

Full Length Research Paper

Examining “The book”: How perception, power, and practice altered memory of Irish Ceili dances

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This paper is an ethnographic examination and exploration of the power politics of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* and the subsequent changes in perceived nationalism, stylizations, and memory of Irish dance as it refers to both the practiced repertoire and textual archive of ceili dancing within Ireland and the Diaspora. The researcher examined each iteration of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* antecedent and relevant texts the socio-political climate following the Irish Civil War, and the aims of the Gaelic League to determine how the textual archiving through the 2014 edition of “*Ar Rinci Foirne*” affected embodied memory of Irish Ceili dancing. Theories of transculturation, ethnography, post-structuralist criticism, archiving with thematic and chronological examination of texts were utilized with a qualitative methodology. Through the intentional inclusion and exclusion of dances, the *Ar Rinci Foirne* functions as codification and propaganda of Irishness through dance, while systematically altering and erasing embodied memory of ceili dances within Ireland and the Diaspora.

Key words: Irish dance, ceili, ethnography, embodied memory, folk dance.

INTRODUCTION

An Coimisiun played a significant role in the preservation of Irish dance repertoire while simultaneously erasing embodied memory through systematic codification and text based archiving. This paper will examine and explore the matrix of power and politics asserted by *An Coimisiun* through the publication of *Ar Rinci Foirne*, and the subsequent changes in perceived nationalism, stylizations, and embodied memory of Irish dance as it refers to both the practiced repertoire and textual archive of *ceili* dancing. Questions that inspired this research include: (1). What is the presumed ideological purpose being served by *An Coimisiun le Rince Gaelecha* in the selection of the thirty-ceili dances for *the Ar Rinci Foirne*? What dances or styles were marginalized or pushed to

the periphery by this act, and what dances or styles flourished as a result? 2. How through the process of archiving the Ceili dances - the formatting, inclusion, exclusion, description and classification - was the practice of ceili dancing affected? How did the architecture of textual archiving affect the memory of embodied practice? What was codified, what was left as exceptional? 3. What role do these three publications and continual updates play in the ongoing assertion of power, politics, and the shaping of public perception of Irishness?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study included a detailed review of

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literature following the seven steps for a comprehensive literature review as outlined by Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016). Theories of transculturation (Ortiz, 1940; Taylor, 1991), ethnography, post-structuralist criticism (Harari, 1979), and archiving (Sekula, 1986; Derrida and Prenowitz, 1998; Swanson, 2009); thematic and chronological examination, and qualitative methodologies were applied. Based on the three lines of inquiry, antecedent texts and other relevant archival documents that recorded the practices of Irish Ceili dancing were examined, analyzed, and compared with the publications of *An Coimisiun* to notice: what dances appeared in other texts, what dances were changed, and what dances were excluded. Additional research was conducted to determine the motivations; which included interviewing a prominent historian and *An Coimisiun* member, dialogues with current Irish Dance teachers, research into the socio-political climate during the writing of the three books, as well as auto-ethnographic reflections on the author's personal experience as a dancer and dance teacher.

Conradh na Gaeilge and An Coimisiun - The Organizations

In 1893, *Conradh na Gaeilge* was founded with the purpose of rejuvenating Irish cultural traditions following English occupation and colonial control. This marked the beginning of the Irish nation redefining itself and its cultural traditions. The English established Penal Laws in 1691 in part to suppress popery. Because dancing was considered a Pagan practice; it was concerning to the dominant party as a potential for uprising (Schaffer, 2000). While *Conradh na Gaeilge's* goals were preservation and rejuvenation of Irish Culture, it was primarily concerned with Irish literature and language (*An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha*, n.d.). In 1929, *Conradh na Gaeilge* commissioned a sub-committee to oversee the preservation and regulation of Irish dancing, particularly the irregularities and inconsistencies of dance in *fesianna* (competition) (Hall, 2008).

An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha, or the Commission on Dance, was formed, its principal aims to preserve and promote Irish dancing, both step and team dancing (*An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha*, n.d.). "[*An Coimisiun*] also centralized authority and set before itself the task of codifying the rules of participation and production of this form" (Hall, 2008). As the organization's inception came about in the wake of the cultural revolution that had gripped the nation, this agenda of codification was highly politicized. *An Coimisiun* still considers itself as the leading authority of Irish dance; as chartered by *Conradh na Gaeilge*, the self-appointed authority on Irish culture.

