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Maypole Dancing and Other Body Movements in a Neo-Pagan Bealtaine Ritual in Ireland

by

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Abstract

Maypole Dancing and Other Body Movements in a Neo-Pagan Bealtaine Ritual in Ireland

This thesis examines the role of dance and body movements within a specific Pagan ritual in present day Ireland, namely Bealtaine. The purpose of my research is threefold: to identify the kinds of dances and body movements incorporated into this ritual; to question how participants – the Tipperary Pagans group – perceive these dances and body movements in their ritual; and to analyse the importance and meaning of body movements in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual for the participants of this ritual.

My place in the study is that of an ethnochoreologist as well as a Pagan and Druidry practitioner. My reasons for choosing this topic are various. First, I am an ethnochoreologist and I wish to study body movements within a group with a particular cultural background; as a dancer, dance is the category of body movement that interests me most. Second, due to my deep interest in Ritual and Religious Studies, I opted to research dance within ritual context. Third, as a Pagan adherent from another country I possess a unique perspective to analyse rituals and dances from both emic and etic perspectives. Moreover, dancing in present day Pagan rituals in Ireland is a field of research somewhat unexplored. As a researcher my position is negotiated in the field: occasionally as insider and other times as outsider. The research methodologies are drawn from the field of ethnochoreology. I undertake fieldwork and conduct ethnographic interviews. I attend and participate in Pagan rituals where the method of participant observation is widely used. Bibliographic sources are also examined (Appadurai, Barber, Bell, Danaher, Featherstone, Grau, Grimes, Hobsbawm, Turner). I attended and participated in a Bealtaine ritual as fieldwork for this study, performed by the Tipperary Pagans group at Saint Berrihert’s Kyle in Tipperary, Ireland.

In conclusion, this thesis analyses and reveals that Maypole Dancing, Puck Hunt, and Jumping the Bonfire were incorporated in the above mentioned ritual. Participants perceive the dance and body movements in their ritual as enjoyable and as a means to connect with ancestors and the earth. The dance and body movements function as homeopathic magic and as a means to connect with the divine. This research shows that the Tipperary Pagans engage in the fertility ritual of Bealtaine in order to acknowledge human dependence on fertility and to connect with nature and ancestors.
Declaration

I, Ana Camillo, declare that the enclosed project is entirely my own work and in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified.

Signed___Ana P. Camillo___
Dedication

Aos meus pais, Célia e Marcolino, que nunca mediram esforços para que eu tivesse a melhor educação possível e que eu realizasse meus sonhos.

To my parents, Célia and Marcolino, who always went through great lengths to provide me with the best education and the means to make my dreams come true.

To Vinicius and Danny, for the support, companionship and fun.

To my best friend Pepita who, even in the Otherworld, is always with me.
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My greatest thanks goes to all the lecturers at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, who helped me through this new path and enriched my world in ways that words cannot explain. My special and warmest thanks to Dr Catherine Foley and Dr Helen Phelan – you both will continue to be an inspiration for me.

I am also grateful to my classmates and dear friends – this journey would not have been as pleasant without all of you to share it!
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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Sometimes one person’s religion is another’s mythology.” Dr Aengus Finnegan lecture notes 2016.

This thesis examines the role of dance and body movements within a specific Pagan ritual in present day Ireland, namely Bealtaine. The purpose of my research is threefold: to identify the kinds of dances and body movements incorporated into this ritual; to question how participants – the Tipperary Pagans group – perceive these dances and body movements in their ritual; and to analyse the importance and meaning of body movements in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual for the participants of this ritual.

My place in the research is that of an ethnochoreologist as well as a Pagan and Druidry practitioner – I have been studying and practising Druidry for over ten years, and for six years I was part of a Druidry group in Brazil. Moreover, I have background in several dance genres, including Irish dance, gypsy dance, flamenco, classical ballet and belly dance. My reasons for choosing this topic are various. First, I am an ethnochoreologist and I wish to study body movements within a group with a particular cultural background; as a dancer, dance is the category of body movement that interests me most. Second, due to my deep interest in Ritual and Religious Studies, I opted to research dance within ritual context. Third, as a Pagan adherent from another country I possess a unique perspective to analyse rituals and dances from both emic and etic perspectives. Moreover, dancing in present day Pagan rituals in Ireland is a field of research somewhat unexplored.

