Posture in Irish Dancing

Posture in Irish dancing is not only a matter of body carriage (extended torso, shoulders back and arms down at the sides) but also the elimination of movement in the upper half of the body. This feature makes it somewhat puzzling, because dancing is an expressive form built on movement of the body. A tradition in which half the body is held immobile invites curiosity.

Although there has been some discussion about the reason for the unique posture of Irish dances, investigation reveals there is no single reason for the style.[1][see p. 90] A number of forces have impinged upon the practice of solo Irish step-dancing. Three factors emerge: (i) the practice of the dancing as physical education; (ii) the processes and requirements of formalized competition, and (iii) the agenda of nationalism. These features merge to form a powerful and consistent ethos that has precipitated the particular development of Irish dancing, including its posture.

Does Irish dancing have something to do with 'Irishness'; with life in Ireland, its society, culture and history? This question of authenticity is embedded in the practice of dancing competitions where winners and losers can be evaluated as dancing more or less in "the Irish style". The question is also raised by critics of competitive step-dancing, including some participants, who argue that the tradition has gotten "too competitive". From an anthropological point of view, the connection of cultural form to social formation is assumed, although the particular nature of the connection is an aspect to be discovered. To say that Irish dancing expresses "the Irish character" is going too far. Yet this is precisely the romantic nationalist point of view. What, if anything, constitutes the 'Irish' aspect of this form?

Along with the question of authenticity, themes of control and authority interpenetrate in particular ways in the practices of Irish dancing. It is not the *fact* of control but the *issue* of control which is incorporated in the form and practices of Irish dancing that is important. How much bodily control is enough? Too much? In this fundamental sense, control becomes an issue in Irish dancing and is literally contested in a dance competition. Authority may be taken for granted in the role of the teacher and competition judge, however this authority may also be challenged within and beyond the competitive process.

The issue of control, which is evident in competitive performance by the individual dancer, is also present at other levels of identity and social formation in what might be called "bodies politic", for example, schools of dancing as well as regional and national level organizations. International competitions in the past several decades have introduced another level of concern at which the issue of control and authority over the development of the form may be raised. Can Americans, Englishmen and women and Australians have input into the development of the form, costume or rules of Irish dancing? At all these levels, control, authority and authenticity are at issue in ways which impinge upon the form and social process of Irish

dancing. I will argue that it is the particular way in which these themes relate and merge in the practice of Irish dancing as physical education, competition and national symbol that ultimately constitutes the Irish aspect of Irish dancing. The posture is a case-in-point.

Posture: Puzzle and Explanations

The posture in Irish solo step-dancing consists of these elements: (1) the torso is held in an extended position, 'place high',[2] (2) the shoulders are held back in middle level and (3) the arms are held in a relaxed manner down at the sides.

Torso	Shoulders	Arms
place high	middle level	down
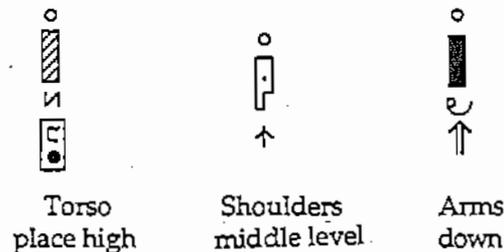
The most important feature apart from the positioning is the fact that each of these body parts are *held,* that is, they are kept from moving. Any single one of these features is not unique to Irish dancing. For example, ballet dancing also uses a still (though not a 'held') torso, extended in place high. Scottish folk-dancing is nearer. Nor is the combination of these features unique among movement systems. One can readily see the similarity to military parade postures and movement, especially drill teams. The uniqueness of this posture derives from its presence in the context of dance forms.

> The restricted pose of the Irish solo dancer, with arms rigidly down by the side, no movement above the waist and so on, looks very strange to people nowadays, accustomed as they are to seeing the freedom of full bodily movement in the various kinds of popular dancing in vogue today and by ballet. What was the reason for this peculiarly inhibited dancing style? (Small 1990).

Jackie Small's question from a radio series on Irish dance music echoes one of the questions I hear most often as an anthropologist interested in Irish dancing. Why is Irish dancing so "stiff"? Whether the descriptive words used are 'stiff', 'rigid', 'inhibited' or 'restricted', the question reveals a curiosity about the visible discipline of the dance form and the significance of non-movement in a system of expressive movement. Breandan Breathnach, respected scholar of Irish music and dance traditions, replied to Small's question on the same radio program:

> I really don't know. I'm sure if you had anthropologists they'd tell you some particular reason why the Irish dance in a particular way, apparently peculiar to themselves -- and this was that they dance from the hips down as it were. And a quality of the dance was that it could be done in a minimum of space. Of course this is different altogether now. I'm sure that people would be able to deduce from that that there were particular features of the Irish character manifested by this kind of thing, but I don't know (Breathnach 1990).