In an interview with Catherine Foley (2012) of University of Limerick, she describes the hierarchical culture of *An Coimisiun* and their effect of centralizing, homogenizing, codifying, and institutionalizing Irish dance, and marginalizing practices that did not align with their cultural and political goals. Despite the various forms, manifestations, and origins of group dances practiced throughout Ireland, *An Coimisiun* was attempting to redesign an Irish identity after so many years of English oppression that centered select dance practices. Their goal was part of a larger anti-Anglicization movement supported by *Conradh na Gaeilge*. A process of redefining itself after the 1916 Easter Rising and subsequent Civil War in 1919 grasped the country, and *Conradh na Gaeilge* was only one of many examples of Ireland defining its "Irishness" again. Dance, being social in nature, was an obvious vessel to promote a new Irish identity.

Other documentation of social dances in Ireland

Prior to *An Coimisiun's* publication of *Ar Rinci Foirne*, dances were

embodied and transferred between traveling teacher and student as mental repertoire to be later called upon at social functions or subsequent lessons. The first known written documentation of Irish social dances is J. J. Sheehan's *A Guide to Irish Dancing* (1902), and O'Keeffe and O'Brien's *Handbook of Irish Dances* (1902, 1914). Many of the dances included in both Sheehan and O'Keeffe and O'Brien's books make their appearance in the *Ar Rinci Foirne*. Many of them have been modified, and many of them do not appear in the first publication in 1939, but rather are included in the 1946 or 1969 publications. In 1924, Elizabeth Burchenal published a book of 25 ceili dances, *Rince Na Eirann: National Dances of Ireland*. Fifteen of the dances from Burchenal's text appeared in one of the three *Ar Rince Foirne* publications. Like with dances from Sheehan and O'Keeffe-O'Brien, many of these dances were refashioned or excluded until the 1946 or 1969 publication. There are other textual documentations of early dance practices in Ireland, however, the promotion of the selected thirty dances marginalized and rendered many of these texts forgotten.

In 2017, James Mueller, a prominent Irish Dance judge, published a *Rinci Foirne Cailte* (Jame 2017). *Thirty Lost Figure Dances* (Volume 1) included thirty ceili dances previously published in texts by O'Keeffe and O'Brien, Sheehan, and Burchinal. While this is one example of a community effort to recover lost memory of traditional dances of Ireland, this text too suffers from an attempt to conform to the established canon by modifying descriptions of movements to remain consistent with *Ar Rince Foirne*.

RESULTS

The *Ar Rinci Foirne* is a series of three pamphlets compiled by *An Coimisiun* in 1939, 1946, and 1969, and contains thirty *ceili* (social group) dances that have been collected from repertoire of oral and physical tradition from all around the country – but mainly from the county Kerry and the south of county Armagh as sourced from earlier documentation (Cullinane 1998). These dances were published under the title *Ar Rinci Foirne* as three pamphlets known as *Leabhar Aon*, *Leabhar Do*, and *Leabhar Tri* (which translates to Book 1, 2, 3). The term *Ceili* was first used in 1897 at the first *Ceili* Event, hosted by the London Branch of *Conradh na Gaeilge*. Borrowed from the Scottish term, it replaced local terminology already in use: *Seilgi* as used by the London Irish and *Siamsa* by most of Ireland. (Cullinane, 1998, p. 24)

The publication of *Ar Rinci Foirne* initially aimed to publicize dances the commission perceived as popular local *ceili* dances and to create uniformity among these selected dances. Uniformity and performance under the prescribed guidelines supported the reengineering of the Irish image as "civilized" and comparable to other European nations. Establishing "Irishness" as different from "Englishness" was essential to the nationalist movement. More critical was ensuring the new image of "Irishness" presented to the world was positive, civilized, and comparable to other European nations (Foley, 2001). In Sheehan's text (1902), *A Guide to Irish Dancing*, the differentiation of Irishness from Englishness was already being determined. "Don't hug your partner around the waist, English style. When swinging hold her hands only...In short, be natural, unaffected, easy - be Irish, and

you'll be alright" (p 48).

Statements in the forward of Burchenal's publication (1924) provide foreshadowing for the formation of *An Coimisiun* and the systematic codification of Irish identity through the creation of a centralized and recognized authority on dance.

"It is scarcely necessary to mention that this is not intended to be anything like a complete collection of the National Dances of Ireland, but it is simply a selection of twenty-five covering a varied range from the oldest types ... many of these dances are danced with certain differences in various parts of Ireland and, in fact, at the present time, different versions of the same dance may be observed in the various circles in Dublin. This is due to the absence of a central recognized authority on the subject, and until such authority is established no general uniformity of practice can be hoped for" (viii).

In the remarks of the 1939 edition of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* (which are not included in the final pamphlet of 1969, or the updated editions of 2000, 2003, or 2014) it is evident that *An Coimisiun Text should not be italicized*.