As a researcher my position is negotiated in the field: occasionally as insider and other times as outsider. The research methodologies are drawn from the field of ethnochoreology; I undertake fieldwork and conduct ethnographic interviews – mostly in person but at times via email. This research study has received ethical approval from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Participants will be named in my research unless they request to remain anonymous in which case I will give them a pseudonym.¹ I attend and also, whenever possible, participate in Pagan rituals and moots where the method of participant observation is widely used. Moreover, the phenomenological method is likewise used – a distanciation that in theory allows the anthropologist of whatever religion, if any, to

¹ All participants have the right to confidentiality in relation to their participation and personal details.
examine religious beliefs and practices of others regardless of his or her own biases and prejudices. (Bowie 2005) Bibliographic sources were also examined.

The group under study in this thesis is the Tipperary Pagans. Tipperary is a county in the mid-west of Ireland and is located in the province of Munster. The Tipperary Pagans welcome people from all alternative Pagan based practices. They meet on a regular basis for days out, moots\(^2\), seasonal celebrations, workshops and talks at neighbouring Tipperary and Limerick areas\(^3\). The Facebook group has 46 members, however an average of eight people attend the activities frequently.\(^4\) This particular group was chosen not only geographically but also due to the adherents’ willingness to participate in my research and to allow fieldwork and video recording at their ritual. The Celtic-inspired ritual taken into account is Bealtaine, performed by the Tipperary Pagans group on the 24\(^{th}\) April 2016. The Gaelic word Bealtaine translates as May. Hence, Lá Bealtaine would translate as May Day – the other term commonly used for this festival. Bealtaine celebrates fertility and the coming of summer. More information about the festival of Bealtaine is provided in the next chapter.

**1.1. Understanding Paganism**

“Paganism is alive and well. It is growing in western societies and, unlike the established religions, is inclusive and non-dogmatic…It uses imagination, the most powerful tool of humanity, to explore realms of thought and meaning.”

(Vance 2006 p.7)

Rob Vance’s description of Paganism\(^5\) is an accurate and flattering one for a minority religion. According to Sabina Magliocco (2009) modern Paganism is a religious movement that arose in Europe in the early 20\(^{th}\) century and dispersed around the globe. Modern or contemporary Paganism is influenced by the pre-Christian and indigenous religions practised by peoples in Eurasia, North Africa and Near East. (Magliocco 2009) In Ireland Paganism draws its inspiration mainly from the Celtic peoples’ beliefs, a phenomenon that has become known as Celtic Paganism, Druidry, Druidism, among other denominations. Lewis and Pizza (2009) categorise Druidry and ethnic reconstructions, along with other religions such as Asatru,

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\(^1\) Informal social gatherings.

\(^2\) In Tipperary Pagans Facebook group page [accessed 19 May 2016].

\(^3\) More information on the Tipperary Pagans group is provided in Chapter 3.

\(^4\) The word Pagan derives from the Latin *paganus*, meaning a villager. *Pagan* usually describes a follower of a polytheistic religion. (Bonewits 2007)
Heathenry, Wicca and Witchcraft, within contemporary Paganism – a recent movement that is still establishing its identity on the global religious landscape.