On the one hand, Breathnach recognizes the anthropological nature of the question, that is, the relation of cultural forms to social entities. On the other, he expresses doubt about the possibility of deducing "particular features of the Irish character" from this aspect of the form of Irish dancing. I share his reservations, as indeed, I would be critical of the notion of "the" Irish character. A simple deductive process from the formal features of dancing to a construction purporting to represent essential Irishness can ultimately tell us only about the deducer's ideas, personality and culture. At the same time, however, it is evident in the name and history of this form that Irish dancing is implicated in a nationalist cultural movement and in precisely such romantic notions as "the Irish character". The posture in Irish dancing is a social, cultural and historical construction which some people claim expresses Irishness. The posture is also subject to critical questioning by other Irish observers and, in some cases, participants.

The posture is puzzling (as Small suggests) because it is non-movement in dancing, where we have come to expect more "freedom of full bodily movement". It is also a puzzle because, as Breathnach suggests, its connection to Irishness is unclear.

Inside the world of Irish dancing the posture simply is the way it is. If one asks dancers why they maintain the particular carriage they do, the explanations are likely to entail reasons relating to competition scoring or simply how they have been taught to do Irish dancing. Teachers who are asked may note that it is a feature unique to Irish dancing and reply that it is not meant to be 'stiff' or 'rigid', but simply 'good bearing'.

The two glosses on the posture, 'good bearing' and 'stiffness', represent two poles on an interpretive continuum. One casts the posture in the light of a positive expression, the other in a more ambiguous light, not because there is anything 'bad' or 'wrong' about the posture, but because its stillness is thought to be precisely the antithesis of movement, which is the stuff of dancing. Stillness may also be the stuff of dancing, where it may communicate as silence does in speech. However, the complete elimination of movement from the upper half of the body makes this 'silence' remarkable.[3] As a style of movement this non-movement invites speculation, as well as scholarly research and thought.

There are stories and explanations offered to account for the remarkable carriage of the body. One author traces the style to a ruling by a priest in Donegal that hands be removed from hips while dancing, as this gave the appearance of haughtiness and suggestiveness (Carty 1987). I have been told that since the Catholic Church disapproved of dancing in earlier times,[4] people developed the style of keeping the upper body still so that a priest passing by and glancing in the window could not tell if people were dancing. I have been assured by an Irish colleague that this bizarre account is nothing more than a sample of Irish humor.

Another structurally similar explanation pertained to the setting of hedge schools in penal times, with British soldiers as the disapproving authorities who were fooled by the non-dancing upper-body posture. I have also been told, "Well, the Irish are sexually repressed", as if this accounted for the posture.

The myth-like status of these explanations draws attention to some key issues. First, the accounts exist as explanations and the posture is recognized as an issue -- a 'puzzle'. Second, the accounts recognize the non-dancing character of the posture which calls attention to itself only in the context of dancing. Its meaning "through the window" or "over the hedgerow" is not dancing. Third, these descriptions attempt to account for the posture in terms of social relations of authority, subordination and, in some cases, resistance. Like myths, these accounts, descriptions and explanations, if unsatisfactory in themselves, contain themes which resonate with historical and contemporary concerns with authority, control and the morality of expressive bodily movements.

On a more practical level, some people argue that because the focus of Irish step-dancing is on the feet, the upper body is kept still to minimize distraction. This explanation has a certain appeal because it side-steps the problems of social, historical and semantic investigation. But, the explanation raises questions. Why aren't step-dances from other countries, all of which feature the feet, performed with the same posture? If the purpose of the posture is to avoid distraction from the feet, then doesn't it fail in that the posture calls attention to itself as a remarkable feature of the form? The question of meaning cannot be avoided by appeals to utilitarian or commonsense explanations. It would be possible to assume a radical position and say there is no *natural* evolution of dance forms. Irish dancing is a cultural, thus an Irish, product. The question still remains: why is the posture as it is and what is significantly Irish about it?

