen, the later case may happen if temporarily lifted repression with out proper outlet to the long repressed instinctual desire is promptly reinstated by the ego. Therefore, the difference between the normal repression and other kind of repression which result in 'neurotic' illness is one of the degrees not of the kind.

Freudian theory holds that all human beings are motivated by powerful and innate sexual and destructive instincts (drives) including incest and murder. Because society will not tolerate such threats for its existence it inevitably comes into conflict with the individual. Initially this takes the form of conflict between the man and society. Subsequently, the socialization demands and prohibitions imposed by parents are internalized by the child leading to intra psychic conflicts. Freud therefore says mental health consisted of resolving these conflicts by channeling one's drives away from inborn illicit wishes and into mere socially acceptable forms of behavior. However, these substitute activities are never quite as satisfying as the original ones would be.

The individual is left with a residue of unfulfilled desire which is the price one pays for living in a civilized society. Another definition for sublimation has been the unconscious substitution of ones behaviors for another that not only would be more satisfying, but also more threatening. This conception implies that sublimation is not always healthy or advantageous, as it may deprive an individual of the maximum feasible satisfaction when strong anxiety has become associated with desirable goal that is actually safe and socially accepted. In this context Freud writes:

It then becomes impossible for the unconscious instincts revealed by it

to be employed for the useful purpose which they would have found earlier if development had not been interested owing to their repression, neurotics have sacrificed many sources of mental energy which would have been of great value in the formation of their character and their activities in life. (Freud 35)

Thus we can evidently describe Freudian psychoanalysis theory of human mind that deals with the dynamics of human behavior. Furthermore directly or indirectly, Freudian theory is concerned with the nature of unconscious mind, suggesting that the powers. Motivating individuals are mainly unconscious. We will forsake the therapeutic aspect since we are concerned here with the theoretical concept of psychoanalysis.

III. Irish Pagan Dance as a Redemptive Force for the Celebration of Life

Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which debuted in 1990, earns its distinction as an Irish memory play more from charm than age. Following the tribulations of the Mundy family in the fictional town of Ballybeg in 1936, it is an engaging piece well suited to this gifted ensemble. *Dancing at Lughnasa* does not dilute the sadness. The cold facts of reality, finally, are what its words are for. But the play does exactly what theatre was born to do, carrying both its characters and audience aloft on those waves of distant music and ecstatic release that, in defiance of all language and logic makes us dance and dream just before night must fall.

Dancing at Lughnasa, surrounds the lives of five grown sisters in rural Ireland in 1936. Though the eldest sister, Kate, struggles to maintain a hard-working, god-fearing Catholic household, Ireland's pagan origins beckon constantly, and the tension between the two ideologies threatens the family's already tenuous harmony. The characters have many unrequited longings such as romantic love and material possessions, but the lack of religious or spiritual ritual is conspicuous. During the feast of Lughnasa the bolder town folk dance around a fire to Lugh, an ancient god of light. Yes, in fiercely Roman Catholic Ireland and Lugh is considered a pagan god, but that irony is, the hypocrisy of tradition.

It is true, just most certainly as it was true in the 1930's of *Dancing at Lughnasa* that Ireland existed at a wistful and sometimes mad crossroads. People made a seasonal pilgrimage to pagan festivals usually after Sunday church services. Voices were raised in earthy airs, just as they joined with others in hymns. Morning prayers blessed homes, sanctified with a light rain of holy water. While during harvest nights in the forest, blazing fires stoked an abandon to Lugh, an ancient god of Light. It put the Irish on a unique temporal plane neither living purely in the past, nor

absolutely in the present but in both at the same time. As Michael narrates in the beginning about the festival as, “She wanted to call it Lugh after the old Celtic God of the Harvest. Because in the old days August the first was La Lughnasa, the feast day of the pagan god Lugh: and the days and weeks of harvesting that followed were called the Festival of Lughnasa” (I 1320).

The dance in the play leads to the awareness and the talk about Lughnasa being celebrated, the pagan feast of the Celtic sun god Lugh, the traditional harvest festival. In Celtic mythology, the celebration on 1 August of the union between sun and earth, nine months before the feast of Beltaine (1 May) marked the beginning of summer. Many pagan festivals have been hijacked by Christianity, but *Dancing at Lughnasa* more than hints at the fact that they might, particularly in Ireland, have been superseded rather than fully replaced. The Christian ideals can be seen in the words of aunt Kate, as Michael says, “She said it would be sinful to christen an inanimate object with any kind of name” (I 1320).