The main point regarding Paganism is that this religion is based on nature: the practitioner worships and honours nature as an embodiment of divinity. The universe is perceived by the practitioners as interconnected and held together by an energy akin to a life force, present in all living things and in specific inanimate objects as well, such as rocks, rivers and springs. As this energy can be channelled and manipulated by human beings, one of the main purposes of Pagan rituals is to direct this energy towards a certain objective. For instance, the energy is supposed to further the natural cycle when properly directed in year cycle rites; in rites of crisis, the energy is used to balance the cause of the crisis. (Magliocco 2009)

Furthermore, Pagan deities are usually personifications of distinct facets of nature. Michael York (2009) advocates that contemporary western Paganism “is a form of naturism, worship or honouring of natural cycles and processes.” (York in Lewis and Pizza Eds. 2009, p.284)

Moreover, he states that Paganism tends to perceive all things as sacred and of divine nature. As a Pagan practitioner, I concur. Another aspect of Paganism is the incorporation of the magical. As York (2009) clearly describes, “magic is variously understood as the psychological harnessing of the will to achieve particular ends beyond the norm, as the cultivation of a sense of wonder and enchantment, and as the utilization of the preternatural energies.” (York in Lewis and Pizza eds. 2009, p.294)

Magliocco (2009) describes magic as an organisational principle that lies beneath the cosmos and which is shared by most Pagan adherents. Some Pagan rituals, on the other hand, are not exactly magical in nature but are a manner of experiencing what the past cultures – supposedly – used to perform, thus connecting with the ancestors. Alternatively, they can be devotional – this is mainly the case of reconstructionist traditions. A third important feature of Paganism is its polytheistic system of deity beliefs. While there are multiple and gender-differentiated deities, the believer can opt to worship whoever he or she wishes to, or not worship anyone at all (York 2009).

Pagan practices today are not similar to the practices of the past, either in Ireland or in most of Western Europe. The term Neo-Paganism is sometimes used as a means to differentiate the ancient Pagan practices from the current practices.⁶ Even if Paganism had not been transformed by Christianity, a number of its aspects would have changed nonetheless as no

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⁶ Pike (2001) defines Neo-Paganism as a reinvention of ancient Pagan traditions and practices, or the creation of new traditions. Moreover, she states that Neo-Pagan religious beliefs are commonly “self-consciously shaped to meet the needs of contemporary Americans and Europeans rather than to remain true to specific ancient religions.” (Pike 2001, p. 227) In this research I use the term Neo-Paganism accordingly to Pike’s (2001) description.
culture or customs are static. As a consequence, in this research I am dealing with the revival of Pagan customs or reconstructionism. While revival is the process of – in this instance a set of beliefs or religion – being renewed, reconstructionism is more complex. Reconstructionism of Pagan religions – for instance Celtic, Norse, Hellenic or Roman – relies on academic and historical sources of old beliefs and practices as inspiration to create present day beliefs and practices. As Jenny Blain and Robert J. Wallis perfectly explains:

“The expressed aim of reconstructionist groups is not to recreate pagan society or ritual exactly as it was, but to use sources from the past to aid in the creation of religious, spiritual and ritual experiences and structures that suit the present-day: to draw on the understandings of the past for an improved understanding of the present.”

(Blain and Wallis in Lewis and Pizza Eds. 2009, p.414)

Different Neo-Pagan groups have distinct approaches (revivalist, reconstructionist, new ager, Wiccan, etc.). Consequently, their approaches reflect on the manner those Neo-Pagan groups perform dance in their rituals, as well as on the meanings attributed to the dance performance. The dance in rituals – including the Neo-Pagan rituals in Ireland – is deeply affected by globalisation and postmodernism. Indeed, as Mike Featherstone (1990) argues, due to globalisation a cumulative number of people are becoming involved in more than one culture, therefore increasing intercultural communication. This results in significant impact on not only vernacular dances but also on dance in rituals, as well as the rituals themselves.

As previously stated Neo-Paganism in Ireland is deeply influenced by Celtic spirituality. Hence, in order to comprehend Neo-Paganism as practised in Ireland it is imperative to know who the Celtic peoples were.