Irish Dancing as Physical Education and Performing Art

Contemporary Irish step-dancing is first and foremost a practice belonging to Physical Education. Many, if not all, Irish girls begin taking lessons between the ages of 5 and 8 years of age. It is this beginning level of dance class which keeps teachers in business. Some teachers have classes every day of the week, only one or two of which will be exclusively for competitive dancers. Most participants are sent by their parents who place value on the activity as physical education and expression, a performance art or a party piece.

Dancing lessons are often an after-school activity occupying children for an hour or more before the dinner hour. Somewhere around eighty-five percent of Irish dancers are female. Greater availability of athletic programs for boys has provided options less available to girls. This may be changing as more athletic programs for girls are introduced. Because of the split in gender participation in these activities however, Irish dancing at present is overwhelmingly a female activity. The atmosphere in classes at the beginning

level is often one of sharing knowledge and responsibility between age groups. Older children may be asked to show younger ones a step or a sequence and continue in the role of teacher by drilling the task with the younger children.

Dancing lessons are an education in physical control. The fact that the dancing is Irish and part of the children's cultural heritage is not central to the teaching. Physical technique is the focus of the lessons: the steps, the rhythm, the carriage, the elements of style rooted in the specific controls of body parts and the whole body. This aspect of the dancing has a long history in Ireland as classes in dancing have been used to teach manners and deportment[5] since the 18th century via travelling dancing masters. These itinerant educators and entertainers earned their livelihood bringing courtly manners to the countryside. Today, parents and teachers refer to the same values of bodily discipline and demeanor, as well as psychological aspects such as developing self confidence, in explaining why children are sent to dancing lessons.

The larger context of competition finds its way into the classes through various subtle means. One child may be chosen, based on her skill, to lead a line of dancers through a sequence. If lines and rows are utilized in class instruction the best dancers are put in the font row to provide good examples. Children often vie for the chance to be in the front row.

Competition at this level also happens once or more a year with a school *feis* (competition, festival, pl., *feiseanna*). An adjudicator from outside the school is called in to evaluate the students and award places, medals and trophies. As children and parents find reward in these experiences, they may take interest in further competition. They may also be recruited by their teachers to enter *feiseanna*. This requires a larger investment in time and money for parents and children. Costumes, shoes, extra lessons and entrance fees, not to mention travel and accommodation for distant *feiseanna*, make the step from beginning to competitive level one that fewer parents (if not their children) are willing -- or perhaps able -- to make.[6]

Competition

It is impossible to separate Irish solo step-dancing in any of its aspects from competition. As far back as memories, written records and legends go there have been competitions of one sort or another between dancing masters, their pupils, or simply people with clever feet. Contests were said to be part of county fairs and markets; they have been sponsored by parish priests and they have been an informal part of pub-culture.

The process of competition adds its own dynamic to the history and development of Irish dancing. When an aesthetic form such as dancing is placed in the framework of competition a narrowing of style takes place. It is not a mysterious process. Winners are imitated. The goal of competition is to win medals, trophies and titles. Winners receive praise, status and recognition. Losers may seek explanations for their ranking. Adjudicators, by

the nature of their position, have to know why they chose one dancer over another. That is, they have to have reasons in order to be prepared to reply to curious or angry dancers, teachers and parents. The reasons given to a great extent *define* the winning form which is then taught, practiced and emulated by competitors.

Imitation of winning form is one force that narrows the range of style in Irish dancing. The other force is consistent selection of a set of formal characteristics by adjudicators. The defining characteristics of the form, as they have been developed by adjudicators' decisions, tend to harden and admit less and less variation. If crossing the feet becomes a characteristic which wins, as indeed it has, then a dancer will not win if he or she doesn't cross the feet . The more the dancer can cross the feet or keep them crossed without violating another defining characteristic, the better. And so it is with holding the upper body still with straight shoulders back, the arms down at the sides. The more straight and still, the better the chances of winning or, perhaps, not being eliminated.

If it is true that a narrowing of style has taken place through the process of judging and competition, then more questions arise. What did the style look like in the past? Were there regional variations? Sometimes one relies on negative evidence. In an article on the position of the hands, a former dancer/teacher and current commission member writes about a tradition in Cork of resting hands on hips: ". . . in a last effort to win that coveted medal our tradition was discarded and we conformed to the regulations and specifications of modern day competitions" (Cullinane 1987). There were regional differences in Cork and elsewhere before modern competitive standardization set in.