"This little brochure describing ten Irish figure dances is the first of a series which the Irish Dancing Commission has decided to publish. From the numerous enquiries received it is felt that there is a widespread demand for an authentic publication covering the whole field of Irish figure dancing, and the Commission has consequently undertaken the work. Irish dancing and Irish games are accepted as being complementary to the Irish language revival; from the social point of view it may be said that Irish dancing has been the spearhead of the struggle for the re-establishing of a district Gaelic culture and civilization. It follows, therefore, that the propagation of Irish dancing is a matter of great moment, and its regulation and control secondary only in importance to the revival of the language itself. It is the desire of the commission to aim at uniformity in the more popular and general figure dances. The group selected in this booklet falls within this category. Familiarity with the contents will be of great help in the correct interpretation of the more difficult figure dances in future issues" (np).

An Coimisiun made their intention clear: to create uniformity of popular national dances to 'spearhead the struggle' to re-establish Gaelic culture. Dances were cited from a variety of earlier sources: text, teacher, and practice, but were presented in a new fashion supporting the cultural-political assertion of power. Regardless of the intention, 'the book' remains a significant archive of both *ceili* dancing and *An Coimisiun*, although the latter was likely unintentional.

Control over the dances practiced would therefore assert control over the expression of "Irishness". Careful selection of the allowed dances would promote the ideology of the organization defining the margins of the practice. "Although group dances were practiced in the various regions of Ireland, they were neglected in favor of the thirty chosen for ideological purposes" (Foley, 2001).

In this way these "Irish" social dances were intended to replace previous social dances being done throughout the country to separate out the 'foreign influences' and find an authentic "Irish Culture". Over time the selected *ceili*'s became perceived as superior and "Irish" (Foley, 2011). Thus, the *Ar Rinci Foirne* functions as Irish Nationalistic propaganda, promoting the agenda of the cultural rejuvenation movement of *Conradh na Gaeilge*.

In a choice that further altered the practice and performance of *ceili*, clarification of figures to be performed was added in 1939. *An Coimisiun* published one set of figures for each dance (Cullinane 1998). This created an attitude of inflexibility that had not existed in embodied *ceili* practice. This is in contrast to direction from O'Keeffe and O'Brien (1914) who wrote that the choice of figures danced should be "left to the fancy of the dancers, though it should invariably be settled before the dance begins" (p. 6 of Part II).

In 1994, the researcher learned their very first *ceili* as a student at the Trinity Academy of Irish Dance in Chicago, IL. Despite dancing as a child and pursuing their teachers' certification as an adult, they had no knowledge of the original agency to choose which figures a group would perform for various *ceili* dances existed within the community. Within the framework of competition, *An Coimisiun*, does not permit such flexibility, and thus his understanding of *ceili* did not archive this practice into my mental repertoire.

In this way the *Ar Rinci Foirne* functions as a method of codification of Irishness. Dances were divided into several very different manifestations: the 'authentic' and the foreign, the social and the competitive, and the remembered and the lost. Through the publication of the thirty-*ceili* dances in the *Ar Rinci Foirne*, many other dances in repertoire at the time were pushed to the periphery, and in some cases forgotten or lost.

The final pamphlet

The Irish dance community was changing drastically and dynamically in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The final pamphlet of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* had been under great debate as to how to publish the final set of ten dances. Unlike the previous two books, there was now a certification examination that *An Coimisiun* administered based upon these publications and whatever went into print in this third publication would become canon like its predecessors. This created debate that was unseen in the formation and selection of the previous texts. Additionally, *Ceili* was falling out of fashion among the social events in the country. Banished to the memories of the elderly and the confines of text, the younger generations were becoming enamored by more contemporary and worldly forms of entertainment. With the advancements in travel and technology, the youth of Ireland could be exposed to other types of entertainment

and the popularity of *Ceili* suffered as a result.

The ten dances eventually selected for *Leabhar Tri* were the Haymakers Jig, The Fairy Reel, The Duke Reel, Lannigan's Ball, The Cross Reel, The Waves of Tory, The Rakes of Mallow, The Gates of Derry, The Sweets of May, and The Bonfire Dance. The assertions into the ideology behind the inclusion of the ten dances is pulled from the author's interview with John Cullinane - *An Coimisiun* and *Conradh na Gaeilge* member, Irish dance historian and archivist, and former dancer.

Cor Na Siog - Fairy Reel

It is said that variations of this dance were being done all over the country in various forms. When this dance was written out, it was recorded as such to "try to appease all" as the remarks in *Leabhar Tri* state. "Fighting and arguing and gnashing of teeth and all" the book came out with the standardized version of the Fairy Reel and all others were banished to, as Cullinane put it, "wherever my emails go...you know, up there! They all go to the same place" (2012). This dance continued to cause debate even through the 2014 publication of *Ar Rinci Foirne*.