1.2. The Celtic Peoples and their Spirituality

In archaeology the term “Celts” relates to a sub-division of the Indo-Europeans – a group of Bronze Age peoples who began their migration out of their homeland around the Caspian Sea between 4000 BC and 2000 BC. While some Indo-European peoples migrated east towards India others moved towards Europe. Being a later Indo-European branch, the Celts are believed to have had their homeland in southern Germany and Austria around 700 and 500 BC in the late Bronze age and early Iron Age culture called Hallstatt. Later on, groups of Celtic peoples migrated into Brittany, Galicia, northern Italy, highlands of Turkey, parts of Eastern
Europe, and Britain. (Lewis 2009) The Iron Age culture called La Tène is the second period of Celtic artwork – succeeding the Hallstatt – and is dated from around 350 BC.

Scholars generally agree that the first Celtic peoples arrived in Ireland between the fifth and third centuries BC and encountered peoples with their own spiritual beliefs and rituals – which the Celts assimilated. (Whelan 2010) While there are not accounts of Celtic religion registered by the Celts themselves, many aspects of their beliefs can be understood from the oral myths and tales Christian monks transcribed (Finnegan 2016). The religion was a polytheistic one, where Gods and Goddesses did not have specific roles, as opposed to Greco-Roman deities. Moreover, according to the number and repetition of deities’ names in inscriptions, it is possible that particular Gods and Goddesses were associated with specific tribes. (Jestice 2010) It is commonly agreed by scholars and researches that druids were very educated men and women who held a position of highest status within pre-Christian Celtic society. Apart from having the role of priests, the druids carried out political and poetic

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(Finnegan 2016)
functions (Jestice 2010) and also deliberated on the law. The druids kept information in oral tradition, albeit they wrote accounts down in their own language. The probable reasons for relying on oral tradition were to protect their knowledge from others as well as to prevent their memories from weakening. (Finnegan 2016) Two other interchangeable castes that likewise held importance in Celtic society were the bards (poets and singers) and the ovates (seers). For the reason that druids were so important in Celtic society, Celtic religion and its modern revival are usually called Druidism or Druidry. Many of the deities worshipped are the same as those portrayed in the myths and tales transcribed by Christian monks, albeit it is commonly understood by the believers that these texts are metaphors as opposed to real accounts. The deities, however, are real to believers, and this is the reason the term mythology can be prejudicial and thus should be avoided – myths are, after all, a crucial aspect of religion. (Cox 1969) Myths, particularly within the context of globalisation and postmodernity, will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

According to Phyllis Jestice (2010) the earliest known Irish religion depicts elements of solar symbolism, and was focused on both solar and lunar cycles. Evidence of possible religious significance of the sun is provided by the alignment of some Irish megalithic tombs and stone circles dated from the third and second millennia BC. By the end of the second millennium BC, however, a change of religious customs occurred: the building of megalithic monuments was abandoned in favour of votive offerings in pits and water, suggesting a shift to an earth-related belief system – possible due to dependence on agriculture and herding. Jestice (2010) further relates that many scholars believe the sun holds an important place in Irish Celtic spirituality: not only do many deities have elements suggesting fire, brightness, or light in their names but also in early Irish literature there are references to a special worship of the sun.

With the coming of Christianity to Ireland around 431 AD another merging of customs occurred, “from the pre-Christian Druidic to the Celtic Christian”. (Whelan 2010, p.12). According to Seán Ó Duinn (2000), this occurrence was an intertwining of religious practices and beliefs – Gods and Goddesses were assimilated into saints and churches were built on sacred Pagan sites. As Ireland was not invaded by the Romans, the country managed to be practically free from invasions until the arrival of the Vikings in the 10th century AD and the Normans in the 12th century AD – which helped greatly in preserving Celtic culture. The preserved old Celtic religion is the basis for the Paganism practised today in Ireland.