There is also evidence for a rich and varied past of step-dancing in Ireland in *sean-nós*, or old-style, step-dancing. It is a form which is mainly practiced by older men from rural areas such as North Kerry, Connemara and the designed Gaelic linguistic preserve, Rathcairn, in County Meath. Interestingly, participation in this form is the inverse of modern step-dancing in terms of age and gender. *Sean-nós* has never been institutionalized in regulated or authorized competitions, although there are still informal *sean-nós* competitions. The posture style seen in this form is varied, from the same straight back and held arms of modern Irish dancing to a curved spine and moving arms, depending on the performer. This is not to argue that the straight, still torso and arms aren't traditional to Irish step-dancing, but to point out that it is very unlikely that it was the *only* style extant in the historical tradition of step-dancing in Ireland. A *selection* of the current posture has taken place out of several alternatives.

Historical Context: Nationalist Appropriation

The fact that the *sean-nós* tradition of solo step-dancing allows for a wider variety of posture indicates that the narrowing of this aspect of style is not simply a product of competition. Competition in step-dancing predates the

narrowing of posture style. However, the more informal and loosely organized competitions in the first decades of this century were brought into a unified institution in the 1930s. *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha,* The Irish Dancing Commission, was formed at the behest of the Gaelic League (MacConUladh 1980).

The Gaelic League along with the Gaelic Athletic Association were part of a cultural nationalist movement which sought to promote indigenous Irish cultural activities including language, sports, music and dancing. When suitable local forms could not be found, they sponsored the invention or development of such forms. Such was the case with *ceili* dances (O'Donovan 1990), meant to take the place of set dancing which was believed to be foreign in origin. No such invention was believed necessary with regard to step-dancing, although ultimately autochthonous origins are unlikely. Rather than invention of the form, the Gaelic League concentrated on organizing and institutionalizing the teaching, competing and adjudicating of this dancing practice.

The League's and the Athletic Association's establishment of institutionalized teaching followed the logic of both competition and nationalism. Competitions which were locally organized may be accused of favoring local dancers. Objective standards of judging were difficult to claim, or at least ensure. It is unlikely that this bothered local competitors or organizers. However, the growing popularity of a nationalist perspective which postulates a unified Irish identity provides a rhetoric from which such locally produced competitions can be criticized. Thus, based on the assumptions that solo step-dancing is an *Irish* activity and that 'Irishness' is a *singular* identity, the argument for establishing standards of adjudication makes sense. The establishment of standards in competitions goes hand-in-hand with the organizing of teachers, as well as the authentication of teachers, judges and competitions. In fact, teachers were fiercely recruited for the establishment and justification of *An Coimisiún.*

The founding of *An Coimisiún* had the effect of locating authority in the practice of competitive step-dancing.[7] The adjudicators in modern Irish dancing are involved in a process of regularizing standards of evaluation through the Irish Dancing Commission. They do this in the name of fairness to the competitors and in response to their complaints. Again, this regularization of standards follows the logic of competition and of nationalism. Dancers, teachers and parents want to feel that the standards of evaluation are everywhere the same, that local associations, acquaintances and the like don't affect adjudication. As the judges regularize the standards and dancers imitate winners, the form becomes more and more narrowly defined. Variation is limited to the aspects of the form which have not been regulated to standards of evaluation. Thus, it is through the establishment of the Irish Dancing Commission that adjudicators align their standards to reward one style of dancing and eliminate others.

In this move to organize and bring continuity of standards, a new dimension inured to the context of step-dancing emerged. It has become *Irish* dancing; that is, it took on political meaning. It became a national and nationalistically oriented form. It changed from being an activity of some Irish people to a symbol of Irishness itself.

Representation as Social Practice: Expressive Form as National Sport

If the mechanism of competition and the institutionalization of the practice through a national organization have affected the development of the posture in the ways outlined, one question remains. Why has this particular posture been selected by adjudicators of Irish dancing competitions? There are at least two features of this selection: the practical role of the adjudicator and the meaning of the posture.

It is easier for an adjudicator to look for (and to eliminate competitors from) an ideal of "straight and still", i.e. erect and non-moving, than from an ideal of "loose" -- a concept which admits a much wider range of interpretation. One can appear to be absolutely still but can one be absolutely loose? What does it signify to be either? The first option (stillness) recommends itself more to empirical certainty and precision, and both are required by a rationalized system of aesthetics that is developed under the pressure of explanation and justification. The adjudicator is in the *practical* role of making aesthetic judgements which he or she may be called upon to defend. Under this kind of demand, judges probably rewarded the posture which was more easily defined. Even so, there is always an aspect of meaning and interpretation involved.