Most versions had a Fairy Arch at the end, but the other movements differed by region. In Cork, where Cullinane is a native, there was no square and diamond, "that was Dublin" says Cullinane (2012). A Fairy Arch is a term that refers to a movement where the gentleman is between his two lady partners and raises one arm up to allow the other partner to pass through, then does likewise with the other arm for the other partner. This figure had variations on it too, that is, men would move on the ladies two short threes, making it even more challenging. The commission settled on what it thought was the most appealing to all, and included the 'difficult' figure, presumably for two reasons: (1) the governing body resided in Dublin, the city where the variation was common, and (2) as the main purpose of *An Coimisiun* was to govern over Irish dance within competition, including the most difficult movements would add to the challenge and advancement of the sport.

"In and Out, Big Ring Right and Back, In and Out, 2 Small Rings of 3 to the Left and Back. Slip Sides, Cross over Chain, the man crossed over to the lady to opposite gents Right, chain with the partners' ladies and back to place, Fairy Arches to finish. Without square and diamond, it was easy to teach dancers, as it was fairly easy. That figure was challenging and less people do it in competition now" (interview with Catherine Foley, 2012).

The Fairy Reel was published in O'Keeffe and O'Brien's 1902 text as well as Burchenal's 1924 text, and was among the 50 dances collected by the commission in 1935 (as part of the process of publishing the first book of ten dances). In the O'Keeffe and O'Brien publication, the figures go as follows:

Advance and Retire, Rings, Advance and Retire again,

Rings again, Link Arms, Side-step to Centre (1902). In the Burchenal publication, the figures go as follows:

Advance and Retire, Ring Round, Small Rings, Figure Eight, Side Step, Link Arms, Men Side Step to Centre, All Hands In, Ring Round, All Hands In, Ring Round (1924).

From the existence of this dance, and the records of commission meetings, we know that it was both textually known in 1939 as well as a part of the repertoire in *Ceili* events leading up to 1969. It was originally meant to be included in the 1939 publication, but there was no agreement as to which variation would be included, so it was left out. This dance is one of the main reasons for the delay in publishing *Leabhar Tri* (Cullinane).

In the 2014 publication of *Ar Rinci Foirne*, the movement Gent's Link Arms was updated to reflect the continued debate regarding how the dance was documented versus how the dance was actually performed. In 1969, it was written that after the gent advanced to the center to link arms and turn with the other gent, that he would take hands with the lady to the left and turn, link arms with the lady to the right and turn, then return and take hands with the lady to his left and turn. The debate came with how the gent turned with the ladies. The mixture of taking hands and linking arms was never performed in practice. Even when a video was filmed by the crew of Riverdance to document ceili, the dancers only used hands. The movement was updated in 2014 to reflect this continued debate and the use of only catching hands was settled on.

Cor an Diuic - The Duke Reel

This dance was found in O'Keeffe and O'Brien's handbook from 1902 under the six-hand category. Notably, in 1902 one figure changed from 'Full Chain' customarily using arms to 'Interlace' and clearly stating to not use the arms. This change is not the most significant of the alterations made. There was no such thing as a figure in the original manifestation (textual or embodied). Figures were composed to lengthen it. "It distorts the whole dance because it makes it structurally more like a Kerry dance, when it comes from Donegal in Northern Ireland." (Cullinane) The first pamphlet contained mostly dances from Kerry and set a strong precedence to the structure of *Ceili*, despite its fierce resemblance to set dances. This structure is to begin with a lead around, then the body of the dance is done, followed by a figure, body, figure, and onwards until the finish. By altering this dance, *An Coimisiun* imposed a taxonomy onto *ceili* dancing that did not previously exist and re-imagined it in conformity with the new ideology of *ceili*, and therefore "Irishness".

Baineis Ui Lonagain - Lannigan's Ball

Lannigan's Ball was collected by Maureen Hall's father.

Hall is significant in the history of Irish Dancing in America, having immigrated to California and spreading the traditions of Irish Dance to much of the western American-Irish diaspora. “[W]hen he first saw all of the dances in South of Armagh, they had no footwork at all. In Lannigan’s Ball they did a lot of shuffling. They rolled with a lovely twist as they passed from behind” (Cullinane, 2012). All of these unique performance qualities were written out and subsequently lost.