Two meanings oscillate in the feast of Lughnasa. The first is connotations of sexual awakening and transformation, and the beginning of the darker days, the 'eventide' of the year. In the dance the five sisters seem to triumphantly express their atavistic life-force, their emotions far beyond the reach of words. In the liberating force of the dance, Pan god seems to celebrate his victory over civilized Christianity. Paganism seems at least temporarily to win out over the constraints of Christian society. Their dance, individual and collective at the same time links the Mundy sisters to the dancing which was one of the main features of the Lughnasa celebrations and thus to the hidden, submerged culture which neither colonial influence nor Christian teaching has been able to extinguish.

But the dance is not the catalyst into a bright future for the sisters. On the contrary, it is more like the last orgasmic manifestation of the women's joy of life, the last fling of the spinsters, where hope and passion and the present meet, before the evening of their days sets in. What follows, is dismal and tragic. None of the Mundies will go to the Lughnasa dance in the back hills. Agnes and Rose will soon go to London to die there in poverty. Father Jack will be dead within a year. What lies ahead is the sad break-up of a family. It is in many ways emblematic for the stifling social and cultural circumstances of Ireland in the 1930s, for an Ireland edging closer to total isolation during the emergency. At the end of the drama, nostalgically Michael narrates that:

When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as it language had surrendered to movement –as it 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 it 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...

(II 1350)

Kate's fear is of the unknown. She needs things to be a certain way because the changeable aspect of life is threatening to her. Her fixed ideas of right thinking and right behavior act as a buffer between the life she knows and everything that is unfamiliar and therefore menacing. While her sisters respond with pleasure to the thought of celebrating "La Lughnasa" with the country people, Kate reacts with deep hostility:

Kate: And they're savages! I know those people from the back hills! I've taught them! Savages - that's what they are! And what pagan practices they have are no concern of ours - none whatever! It's a sorry day to hear talk like that in a Christian home, a Catholic home. All I can say is that I'm shocked and disappointed to hear you repeating rubbish like that, Rose! (I 1327).

Kate's identification with an uncompromising Catholicism makes her view the issue of Father Jack's forgetfulness with alarm. Not only does he confuse one sister with another, but he has lost all sense of the importance of saying Mass.

It is in the wild dance of the sisters in the middle of the first act that the power of the life-force breaks out in the play. Kate announced that the Mundy family will not be attending the Lughnasa revels, and the sisters are back at their chores in the farmhouse kitchen.

Kate: No, No! We're going nowhere!

Chris: If we all want to go-

Kate: Look at yourselves, will you' just look at your selves! Dancing at our time of day? That's for young people with no duties and no responsibilities and nothing in their heads but pleasure.

Agnes: Kate, I think we –

Kate: Do you want the whole countryside to be laughing at us? – Women of our years? – Mature women dancing? What's come over you all? And this is father Jack's home- we must never forget that – ever. No, no, we're going to no harvest dance.

Rose: But you just said -

Kate: And there'll be no more discussion about it. The matter's over. I don't want it mentioned again. (I 1326)

However, when the music of a step-dance comes on the radio, they hesitate, but then, one by one, they form a line that snakes out of the house into the moonlit barnyard. The line becomes a circle as the women grab hold of each other and scream and shout at the night sky. Only Kate fails to respond fully to the wave of excitement that sweeps over the sisters. She is the last to start to dance, and instead of joining the others, dances, "alone, totally concentrated, totally private" in a movement that is "simultaneously controlled and frantic ... out of character and yet ominous of some true emotion" (I 1329). Moreover, while her sisters scream and yell in near hysteria, Kate makes no sound. Describing the dance between his parents, Michael narrates that:

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. (II 1338)

By breaking through the impasse of fear and fascination, set up by the opposition of Kate and Father Jack, the circle dance of women is ritually significant as a celebration of life. In their exuberant repetition of the jumps and kicks of the traditional dance, the women are giving expression to a primitive joy. The dance is raucous, even grotesque, as one would expect from a group of people perennially engaged in the struggle of life against death, but the women's faces are radiant. Without moments like this of ecstatic release, in which one receives an intimation of life's mysterious

source, the daily round of life, with its deprivations and hardships, might seem too much to bear. When the music stops, the sisters stand gasping for breath, half-ashamed and avoiding each other's gaze, but they have tapped a well of spiritual energy that they had not known existed. Rose and Agnes, the two sisters who eventually run away were submissive to Kate in the play's opening exchanges, but now they are emboldened to challenge her authority.