In Irish dancing, there is a layering of significance based on its cultural meanings attached to a large part of the population. Because step-dancing has become a symbol of Irishness it takes on a new dimension of presentation at the level of the world stage. The characteristic posture isn't determined by its use as a symbol of nationality, it has emerged from a process of selection -- selection with an aim of "good bearing" in mind. Irish dancing is a physical education that had its roots in European courtly manners and physical practices. When human beings re-present themselves in groups to others, they seem to do so using conceptions of presumed universal values and those shared with audiences (intentions to shock notwithstanding)

'Good bearing' was (and still is) a physical and behavioral value of pan-European (and generally 'western') cultures. It has moral overtones which are frequently expressed in bodily and spatial metaphors. For example, 'bearing up under pressure' and the notion of 'an upstanding citizen'. Some of these have been explored by Lakoff and Johnson as orientational metaphors akin to 'good is up', 'control is up' in contrast to 'breaking down', etc. Such linguistic clues are shadows of the physical education in civility and 'good bearing' to which children are subject as they are admonished to "sit straight", "stand straight" and "keep still".

The selection of a straight, still posture in Irish dancing is no surprise, then, because it agrees with values that enhance its status as a symbol of the Irish nation. This is especially true in the context of Ireland's struggle for political independence. The fact that the formal organization of Irish dancing grew out of Gaelic League impetus indicates that organizers, teachers and adjudicators were aware of the political dimensions of these activities. There is nothing in the values and style of Irish dancing that would preclude Protestant participation although participation in *An Coimisiún* is overwhelmingly Catholic. Indeed, there is an Irish dancing organization in the north of Ireland known as 'Festival', which claims a near 50/50 split of Protestant and Catholic participation. This organization not only sponsors competitions, but performances of an 'Irish Ballet'. Interestingly, Festival is a breakaway from *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*.

Furthermore, the specific issue over which Festival's founding teacher split from *An Coimisiún* involved the inability of that group to countenance a performance of Irish dancing on a stage where the Union Jack was displayed or at an event where "God Save the Queen" was played. It may be argued that the nationalist appropriation of this dance form combined with tendencies of the nationalist movement to define itself also in sectarian terms is not lost on northern Protestants. Yet there appears to be no problem with Protestant participation in Irish dancing under the auspices of Festival.

The organization of *An Coimisiún* established the political dimension of a cultural practice by adopting an island-wide, nationalist approach, naming itself the Irish Dancing Commission. It located authority in the practice of Irish dancing by presuming to authenticate and sanction competitions, teachers and judges. It codified rules and regulations for dancing competitions, thus aligning the contemporary rationalist approach to sports with nationalist assumptions of population unity and symbolic coherence, i.e. one people, one language, one flag, one style of dancing.

The values according to which adjudicatory selections were made were involved in a (largely out of awareness) process of accommodating *form* (posture), to presentational *context* (a representation of Irishness) to others and to themselves.

Control, Authority and Authenticity

In taking control of this cultural practice, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* consolidated its authority and authenticity by defining the form of Irish dancing. The social organization of Irish dancers was coupled with the cultural process of defining Irish dancing.[8] The control exercised by *An Coimisiún* over the practice of Irish dancing is, however, not complete. There are breakaway organizations that control and sanction their own competitions, teachers, adjudicators, etc. Authority, once established, was also splintered in various organizations and claims to authenticity that are informally contested.

The themes of control, authority and authenticity, while present in any social formation and any cultural activity, are not the only themes to be found in relation to Irish dancing. However, these issues are the focus of interest and dramatically represented in competitive Irish dancing to the extent that they are crucial to understanding the development of the form. At a pragmatic level, in each dance contest, regardless of which organizational umbrella covers it, the control of the dancers' bodies and the aesthetically determined authenticity with which they perform is centrally at issue. This is 'the game', so to speak. The adjudicator is the authority who will separate the winners from the losers.

At this point in time, it is the marriage of competitive requirements and nationalist assumptions which produce the official world of Irish dancing and its multi-levelled concern with control, authority and authenticity. It is this world that selects for the posture of 'good bearing'. The critical point of view that sees the posture as stiff, rigid, repressed or otherwise negatively cast is extra-organizational and unofficial. In fact, the interpretation swings on the issue of control and agency. A relevant anthropological question is, "Is the posture a matter of self-control or control of selves"?