This introduction to Paganism and Celtic spirituality provides a general background to this thesis on the role of dance and body movements within Pagan rituals in present day Ireland. Below is an outline of the chapters to follow.
1.3. Outline of Thesis Chapters

This thesis is organised into five segments. Chapter One consists of an introduction to research questions, topics of investigation, and a background on Paganism, the Celtic peoples and their spirituality. In Chapter Two, *Unravelling Concepts*, I build a theoretical foundation on Ritual Studies and Ethnochoreology: I examine the concepts of ritual and the invention of tradition, rituals in Celtic festivals and dance in rituals; I also explain briefly how rituals and dance in rituals today are influenced by globalisation and post-modernism. In Chapter Three, *Experiencing Ritual through Body Movements*, I introduce the ethnographic data of the field, as well as the people, the dance, and the ritual studied – Maypole Dancing and other body movements in a Bealtaine celebration performed by the Tipperary Pagans group. In Chapter Four, *Reading between the Lines*, I apply the theoretical framework explored in Chapter Two, I analyse the ethnographic data and I argue my results. Chapter Five presents the conclusions of my research.
2. Chapter 2: Unravelling Concepts

“Dance is created out of culturally understood symbols within social and religious contexts, and it conveys information and meaning as ritual, ceremony, and entertainment. For dance to communicate, its audience must understand the cultural conventions that deal with human movement in time and space.”

Kaeppler in Garfinkel 2003, p.4.

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation for this thesis, mainly on Ritual Studies and Ethnochoreology. It examines the concepts of greatest interest for my research, as follows: the concepts of ritual (Bell, Grimes, Turner), the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm, Lewis), rituals in Celtic festivals (Danaher, Ó Duinn, Whelan) and dance in rituals (Backman, Barber, Frymer-Kensky, Garfinkel). I also explain how rituals and dance in rituals today is influenced by globalisation and postmodernism (Appadurai, Buckland, Featherstone and Lash, Grau).

2.1. The Concepts of Ritual

In order to understand the role of dance in rituals it is imperative firstly to understand the concept of ritual and its structures. According to Ronald Grimes (2014) rituals are not necessarily religious or liturgical. Everyday life can be ritualised, even if no special event happens. Moreover, actions can become ritualised when they are traditionalised, associated with sacred values, systematically repeated and in the same way, singularised, stylised, performed with a special state of mind or attitude, directed to higher power, situated in distinct places or time, and/or executed by qualified persons. Accordingly, rituals are not essentially religious, and dance can be performed in a broader ritualistic sense. An explanation of the difference between ritual and rite is also clearly provided by Grimes: “Ritual is what one defines in formal definitions and characterizations; rites, or rituals, are what people enact.”

(Grimes 2014, p.193) In other words, rituals are enacted and a ritual performance is not an object. Whatever the duration, however long or often, ritual has a beginning and an ending. It is an evanescent social event that does not exist in the abstract, but in exact forms and eras intersecting local and global cultures. Its meanings are modified by the intentions of those performing it as well as the actions that preceded and followed them. Undoubtedly, similar to dance, rituals are ephemeral – after their enactment, they are gone. Grimes (1995) accurately distinguishes and describes six modes of ritual sensibility – or embodied attitudes – that may...

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8 In this research, however, dance and body movements do have religious connotation.
appear during a ritual: ritualisation, decorum, ceremony, magic, liturgy, and celebration. This classification was made necessary, according to him, due to the confusion and problems some minimal categories were causing, such as rites of passages/seasonal rites, rites of intensification/rites of rebellion, and sacred ritual/profane ritual. It is interesting to note that dance is particularly present in certain modes of ritual sensibility: ritualisation, magic, and celebration.