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! (I 1330)

And yet, the play does not end on a note of hopelessness. In Michael's memory dream and reality form the blurred in between-land of conjured-up reminiscence. The past is, despite the acknowledged tragic facts, illogically enchanted. Evoking in Michael's final narration this, "space somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the actual and the imaginary meet" (II 1350), life retains its aura of enchantment. The play refuses pessimism. But *Dancing at Lughnasa* remains an affecting story of dreams deferred and unfulfilled which strikes just the right affectionate, nostalgic tone. The walls of the Mundys' cottage seem solid in the middle but fade out at the edges, seeming to become part of the cloudy Donegal sky.

The Mundy Sisters and their Dance

The sisters have acquired a wireless radio, which they have named Marconi. This radio plays only intermittently, because the battery expires quickly, and the wireless set has some undefined mechanical problems. When the radio works, wild Irish music streams from it and the sisters dance with abandon paying tribute to the god Lugh. Lughnasa is a Celtic pagan harvest festival that has been adopted by and adapted to the Catholic Church. Along with other annual celebrations, it helps define the calendar of the village. Lughnasa is originally a tribute to the Celtic god, Lugh.

Throughout the whole of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, nothing momentous happens. *Dancing at Lughnasa* vividly depicts the frustrated but animated Mundy sisters and other male characters. By reacting impulsively to the sudden music that blares out through their radio set, they break into a frenzy of uninhibited wild dancing as their tribal festival of Lughnasa. The Mundy sisters and other male characters take resort to the Irish Pagan Dance as it offers them the redemptive energy to overcome their frustration from the burden of life and convention of society.

Dancing at Lughnasa is set on a farm in Donegal in 1936. The piercingly melancholy drama centers upon the Mundy sisters, who just manage to make ends meet. All unmarried, due in part to the man shortage caused by emigration, the religious calling and wanderlust, the sisters are nominally led by the eldest, Kate. She is a buttoned-up, middle-aged schoolteacher and is upset to learn that she is called "the gander" behind her back. Maggie is the liveliest of the bunch, which also includes the dependable Agnes, the "slow" Rose, who is furtively carrying on with a married man, and the prettiest of the quintet, Christina. She is responsible for the family's one moral embarrassment, "love child" Michael, fathered by a man who's never around. However, the eight-year-old is the center of the family, as he's doted on

endlessly by his aunts. The drama is narrated in wistful retrospect by the adult Michael, who remarks of the summer in question, "This was the beginning of things changing. Quickly. Too quickly" (I 1321). As their lives begin to change due to the arrival of things like radio and factories, we begin to see that some traditions cannot be held onto, even when they hold a family together. In spite of all their troubles, the Mundy sisters behave like schoolgirls when they listen to the beat of Irish dance as Michael narrates:

I remember my first delight, indeed my awe, at the sheer magic of that radio. And when I remember the kitchen throbbing with the beat of Irish dance music beamed to us all the way from Dublin, and my mother and her sisters suddenly catching hands and dancing a spontaneous step-dance and laughing-screaming!-like excited schoolgirls. (I 1321)

There is a common thread that binds all the Mundy sisters. They form a very believable family but none of them are able to take control of their lives. Each sister has her own personality and attitude which gives them their sense of family bonding. The youngest of the five sisters, Christina Mundy is 26 years old. She is not married but had a son with Gerry Evans, and was looked down upon for having an illegitimate child. She dressed poorly and had no money and no job. Her son's name is Michael, whom she loves and is very proud of. Maggie Mundy is 38 years old. She also has no money and no job. She is the homemaker and family "Chef." Rose Mundy is 32 years old. She loves to dance but is a bad dancer. She helps by making a little bit of income with Agnes Mundy to add to the Mundy sister household's income by knitting gloves. She is fond of the Festival of Lughnasa as she says:

Rose: First they light a bonfire beside a spring well. Then they dance round it. Then they drive their cattle through the flames to banish the devil out of them. (I 1327)

Agnes Mundy is 35 years old and loves to dance and is a good dancer. She along with Rose wants to go to the festival and she argue with Kate saying:

Agnes: How many years has it been since we were at the harvest dance? – at any dance? And I don't care how young they are, how drunk and dirty and sweaty they are. I want to dance, Kate. It's the Festival of Lughnasa. I'm only thirty – five. I want to dance.