In one way of looking at things, the control of the body is meant to be a positive political signification of Irish culture. In this scenario, Irish selves control their bodies in a positive representation of their own Irishness. The positive values of this posture comes from its place in an hegemony of manners finding its origins in west European courtly physical traditions of civility and nobility. The contested meaning places the agency of control not in the *selves that dance* but in a paradigmatic organization of social control, whether the Catholic Church or British military presence (as the apocryphal tales allege to this day), or even *An Coimisiún* itself. In this scenario, Irish mind/bodies subordinate themselves to the stylistic requirements of (a) an agonistic model of events and (b) an organization that hands out the rewards (and punishments) of group control.

Both of these interpretations are inscribed in Irish history, pre-, and post-independence. Anthropologically speaking, they draw attention to the Durkheimian tension between individual and society. The myth-like stories that explain the posture in terms of fooling Church or British authorities contain grains of truth. These two institutions spearheaded what Norbert Elias calls "the civilizing process" in Ireland (Inglis 1987: 130-165). While the stories frame usage of the posture as an act of resistance, the posture itself can also be seen as an effect of cultural subordination. The real Irish humor isn't in the bizarre nature of the accounts, but in the partially hidden message of the story: he adoption of an exogenous cultural feature for indigenous ends -- specifically, making merry in the midst of political and moral restrictions -- a potent Irish theme which turns up in musical stylization (Breathnach 1990), language-use in stories and writing and religious practices (O'Madigáin 1986).

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The nationalist selection for good bearing also adopts (and adapts) this bodily self control for its own aesthetic and political ends. While nationalist ideology concerns itself with autochthonous origins, nationalist practice is often one of borrowing foreign goods -- including the ideology of nationalism itself -- for indigenous purposes, in this case, political independence.

The carriage in Irish dancing, regardless of its origins, is unique to Irish dancing. The contrast in the upper and lower halves of the body -- upper still while lower leaps, twists, turns and beats out rhythms on the floor -- creates a powerful aesthetic which instantiates an Irish historical concern with control, authority and playful expression.

Frank Hall

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[1] At least four types of dancing are uniquely Irish in several ways: 1. *ceili* dancing, 2. sets, 3. modern step-dancing and 4. *sean-nós* step-dancing. The term "Irish dancing" or "Irish dancer" is, however, most often used in Ireland only to refer to modern competitive step-dancing (and by extension) to the *ceili* dances, especially when they are performed in competition. This usage is due in large part to a nationalist appropriation and/or re-invention of these forms. This essay is solely concerned with modern competitive forms and the posture associated with them.

[2] The words 'place high' and others are from the technical vocabulary of Laban movement-writing.

[3] The first time I saw Irish dancing I was struck by the power of the form. The posture was very much part of its aesthetic potency. The contrast between the stillness of the upper half of the body and the often incredible movements of the lower half was both impressive and curious. I found myself both attracted and bothered by this combination of exuberance and restriction. This complex personal reaction added zest to the motives that led me to explore the social, cultural and historical processes at work in the development of the form.

[4] It was never "the church" as an institution that disapproved of dancing, but some of its religious, responding to local conditions and forms of behavior they believed to be ungodly. For example, Easter sermons from the 1930s through the 1950s, delivered by the Archbishop of Dublin (printed in the Irish Independant) always contained a section warning of the evils of dancing.

[5] See Ardener (1973) for an interesting analysis of this and related words.

[6] Parents of young gymnasts or ice skaters come to similar points of hard decision.

[7] The usurping of authority by the Gaelic League with regard to the dancing didn't go unchallenged. The Gaelic League retains a symbolic and real position of power in the Irish Dancing Commission by holding one-half of the seats on the Commission. This arrangement was challenged by a dance teachers' organization which eventually broke with *An Coimisiún*, founding its own organization complete with its own competitions, adjudicators, sanctioning and authenticating procedures. Because the breakaway organization duplicated the purpose and organization of *An Coimisiún*, it doesn't really challenge the marriage of nationalist

assumptions and competitive processes. Rather, it confirms this relationship and illustrates the political basis of the organization(s) of Irish dancing.

[8] The bold type endings indicate a subtle relation between the people involved and the *act of* dancing itself. Dancing, dancers, *the* dance and *a* dance or *some* dances are often conflated by the simple usage of the word, 'dance' without any qualifiers.

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