Ritual begins with ritualisation, and ritualisation begins when meaning or performance are more important than functionality. (Grimes 1995) Catherine Bell (1992) describes ritualisation as “the production of ritualized acts.” (Bell 1992, p.140) In this thesis I argue that dance as well as body movements are very effective means of ritualisation, albeit in some instances their performances do have a practical function. Magliocco (2009) states that “ritualisation lies at the heart of modern Paganism.” (Magliocco in Lewis and Pizza eds. 2009, p. 223) Seasonal, agricultural, fertility, divinatory, funerary and healing rites embody ritualisation processes most wholly due to the fact that they show clearly the symbiosis between people, their bodies and their environments – and it is indeed in those types of rituals where I would argue most accounts of dancing are encountered. Another mode of ritual, and which overlaps with ritualisation, is magic: “The word refers to any element of ritual understood as a means to an end. If a rite not only has meaning but also works, it is magical.” (Grimes 1995, pp. 48-49) Divination, fertility rites, healing rites, and curses can be categorised as magic. The last mode of ritual that is of interest in this instance is celebration, a ludic sensibility expressed by feasts, carnivals, birthdays, dancing, singing, and festivals. Celebration is connected to the arts as its rites derive from expressive culture. Victor Turner (1969) states that important time rites – for instance marriage, birth, and death – can occur either in an individualistic or collective setting and tend to be more frequently performed by individuals. Calendrical rites, on the other hand, commonly involve large groups or the whole community. As this thesis will argue, dance is therefore mostly present in rites where ritualisation, magic and celebration are present: seasonal, agricultural, fertility, divinatory, funerary, healing, and festivals – where large groups are involved. Accounts reporting dance in important time rites, however, are likewise existent. More details on dance in ritual context are provided below in this chapter.

Robert Turner (2015) argues that ritual actions can physically change the brains of the celebrants. Rituals use symbols, filled with cognitive and affective meaning. Moreover, ritual acts unite sensory experience with rational cognition. R. Turner (2015) also relates the skilful

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9 Examples and analysis from my fieldwork are provided in Chapters Three and Four.
sequencing of ritual symbols as an art form akin to choreography or musical composition, resulting in lasting alterations in the connections of human brain. According to him: “These alterations, which are only visible using neuroimaging methods, have overwhelming importance in determining how we decide, and how we act.” (R. Turner in Bull, M. and Mitchell, J.P. eds. 2015, p.43) It can be argued that the effects of religious rituals are not due to divine response, but instead on how the celebrants’ brains are affected. The celebrants’ brains can be particularly affected when a state of mind alteration is sought. A common practice to achieve this goal is by means of dance and body movements. This is discussed further below in this chapter.

Myths have a parallel outcome in the human mind and behaviour. As previously stated, myths are a fundamental aspect of religion. According to Halton (1995) human emotions are semiotic, and as the biosemiotics capacities are ritually codified, they can transmute feelings into communicable form. This conversion happens in the form of myth. Communal myths are boundaries of human conduct and offer both a foundation to reason and a placing of the subject in community and nature. As Featherstone and Lash advocate: “Myth is the basis of our ‘non-rational reasonableness’, which is a hybrid of organic intelligence’ from ‘pre-Western, non-Western, and pre-historical sources.’” (Featherstone and Lash 1995, p.22) Moreover, Featherstone and Lash question the possibility of whether or not collective identities may be the basis for resisting the changes of the new global world. The concept of world has a new connotation in the context of globalisation – the global ‘neo-worlds’ are mythically constructed memories. Featherstone and Lash (1995) further argue that the flow of signs, images, signals and symbols can be recombined in the form of myth. Undoubtedly, in most cases, myth is a central part of ritual. Theresa Jill Buckland (2001) explores the act of myth-making within a society utilising as sources Cohen’s (1985) book The Symbolic Construction of Community and Hobsbawm’s (1983) introductory chapter of the book The Invention of Tradition (cited below). Buckland states that “both scholars treat such historical myth-making as a symptomatic response to Modernity.” (Buckland 2001, p.433) This means that, according to Cohen and Hobsbawm, societies at times create new traditions based on old traditions in order to maintain a connection with the past. This is discussed further below with regard to ritual, globalisation and postmodernity.

According to Bell (1992) ritualised activities allow for a wide range of interpretation and do not stimulate belief or conviction. It is possible for an individual to accept particular beliefs but not the rituals associated with them, as ritual and belief are interweaved but detachable. According to Shills: “Beliefs could exist without rituals; rituals, however, could not
exist without belief.” (Shills, cited in Bell 1992, p.19) Therefore the celebrant needs to believe in the power of the dance performed in ritual, which is distinct from merely executing movements – the belief and intention are paramount. It is through ritual that Neo-Pagans communicate with nature, with the sacred and with the past in significant manners. Magliocco states that “ritual is thus a creative form in and of itself – one which, like any art form, ultimately helps humans transcend the everyday, quotidian nature of human existence.” (Magliocco in Lewis and Pizza eds. 2009, p. 223) In fact dance is a very efficient means to achieve this goal.