Kate: I know, I know, Agnes, I know. All the same – oh my God- don't know if it's –

Agnes: It's settled. We're going – the Mundy Girls - all five of us together. (I 1325)

Kate Mundy is 40 years old, the eldest and most responsible of the five sisters. She is the only wage earner in the Mundy household by working as a school teacher. She is against the family going to the festival because she thinks that it is a non-religious affair. She orders her younger sisters to abandon their plan to go to Lughnasa.

Kate: What sort of silly talk is-

Agnes: And you can wear my brown shoes with the crossover straps.

Kate: This is silly talk. We can't, Agnes. How Can we? (I 1325)

Though it's a close-knit family, the different temperaments of each sister provide an emotional support to the whole. But we observe the widening cracks, sense the undercurrents and secrets.

The sisters engage themselves in such mundane events as knitting gloves and sweaters, feeding chickens, picking blackberries, and taking walks. They spend a lot of time reminiscing about the past, arguing about the present, and fantasizing about the future. Through all of this, none of the characters is satisfactorily developed. We are presented with hints about each of them, but the lack of any in-depth examination is frustrating. We understand how they relate to one another, and what their pecking order in the household is, but the veil hiding their inner selves is rarely pulled aside.

The sisters are going through misery after misery. The dissolution of the family and the shattering of their dreams is portended from the beginning of the play by the narrator's reference to the sense of unease he had during the festival time he is describing. But the pathos in Michael's story of the family breakup is offset by the wonder expressed in his memories of the family dancing. The lovingly protective Kate is the mostly keenly sensitive to the shame of Michael's birth, the embarrassment of Rose's simplicity, and now the dawning realization of her brother's alienation from the Church. As the only educated member of the family, her teaching salary is the family's lifeline, augmented by Agnes' and Rose's piecework income, hand-knitting gloves. Frustration seems to build on the family. The drama in the Mundys' lives is fascinating, but rarely exhilarating. There are moments when the sisters seem so reserved that it would be a relief if they would just get up and do something. The story of the five sisters whose lives are torn apart over the course of a summer is poignant and sad. The downward trajectory of the family history is suspended, and a chord is struck that resonates all the way back to the ritual dances of our Paleolithic ancestors in cave sanctuaries. Before the festival of Lughnasa was over, Michael narrates that aunt Kate's forebodings weren't all that inaccurate as:

And she had good reason for being uneasy about Rose- and, had she known, about Agnes, too. But what she couldn't have foreseen was that the home would break up quite so quickly and that when she would make up one morning in early September both Rose and Agnes would have left forever. (II 1338)

Kate is not only the wage earner, but also the voice of reason and restraint in the family. There is much tension between the desire to abandon moral, emotional and physical restraints and adherence to social proprieties and Catholic standards of behavior. The agitation is clearly sexual in nature, as the sisters live celibate lives, but it is also religious. Kate and the other women are the victims of an oppressively Catholic ethos, that was shortly to be enshrined in a Constitution which recognized the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society and the special position of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church as the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of its citizens.

Responding to a demand in the country at the time for traditional Catholic social teaching in matters of marriage and family law, *Dancing at Lughnasa* is praised for its skillful focus on Irish cultural identity. It also succeeds in portraying the lifestyle, character, and beauty of the Irish countryside, when all that mattered was family and church. Dancing in all its forms was frowned upon by the Church in the 1930s, if not outright condemned as immoral. Dancing is the central image of the play, from the civilized style of Gerry and Chris (Michael's parents) through Father Jack's ritual dances of pagan Africa to the wild frenzy of the women's Irish reel. Michael once more narrates the dance between his parents which he had observed in hiding as:

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. 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 them selves 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, no collapse into a depression. (II 1338)

The conflict between Kate and Jack regarding dancing can be seen here. Kate believes pagan celebrations, such as the Feast of Lughnasa, which still provide fun and enjoyment in the countryside, are "uncivilized." She believes it is a pagan ritual that the village observes every August, a night when they dance around a fire in honor of the god Lugh, the ancient god of light. Her priest brother however, is now virtually a pagan himself. Though he is clearly unbalanced, he has learned the need of the poor for happiness, dancing, and community celebration, even if it is not church-sanctioned. Describing one of the African rituals, Jack says:

And that part of the ceremony is a real spectacle. We light fires round the periphery of the circle; and we paint our faces with colored powders; and we sing local songs; and we drink palm wine. And then we dance- and dance- and dance- children, men, women, most of them lepers, many of them with misshapen limbs- with missing limbs dancing, believe it or not for days on end! It is the most wonderful sight you have even seen? (II 1340)

The other Mundy sisters help illustrate the chasm between Kate's attitudes and those of Fr. Jack. Maggie, the fun-loving, free-spirited, and most humorous of the sisters, constantly bursts into singing and dancing. Christina has fun during the summer with lover Gerry Evans but feels no need to marry him. Aggie and Rose, who earn small wages knitting gloves, work as the family's sad, "unpaid servants," (I 1322), and constantly chafe against Kate's strictures and the lack of fun. When Kate loses her job, the family is devastated, but it is at that moment that they discover the joy of dancing and recognize the need to celebrate life itself. The dances, especially the dance to what the narrator describes as "dream music" (I 1321), which closes the play as signifying a force for change, which, though it may threaten the 'safe' world of childhood, is also the ground of hope and aspiration. The five unmarried and isolated sisters seem to question about the power of tradition and the waste of lives caught in a society which can't provide them hope or fulfillment.

The dance of life is compromised if anything less universal than life itself is being celebrated. Celebrations of one's family, tribe, and nation constrict the heart, unless every family, tribe or nation can be included in the rejoicing. If one's particular situation is oppressive, however, receiving an intimation of the mystery of life frees one's spirit for a new way of relating to one's situation, and that can lead to conflict. 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, however imperceptibly, in people who have been subject to it. So while the circle dance of women resolves one tension in the play, it also creates the condition that will lead to another. The awakened spirit is the restless spirit. The great celebrations in which all hearts can rejoice, the celebrations of life and of love are not ends in themselves, but touchstones of the spiritual adventure which culminates in the greater life, eternal life.

The male presence is compounded when Michael's father, Gerry Evans unexpectedly arrives with the disquieting rumble of his motorbike. Gerry is a searcher/wanderer, a dreamer whose journey constantly changes destination and brings him into the orbit of his son so sporadically the boy fails to recognize him. This brief sojourn is merely an interlude on Gerry's path to Spain, where he plans to join International Brigade against Franco. But it is enough time to forge an awkward bond with his son, to excavate the hidden wisdom of Jack, and to spark an independent abandon in the sisters that has laid dormant under years of duty and service.

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, 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. The interweaving of the dances with the narrative is so skillful that its movement has been toward a depth of heart that is transcendent.

Then Rose's face lights up. Suddenly she flings away her knitting, leaps to her feet, shouts, grabs Maggie's hand. They dance and sing-shout together: Rose's Wellingtons pounding out their own erratic rhythm. Now after another five seconds Agnes looks around, leaps up, joins Maggie and Rose. Of all the sisters she moves most gracefully, most sensuously. Then after the same interval Chris, who has been folding Jack's surplice, tosses it quickly over her head and joins in the dance. (I 1329)

Dancing at Lughnasa is told from Michael's memories, summoning back to the end of that summer, on the eve of celebration to the harvest deity Lugh, god of music and

light. But the celebration really lives within the sisters, a gift they share with each other and the ones they love. In the Mundy household, they are simultaneously the storm and the buoy, a sharp judgment will always give way to loving forgiveness, a reproach is merely a prelude to a song or a cup of tea or an act of kindness. They are a family marked by the unfailing courage they possess for each other. But now it is on the threshold of autumn, where events will conspire to irretrievably change the golden season of the Mundy's. *Dancing at Lughnasa* breathes through the festival of Lughnasa, and the brilliant images of African customs that Jack imposes on the misty farm, and the kites that Michael chases, wonderfully decorated by his own hand. It is an early artistic vision that will later allow him to so eloquently recall a family to whom fate has dealt a severe blow. As Michael narrates:

She was right about Uncle Jack. He had been sent home by his superiors, nor because his mind was confused, but for reasons that became clearer as the summer drew to a close. And she was right about losing her job in the local school. The parish priest didn't take her back when the new term began; although that had more to do with Father Jack than with falling numbers. (I 1337)