Geatai Dhoire - The Gates of Derry

Found in the Elizabeth Burchanel book from 1924, it is not very old, dating back to about 1914. As Cullinane stated in our interview, “[It] only became popular in the 1980s...no one danced it...nobody knew it even though it was in the book”. It should be noted that it was popular in Derry, but only within Derry. The issue many in the commission took with this dance was in the name. With the ongoing political struggle in Northern Ireland, there was debate over whether it should be made a part of the canon. The name has no significance historically, and likely gains its name from one of its movements that resembles the action of a gate.

Similarly to the Duke Reel, this dance also underwent a facelift before the commission published it. The movement “Telescope” was a new fabrication, originally referred to as “Up the center and down the side”. In Burchanel, dancers exchange one place and back again, while in the description of *Leabhar Tri*, the dancers perform continuous sevens. Dancers perform continuous side steps down the middle that resemble more closely a bourree in ballet than prior trends in ceili. “They have no place in Irish Dance,” remarked Cullinane (2012). He then pulled out the Burchanel text and read, “with two threes the odd couple separates and falls back to line”. It is an anomaly in *ceili* dancing for the movement “sevens” or side-steps to not be followed by the movement “two threes”. *An Coimisiun* rewrote the footwork and invented a new move that had never been a part of the practice previously. It is unclear as to why the commission decided to invent a new style, especially one that is found nowhere else within the book, when most of the other alterations made to dances were done to bring them more consistency. It is possible that they were appealing to the growing interest in ballet in the country or responding to the decline of *ceili*. Whatever the reason, the Gates of Derry has forever been altered and a new memory of practice created.

Aoibhneas na Bealtaine - The Sweets of May

This is a dance originating from the South of Armagh. While many of the chosen dances were made to conform, those that suffered most were the south Armagh dances. A woman named Nan Quinn, who was a fugitive during

the Irish Civil war, came across a small village near Newry while she was hiding out. While there, she discovered a practice of *ceili* dances that were flourishing in the homes and events of the town. Years later, after the war ended, Quinn contacted commission member Tom Farley to have these dances annotated. The three that were archived were The Sweets of May (published in 1969), Trip to the Cottage (1946), and Three Tunes (1946). When asked why Farley only collected the three, he replied saying the dances were all too similar to record more. (Cullinane 2012).

The dances from county Armagh differ greatly from the Kerry dances in structure. They are irregular and contain distinct hand motions, music changes, and no strict structure like the dances of Kerry. Cullinane retold a story of an encounter he had with a woman on a plane from the small town. She remarked on the lack of house dances and music. She then imitated her mother’s complaint: “where are the good old dances that we all had years ago” as she did the hand gestures of Three Tunes and Sweets of May. As *Ceili* fell out of fashion, the dances of South Armagh became forgotten, with the exception of the three dances in the *Ar Rinci Foirne*.

Rince Morn a Tine - The Bonfire Dance

This dance is intended to be danced on the Feast day of St. Joseph. It is one of only two dances in the entirety of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* that resemble large circle dances common to Western European folk dances. According to O’Keeffe and O’Brien, Round Dances predate step and single dances and offer a glimpse into dances whose origins were uniquely Irish (1914). “We have little peasant dances in Ireland. These dances are often in a big ring. There is little or nothing left in the repertoire of large round dances, like Bonfire and An Rince Mor. The socializing of holding hands in a ring,” says Cullinane (2012). “They must have been here in Ireland, but were not recorded. The wealth of our “ceili” dances were noted, but never collected the simpler folk dances, and were not done.” Erased from memory over time or as a result of the popularization of other dances, all that remains is *An Rince Mor* and The Bonfire Dance. According to the commission syllabus, these dances are not performed for competition. Despite the *ceili* gatherings of enthusiasts, these round dances are rarely practiced even in the dance halls and houses of Ireland and the diaspora.

DISCUSSION

Dissonance between archive and repertoire

There is a dissonance between the archive and the repertoire of Irish *Ceili*. Firstly, outside of regulated competition ceili dancing is more often relegated to

organized events (held by *Ceili* clubs) or tourist attractions. The dances performed at these events would be danced markedly differently. Secondly, if one were to be sitting in a pub in Galway – for example The Merry Fiddler or An Pucan, the dancing that might be seen would be only vaguely reminiscent of the *ceili* and sets, as if the memory of them was present in the muscle and sinew, but manifesting in a translated and contemporary context. Even the musical sets reflect this, mixing in traditional, folk, rock, and pop songs to the musician's fancy.