Ritual can be considered akin to artistic production as a way to provide the celebrants with religious ecstasy through elements such as props, music, dance, costume, etc. (Magliocco 2009) Consequently, these elements of ritual combined are able to transport the participant out of the ordinary world into a place “between the worlds” where ecstatic states can be experienced – albeit very personal and individually. According to Yosef Garfinkel (2003) the performance of expressive acts of worship towards the deity or transcendent being is part of religious rituals. He cites four acts of worship commonly present in religious rituals. The first act of worship requires – at the same time as it induces, a special state of awareness. In communal rituals this state of awareness can be achieved by the use of attention-focusing devices such as sacred location, light, sounds, smell, etc. Second, Garfinkel explains the boundary zone as the focus point of the ritual, between this world and the Otherworld – where the deities reside. Third, he illuminates the importance of both human and the divine’s attention being heightened: for a ritual to be considered effective the deity must be present in some sense – hence the widely practised custom of symbolising deities by some image or material form. Finally, participation and offering is the fourth act of worship described by Garfinkel.10 It can take the form of movements, prayers, and offerings of material objects by sacrifice or gift. Notably, dance and/or body movements may hold various functions in rituals: they can be used not only as offering but also as an attention-focusing device, and a way of ‘travelling’ to the Otherworld.

Despite the lack of first-hand records of their religious practices, there is some evidence that dance and body movements were performed in ancient Celtic rituals, although their actual characteristics are unknown. It is widely agreed by scholars that dancing and body movements were indeed present in Celtic festivals. (See below)

10 Garfinkel’s four acts of worship commonly present in religious rituals will be applied to my research in Chapter Four.
2.2. Rituals in Celtic Festivals

According to Whelan (2010) Pre-Celtic and Celtic cultures did not perceive time in a linear manner; instead, these peoples understood time as a circle. Consequently, the Celts created and lived by a calendar according to the belief in alternating opposite forces constantly interacting with each other: night and day, dark and light, winter and summer. Endings and beginnings, then, were closely linked, as reflected in the flowing lines and connected figures abundant in Celtic art. (Whelan 2010)

The Celtic year calendar, or wheel of the year, is divided into two major sections – the dark, associated with winter, and the light, associated with summer. The wheel of the year is further sub-divided into eight segments, each of them with its own festival, as explained below.

2.2.1. Festivals of the Celtic Year

The four central Celtic festivals are Samhain, Imbolg, Bealtaine, and Lughnasa, celebrated around 1\textsuperscript{st} November, 1\textsuperscript{st} February, 1\textsuperscript{st} May, and 1\textsuperscript{st} August respectively\textsuperscript{11}. These are all agricultural festivals, therefore they celebrate the cycle of the earth. As the Celts were people of the land their very existence depended on the seasons as well as on the fertility of the

\textsuperscript{11} All dates are according to the Northern Hemisphere. Some adherents from the Southern Hemisphere prefer to "invert" the circle so the celebrations will be connected to the agricultural time and season of their home.
land for the provision of food. Hence the Celtic peoples were consciously aware of the earthly cycle, as an excerpt from the *Cath Maige Tuired*\(^{12}\) explains:

“Spring for ploughing and sowing, and the beginning of summer for maturing the strength of the grain, and the beginning of autumn for the full ripeness of the grain, and for reaping it. Winter for consuming it.”

(Gray in Ó Duinn 2000, p.77)

Winter and summer solstices (around 21\(^{st}\) December and 21\(^{st}\) June) as well as spring and autumn equinoxes (around 21\(^{st}\) March and 21\(^{st}\) September) are the four minor festivals, and they represent the main moments of the Earth’s journey around the sun.