The five unmarried Mundy women flank Michael, anxiously awaiting a bus that bears their long-absent older brother Jack. The croft bustles as the sisters prepare to meet their older brother Jack, a priest returning home after twenty-five years from the dark continent of Africa where he was sent by the Church to convert remote heathen tribes. His arrival is a clue, as Jack wavers uncertainty. But their pride is temporarily deflated as a frail and disoriented Jack totters off the bus, his makeshift luggage hording pagan African artifacts and memorabilia. Jack's embrace of exotic cultures had alienated the Church, upon which all aspects of local life depended. But Jack seemed to glow with

simple grace of human passion, and innocently revels in the creation of Michael, a creature who exists purely from love without obligation. It is the beginning of things changing, too quickly. Jack was a hero to his sisters:

But if he was a hero to me, he was a hero and a saint to my mother and to my aunts. They pored over his occasional letters. They prayed every night for him and for his lepers and for the success of his mission. They scraped and saved for him sixpence here, a shilling there—sacrifices they made willingly, joyously, so that they would have a little money to send to him at Christmas and for his birthday. (I 1323)

In the long run more significant are the changing local conditions that indelibly impact the Mundys' traditional but highly fragile way of life. Kate always insists that the family will get by and can't look trouble in the face, loses her teaching position, and the imminent opening of a woollens factory threatens another source of the sisters' income, hand-woven clothing. Conclusion is bleak, a reflection that leaving Ireland was indeed the only choice for many people, but that even that was not enough to guarantee a positive change of fortunes. The world of the sisters is mired in a complexity of loyalties, horrors, hopes, confused time sequences, hostilities of the sacred and the profane, a constant probing of their role as victim and a continual belief in the restoration of a way of living and thinking which was beneficent and provident but which has somehow turned tragic and punitive.

The situation in the Ireland of 1936 affects the Mundy sisters. The relationship between the Mundy family and the community is not good. The Mundys do not live in accordance with the norms of Ballybeg and convey feelings of humor and warmth. Kate, the eldest and the most conservative of the Mundys, has been victimized all her life because of the Irish situation. Being confined to their homes, the enthusiasm for

the radio, the gramophone and the bike on the one hand, their fear of the new knitting factory in Donegal on the other seem to occupy their mind space. Their dancing, music, movements uncover the Mundys' suppressed feelings and resistance to their situation in life.

Most scenes in the drama are devoted to gossip and quotidian chitchat among the women. The judgmental Kate is ever-ready with a frown and tendency to deny any opportunity for fun, most notably the sisters' desire to attend the annual harvest festival dance. But it is Kate's relative severity that allows for the feeling of wild release and exaltation when the sisters, inspired by a tune on the radio, spontaneously break into an exhilarating dance that expresses their pent-up frustrations, sense of togetherness and the pagan roots of their homeland, an element linked to Jack's experiences in Africa:

With this too loud music, this pounding beat, this shouting – calling – singing, this parodic reel, there is a sense of order being consciously subverted, of the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves, indeed of near by hysteria being induced. The music stops abruptly in mid-phrase. But because of the noise they are making the sisters do not notice and continue dancing for a few seconds. (I 1329)

The oldest sister, practical, sensible Kate, won't allow her younger siblings to attend the harvest dance, saying there are more pressing things to worry about. At home frustrated, the sisters cluster at the hearth, each an independent but loyal note that together forms a kind of music. Jack appears, fondly recounting native African customs and cheerfully discovering Michael's illegitimacy. Many women have love children in Africa, and they belong to and are loved by the entire tribe, much as Michael is owned by each of his aunts through love.

Jack: You're lucky to have him.

Agnes: We're all lucky to have him.

Jack: In Ryanga women are eager to have love-children. The more love-children you have, the more fortunate your household is thought to be have you other love-children? (I 1337)

Jack invites Kate to dance for a Catholic priest, a blasphemy. A new threat to the Mundy's respectability is Rose's romantic declarations for a local, Danny Bradley, whose wife has left him with their children.