In competition, *ceili* is performed with military-like precision, each movement strictly choreographed and executed. Dancers dress in matching costumes, that through symbols, colors, and design identify various dance schools. Dancers' hair and makeup is done up so each dancer's individual identity is replaced with the identity of the team or school they are representing. The music starts and a very tightly choreographed piece of dance is performed. Everything is timed out from the way the dancers walk onto stage; to the level their elbows are held when hands are held up. In a given competition, such as *Oireachtas Rince na Eireann* held in Dublin in 2017, of the senior *ceili* competition, little variety of dances are seen – nearly half performed *An Cor Casta* (the Cross Reel). Of the thirty dances in the *Ar Rinci Foirne*, only 11 meet the requirements of the syllabus to be performed in competition. While the figures and the basic outline of the dance was strictly the same, there were extraordinary amounts of variations in the details of performance ranging from what count hands are caught on to the stylization of the foot and arm work.

These details are highly thought out by dance teachers and examined by adjudicators, but are disregarded, contradicted, and unconsidered in its social manifestation. Despite the variation in the stylization of the dance, the *Ar Rinci Foirne* clearly delineates the subtleties of which shoulder dancers pass by and how many counts a movement takes. In competition, the syllabus set out by *An Coimisiun*, outlines which figures are to be performed of those outlined (and codified) by the *Ar Rinci Foirne*. After a long workshop discussing the minutia of how to correctly perform dances for competition, a commission member remarked "That night when we got down to socializing we had a *ceili* evening. And what we danced that night contradicted every damn thing that we set down . . . We wouldn't have come within an ass's roar of a prize in a competition in which we ourselves would have been judge (Commission Member, 1991 in Hall, 2008). This interplay of traditional versus competition, old versus new, authentic versus authenticated is central and problematic within Irish Dance. The competitive iteration of *ceili* is the more heavily documented and subject to the matrix of political power of governing organizations. Competitive *ceili* adheres to the prescribed perception of Irishness presented to the world and marginalizes the living practice of *ceili*.

Authenticating and constructing perceptions of culture

(Cullinane 1998) remarked that at the first *Ceili*, held in London (clrg.ie), what has since come to be known as *ceili* dances were unrecognizable from the dances performed. The traditional music used and associated with these dances, reels and jigs, can be traced back to Scotland and Italy respectively (O'Keeffe and O'Brien, 1914). Until the *An Coimisiun* (*n.d*) prescribed the dances and performance style that adhere to the Irish image they were hoping to create, set dancing and *ceili* were performed interchangeably. "Whether they were recreating an old tradition or inventing a new one, the London Branch [of the Gaelic League] apparently was not unduly worried, as long as the dances were danced in a manner that would reflect well on the Irish image" (Cullinane, 1998). It is ironic that the heart of the movement towards de-Anglicisation in Irish culture came from the London Branch of *Conradh na Gaeilge* rather than its older sibling in Dublin.

The 'Irish image' was a prime directive for *Conradh na Gaeilge*. Great care was taken to ensure the promotion of a positive image of the Irish race to the world (Cullinane, 1998). The League was attempting to correct the public perception of the Irish propensity towards drink and disorderly conduct through organizing a *Ceili* (Cullinane, 1998). The dancers' posture, interpersonal spacing, and the interaction and movements between couples in the dances reflected Catholic values of modesty and decency (Foley, 2011). While the dance done at this 1897 event would prove to not be the same dances the organization supported later, the ground was laid for the structure and decorum that would later develop. Even the technical execution of the dances would change as a result. Removing the dances spontaneous and improvisational footwork for a more strict and regulated approach, rendered the dances unrecognizable to the persons the dances were once obtained (Cullinane, 1998).

Under the guidance of *Conradh na Gaeilge*, dances called, "The Walls of Limerick" or "The Siege of Ennis" became popular at *ceili* events. Despite being adapted from English Country Dances and Sets or Quadrilles, these new dances – set to traditional Irish Music – were believed to be old Irish dances. And neither *Conradh na Gaeilge* nor *An Coimisiun* made any attempt to correct this misconception. This authenticated their legitimacy, popularized, and institutionalized these dances, despite them only having been practiced in certain regions (Foley, 2011). This agenda self-designated the *Coimisiun* as mainstream and the dances that it promoted at the center of "Irish Dance", resulting in marginalizing other popular dance practices of the time (Foley, 2001).

There exists a dissonance between the repertoire and the text – and furthermore the embodiment of the text as it pertains to competition repertoire as opposed to social repertoire. There are no generalizations that cannot be

whittled away by the facts as we come to know them. It is the variation that is key; the variation that surely exists, and must exist, in the human condition. By peeling back the layers of the repertoire, through examination of the detail, one can find the specificity, the exception, and variation that makes human experience real. And furthermore, one can find the variation from the text designed to describe the repertoire.