The radio in the house is such a strong source of life and energy that they give it a name, "The Marconi". This unreliable box brings music and joy to the house. The temperamental radio is their magical, musical escape. The radio, which breaks down more than it works, unleashes unarticulated emotions in the five women, who spontaneously break into song and dance, with or without its aid. The far-off music summoned by the radio, exerts a tidal pull on the characters far stronger than any domestic occurrence. As the sisters go about their chores in Act I, bickering and gossiping and joking in the kitchen, they are titillated by intermittent reports of the Lughnasa celebration, in which their neighbors honor the pagan god of the harvest, Lugh, with dancing and fires and other back-hills rituals well beyond the bounds of their own strictly enforced Christian propriety. The importance of Marconi can be gauged in Michael's opening narrative when he says:

When I cast my mind back to that summer of 1936 different kinds of memories offer themselves to me. We got our first wireless set that summer – well, a sort of a set; and it obsessed us. And because it arrived as August was about to begin, my Aunt Maggie suggested we give it a name. (I 1320)

Though the women's participation in the fun remains unlikely, an explosion of Celtic music on the new radio possesses them all, even Kate, and leads them into a spontaneous, short-lived dance in which uninhibited leaps and cries of pure animalistic hunger momentarily throw off the monotony of a drab, impoverished existence for an incandescent explosion of joy. This is best illustrated in Act One when the five sisters burst into their Irish dance. Readers seem to look wondrously at the ecstasy of this wild and savage outburst, a moment of transforming power. The Mundy sisters seem to dance out their impassionate yearnings, seem for a moment to forget what they are otherwise painfully aware of that life was passing them by and that they were trapped in deadening routines from which no escape seemed possible.

On one of his visits, Gerry is persuaded to try to fix Marconi, although he knows nothing about radio. He climbs a tree and works on the antenna, and the set seems to work better. The sister's dance to the music, a grim life is left behind, but there is danger for repressed religious souls in this joy. It can lead to sex, ecstasy, and even abandonment, as we hear of the events of Lughnasa. The people of Ireland find joy in this grim poverty stricken land of beauty and sorrow, not in the church, but rather at a pagan festival, the festival of Lughnasa. The family's acquisition of their first wireless radio "The Marconi" provides the novelty of modern technology and popular culture during that time. The historical setting of the play is also relevant to the intrusion of the Industrial Revolution on rural Ireland.

What does the dancing mean in the drama? Michael later says, dancing is a language "to whisper private and sacred things" (II 1350), the expression of a search for an "otherness." It is a passion that might be spiritual or romantic or uncategorizable. In the first, tumultuous dance, each sister's gestures, steps and whoops have been precisely described briefly and enigmatically, on the individual

passions of five contrasting private souls. The play's own pagan force seems to relate to the audience into communion with its own most private and sacred things, at a pre-intellectual gut level that leaves us full of personal feelings to which words can not be readily assigned. The sexual affection between the young mother Chris and Gerry is dramatized not in the dialogue of their tongue-tied reunion so much as in their Fred-and-Ginger spin to the radio's outpouring of "Dancing in the Dark," a song whose lyrics pointedly elude them.

At home, Kate's spirits plunge under the news that Austin is getting married. She deflects the conversation with talk of the feast of Lughnasa. An unexpected desire erupts from Agnes that they all join the dances of Lughnasa. The desire infects the room, and is abruptly inoculated by Kate in a forceful prohibition. Be they the province of the soiled, the drunk and the unruly or improper for mature unmarried women and mothers to dance. Although the story at the surface portrayed these women as devout Catholics, there are still hints to how they hold onto their pagan traditional past. One is the broken mirror that must be kept for seven years or else bad luck would fall on those who dropped it.

Agnes : A right pair of pagans, the two of you.

Rose : Turn on Marconi, Chrissie.

Chris : I've told you a dozen times: The battery's dead.

Rose : It is not. It went for me a while ago. (I 1321)

Through the dances Michael remembers, the play takes on a religious dimension. According to phenomenologists, even before the dawn of history, human beings danced as a way to enter sacred time. Ritual dancing made the members of the tribe contemporaneous with the time of origins, not only of the tribe but also of the cosmos. It gave them the sense of returning to a life, renewing effect on their

everyday lives. At some point in the play, each of the characters participates in a dance, which is either raucous, or romantic, or dreamy. It is only Michael, who grasps the greater significance of the dances. Friel uses Michael, to show how wholeness, or glimpses of wholeness, can grace the most fragmented personal histories. As the play unfolds, we discover that Michael's life has its own tragic element. That summer of 1936, Michael met his father for the first time, but subsequently, he lost him, and the pain of loss is one of the dark undercurrents of the play. Friel's genius is to weave the two trajectories, the story of loss and heartbreak and the dance trajectory, into a vision of human life with mystery at the center.

IV. Conclusion

During the course of writing this thesis, the song and dances are major motifs of Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*. They symbolize the play's central thematic concerns with paganism and societal change. The instrument of change in the Mundy household is the acquisition of the family's first wireless radio. The presence of the radio, which functions only sporadically, inspires in the Mundy sisters a spirit of freedom and expressiveness heretofore repressed within their traditional Irish Catholic household. The setting of the play during Ireland's pagan tradition of the Festival of Lughnasa provides a backdrop of pagan dance, music, and ritual. The Mundy sisters react impulsively to the sudden music that blares out through Marconi, breaking into a frenzy of uninhibited wild dancing. This dance for them acts like a therapeutic medium as it offers them the redemptive energy to overcome their frustration from the burden of life.

Lughnasa is a Celtic pagan harvest festival that has been adopted by and adapted to the Catholic Church. Along with other annual celebrations, it helps define the calendar of the village. Lughnasa is originally a tribute to the Celtic god, Lugh. Based upon Friel's own experiences as a boy, *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a snapshot of the summer of 1936, pieced together from the childhood memories of Michael who, as an adult, affectionately narrates his recollections of that fleeting period of time, before the world changed.

Dancing at Lughnasa begins with a monologue by Michael, who introduces his nostalgic memories of the summer of 1936, when he was seven years old, and the five Mundy sisters, who raised him in rural Ireland, and had just acquired their first wireless radio. Kate is a schoolteacher and the wage earner for the family. Agnes knits gloves to bring in extra money. Rose, who is slightly retarded, helps around the house

and seems to be especially attached to Agnes. Maggie tends to the chickens and prepares meals. Their older brother, Michael's Uncle Jack, had just returned from twenty-five years spent as a missionary in a leper colony in Uganda. Michael was born out of wedlock to Chris, the youngest of the Mundy sisters, and Gerry Evans, who deserted her and the child and only returns every couple of years to see her. By the end of the year, as the older Michael explains in monologue, two of the sisters, Rose and Agnes, had run off, never to return, and Uncle Jack had died of a heart attack.

Father Jack had a significant career as a Chaplain to the British forces in East Africa and then stayed on in Uganda to work as a missionary. He has been returned home to Ballybeg, supposedly because he is sick with malaria. The real reason he has been brought home is that, instead of converting the natives to Christianity, he has been converted to their paganism. He is disgraced in the Church and the community, which previously had lionized him. He has also disgraced his family, and they are embarrassed and humiliated. Previously, his heroic image had redeemed the family somewhat from the stigma of Michael's illegitimate birth.

The sisters acquire a wireless radio, which they have named Marconi. The Old Radio Nicknamed Marconi by the sisters provides their only source of entertainment by playing many traditional Irish tunes to which they love to dance. But this radio plays only intermittently, because the battery expires quickly, and the wireless set has some undefined mechanical problems. It always breaks down and overheats, then has a funny habit of working again at the oddest of moments. Marconi is the beloved of the four Mundy sisters, except for Kate who thinks it has taken away the time they used to spend having wholesome Christian conversations at dinner. When the radio

works, wild Irish music streams from it, and the sisters dance with abandon, trying to forget all their worries and problems.

Gerry Evans, Michael's father, turns up unexpectedly from time to time, bragging about a new job and making unfulfilled promises of a bicycle for Michael. Kate spoils Michael with gifts she can ill-afford and demonstrates devotion, love, and affection for the child, although she disapproves of his father and the nature of his birth. Maggie, on the other hand, teases him and picks at him. We see little in the story regarding the feelings of other characters for Michael. Michael, for his part, occupies himself by making kites. When his father visits them and dances with his mother to the music from the radio, he hides behind a tree and watches.

Lughnasa refers to a Celtic festival with its roots in pagan antiquity. The sisters survive on Kate's teaching salary and what they can take in sewing. They survive as merrily as their own individual psyches will allow them to. They will not allow themselves the joy of attending the yearly Harvest Dance as they used to when they were younger. It seems that age has wrought worry for some unsaid arbitrary reason. There lies the sisters' tragedy and future, which according to Michael's final monologue, is somewhat bleak. Five adult sisters, one offspring, and their sickly brother (a priest) struggle lovingly through life's challenges, both emotionally and monetarily. A devoted family, each with their own quirks and dreams, it is familial love and support, that gets them through these turbulent times.

The sisters are also living in the memory and glory of Jack and his role as a priest and how important that is to their status in this small cold damp Irish town in 1936. They want him to return to their way of life, but he has gone past those beliefs. They think he is dementing, he is not in tune with their small town existence.

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