Transculturation (Ortiz, 1940; Taylor, 1991) refers to the loss or displacement of culture as a result of acquisition of foreign material and the fusion of indigenous and foreign to make new (Swanson, 2009). This has clearly occurred within Irish Dance, specifically with the example of Ceili dancing vs. Set Dancing. Through the writing of the *Ar Rinci Foirne*, much of the *ceili* repertoire has been lost as a result of this textual archive. Even older texts, such as O’Keeffe and O’Brien’s 1902 handbook have become shadowed to the dominant and politicized publications by *An Coimisiun*.

Context, Con[Text], and Con-text

The circumstances that led to the initial publication of the *Ar Rinci Foirne*, according to the organization that published it, was a public demand for an authentic publication. While there is likely a kernel of truth in this statement, it needs to be acknowledged that the country has suffered a variety of significant socio-economic and political tragedies. The country was still recovering from the Great Famine and attempting to foster good spirit through rejuvenation of the Irish Culture, led by *Conradh na Gaeilge* (as well as other organizations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association) (Cullinane, 1998). As already suggested, dancing was a significant expression of “Irishness” and the organization that could provide an “authentic” publication would certainly aid in this agenda.

Con[TEXT]

The *Ar Rinci* also exists as a text; a bound document; the ‘Bible’ for Irish Dancer teachers and adjudicators – as the examination process for certification might suggest. Despite the vast number of governing bodies in Irish Dance today, the *Ar Rinci Foirne* is accepted as the prime reference on *ceili*. “It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work’s relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather, to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of internal relationships” (Harari, 1979). The book was published over a time span of thirty plus years in three installments. “The technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future” (Derrida

1996). In 1902, a system and structure for writing down the various dances was created and has been copied and modified in all subsequent publications. There are other documentation systems that have been created since and others that were available at the time. It is possible that these other dance documentation systems were unknown to the authors recording them, but regardless it is likely that *Conradh na Gaeilge* wanted to have an Irish system of notating their Irish dances.

Looking at the *Ar Rince Foirne*, there is a clear system of documentation utilized consistently throughout all three books. There are small variations that can be seen developing over time, but the foundation of the structure is omnipresent. *Ceili* dances are named, first in Gaelic, then in English (In the first printing in 1939, the English name was listed before the Gaelic). This supports the agenda of *Conradh na Gaeilge* in its attempts to rejuvenate elements of Irish Culture – specifically Irish Language. Each dance is dissected into parts, labeled and reassembled.

The movements are labeled by number or letter, Gaelic name followed by English translation, followed by a paragraph description of the dance with the prescribed amount of music required to perform the movement. Long dances are formatted by movement, while the other types of Ceili dance are formatted by differentiating *An Chabhail* or The Body from the *Figur* or Figure of the dance. Dances also include an introduction and a finish that is usually one of only a few repeated movements.

This example comes from *Cor Ochtair*, or The Eight Hand Reel as published in 1969:

An Deireadh - The Finish

*All Dancers join hands in circle, forearms bent sharply upwards, elbows held in to the sides; advance to centre [2 bars], retire [2 bars], advance again and retire [4 bars]. All sidestep **anticlockwise** and finish with two short threes [4 bars]; sidestep back ending with two short threes [4 bars]. Advance and retire twice as before [8 bars]. All sidestep **clockwise** and back [8 bars]. Each couple takes hands and swing around to the **right** to finish off [8 bars].*

The use of numbers rather than letters, the use of bold type, and the ordering and gathering of figures and movements, are utilized differently in the second and third books.

In the 2014 publication, *An Coimisiun* sought to correct several errors from previous publications, abandoned the architecture of three separate books of ten dances each, created consistency in terminology for various movements, updated dances to be performed differently, and in some cases notating movements dances incorrectly that had not been previously problematic.

Con-text

Beyond these previous two iterations, the *Ar Rinci Foirne*

exists as the impression – the positive and negative, included and excluded – of Irish Ceili Dancing. It is as much as through the inclusion of the 30 dances and the exclusion of unknown numbers of other set dances that we can glimpse at the portrait of *Ceili* dancing. “We can speak then of a generalized, inclusive *archive*, a *shadow archive* that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain” (Sekula, 1986). Today *ceili* dancing exists in several iterations: the social, the competitive, the textual, and in the memory excavated, in the memory erased.

An example of memory excavated and erased can be found when looking at both the 1902 text by O’Keeffe and O’Brien and the 1939 ARF, and the 1969 and 2003 publications of ARF, within the High Caulead Cap. The last movement of the body is markedly different:

Clap hands

All beat palms of hands together [1 bar], mark time with right foot [1 bar], beat palms [1 bar] mark time with left foot [1 bar]. Partners change places to sidestep [2 bars], ending in two short threes [2 bars]. Beat palms and mark time with feet as before [4 bars]. Sidestep back to place [2 bars] ending with two short threes [2 bars] (1939).

This iteration is backwards from the contemporary practice, which is outlined:

Greadadh Cos a’s Bos/Stamp and clap

All stamp right foot twice to one bar, and clap hands three times to second bar [2 bars]. Repeat [2 bars]. Partners change places to sidestep [2 bars], ending with two short threes [2 bars]. Mark time with foot and beat palms as before [4 bars]. Sidestep back to place [2 bars] ending with two short threes [2 bars] (2003).

Why did this dance change between 1939 and 2003? Were people dancing it differently? Did *An Coimisiun* change it to make the figure more complicated for competition? The dance underwent modification again in the 2014 publication. When dancers mark time with the stamp before returning to places, ladies now stamp with their left foot as it is the foot that would be in front following their previous side step and two short threes.

The High Caulead Cap originated in county Kerry. Every dancer in the town of Castleisland, Kerry had a different version. So numerous were the variations that a Kerry *Ceili* dancer once stated to Cullinane (2012), “The only thing that High Caulead Cap had in common was it was danced to the tune of the High Caulead Cap”. And even this has since been lost. In 1994, when I first learned this dance in Chicago, it was still performed to the original tune, but over time the dance became divergent from its musical sibling.

When the author learned the High Caulead Cap, it left an impression of how not only the High Caulead Cap was to be done, but how *ceili* was practiced. He struggled to assimilate and archive the variation on the movement

“Stamp and Clap” as it was written in O’Keeffe and O’Brien. So deeply and strictly was the variation and attitude ascribed within his body, that while he can perform the other variation, it would take a lot of conscious effort to not revert back to the initial impression he had.

Various publications have adopted different versions of this dance over time. It is likely that the more difficult version is now published for the sake of competition, while the other variations, previously living in *ceili* houses, were left to die out. The answer is likely lost in the bodies of dancers who are no longer with us. Competition has cast into the shadows much of the embodied practices of *ceili* and even assisted in the erasing and overwriting of practice. In the shadows of what is included, Between the intention to project an image of ‘Irishness’ to the world and the framework of competition, *ceili* practice and memory has been permanently altered.

Conclusion

Many factors are at play regarding the archiving of *ceili*. The political climate of nationalism contributed greatly to the movement to archive the dances of the nation, but it was the agenda of creating a new perception of ‘Irishness’ and popularizing a tradition - even if it was created contemporarily - for a nation in search of an identity. *Ceili* became an expression of nationalism and a source of pride among the Irish people; a matrix of power embodied through the common man. Through the publication of *Ar Rinci Foirne*, this expressive practice became codified and permanently altered the memory of these dances in the practice of those who helped to codify it to begin with. The purpose behind the selection of the thirty *ceili* dances was to promote *Conradh na Gaeilge’s* definition of “Irishness”.

As *Ceili* lost popularity in the social setting, the embodied archive of many dances was lost, and what remained was the iteration of *ceili* in competition - as prescribed by the text and embodied in the teachers instructing and dancers performing *ceili* at competitions worldwide. It can be seen in the *Ar Rinci Foirne*, the subtle difference, changes, variations in dances, such as The High Caulead Cap, as either (1) the popularity of variations in practice changed, or (2) the text asserted an intention to generate change and it was reflected in the practice. The *Ar Rinci Foirne* did much for the preservation of dances that otherwise would have been lost to memory, but simultaneously pushed to the periphery, marginalized, and conformed many various practices of *ceili*. In the selection of the thirty dances, whether consciously or unconsciously, the *Ar Rinci Foirne* permanently altered the memory of these dances. Despite the other functions that the *Ar Rinci* possesses, it is still a valuable archive for *ceili* dancing in both Ireland and the diaspora, despite its conflicts with the social

repertoire that lives in the pubs, schools, and social gatherings in Ireland today.

The tradition of the social *ceili* was manufactured and committed to memory in 1897 by the London Branch of the Gaelic League, and by the final publication of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* in 1969, the perception, the power, and the practice of *ceili* was permanently altered. As competition remains the primary theatre for the performance of *ceili*, will more dances – even those preserved within the text of the *Ar Rinci Foirne* – be lost from the Irish body?

Recommendations for further research

The majority of this studies research was centered in North American and Western-European archival and practice of *ceili*. In recent years, Irish Dancing has gained popularity more globally. Further ethnographic study into contemporary practices of Irish Ceili in Ireland and the diaspora are recommended; specifically Australia, Eastern-Europe, and South America. As Irish dance spreads globally, dancers, teachers, and adjudicators are becoming more diverse. Local cultures, practices, and aesthetics continue to influence *ceili* practice. How will this increase in globalization affect the practice and memory of Irish *Ceili* dances?

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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