I provide below a brief background of each of the above festivals, beginning with the summer solstice – also called midsummer – which is the focus of my research. The summer solstice celebrates the full blossoming and fruition of the seeds sown before winter. (Whelan 2010) A strong feature of the summer solstice festival is, alike in Bealtaine, the fire. Fire represents the sun’s nourishing and fertilising power. According to Danaher (1972) large midsummer communal fires were celebrated with dancing, music and singing. Following the summer solstice is Lughnasa. The

\(^{12}\) *Cath Maige Tuired* translates as “The Battle of Mag Tuired”. This is one of the most important mythological texts in Irish literature.
Lughnasa festival honours the God Lugh\textsuperscript{13} and his foster mother Tailtiu, who cleared away the plains and fields of Ireland making them ready for crops to grow. (Whelan 2010) Tailtiu died from her efforts in doing so. Lughnasa marks the beginning of the harvest season and celebrates the success of the people’s working relationship with their land in providing food – an essential aspect to the survival of the community. Next to Lughnasa comes the autumn equinox, the time of the year when the light begins to decrease as the sun starts to lose its strength. (Whelan 2010) The autumn equinox is also a time for completion of the harvest. The next festival is Samhain, one of the most significant festivals in the Celtic calendar. Marking the beginning of the dark half of the year, it is the direct opposite from Bealtaine, and in both festivals it is believed the veils between the worlds are the thinnest. Samhain also marks the end of all agricultural work and honours the ancestors. Following on from Samhain there is the winter solstice, when the longest night of the year occurs. As the winter season extends, this phase represents surrender to the darkness, and paradoxically, fecundity. This is so as the Earth can be perceived to be in a gestational state. (Whelan 2010) The next festival is Imbolg, another very important festival for the Celtic peoples and associated with the Goddess Brigid\textsuperscript{14}. Imbolg means “in the belly”, probably a metaphor for “winter pregnant with summer.” (Whelan 2010, p. 110) This means that the seeds of summer are still inside the earth – the Goddess’ womb – thus providing hope and possibilities. (Whelan 2010) After Imbolg the sun’s force continues to grow towards the spring equinox, when day and night are equal in length. Moreover, the seeds that had been nurtured during winter are getting ready to emerge. The next festival is Bealtaine.

In this thesis I will focus on the Bealtaine festival and the dance predominantly associated with it – the Maypole Dance.

\textbf{2.2.2. The Bealtaine Festival}

The old Celtic festival of Bealtaine, also known today as May Day, is a very celebratory ritual/festivity and nearly every account of it from various sources mentions dancing. As John Ramsay states: “…the most considerable of the Druidical festivals is that of Beltane, or May-day…with extraordinary ceremonies.” (Ramsay in Frazer 1959, p. 715) Standing opposite the Samhain festival in the wheel of the year, and thus marking the beginning of the light period, Bealtaine is connected with fertility and the material world. Jestice (2000) attests that the

\textsuperscript{13} Lugh is of the main Irish Gods. He is a solar deity and God of all arts and crafts. (Ellis 1992)

\textsuperscript{14} A very popular Irish Goddess who became syncretised into Christian saint. Brigid is a triple Goddess, related to healing, smithery, fertility and poetry. (Ellis 1992)
probable origin of this festival lies in the worship of the God Belenos\textsuperscript{15} – the Bright One – who is related with the healing powers of the sun. (Whelan 2010) An alternative etymology of the word, however, is provided by Cormac (c.900) suggesting that Bealtaine means “lucky fire”. At any rate, it is unquestionable that there is a relationship between Bealtaine, fire and the sun. According to the late Irish folklorist and ethnologist Kevin Danaher\textsuperscript{16}, in Ireland as well as in the majority of Western Europe the Maytime ceremonies had the purpose of welcoming summer and were characteristically festive. It was a time for joy and fun but with a magical element blended in it. Seán Ó Duinn (2000) elucidates that in the Bealtaine ritual it included a dancing routine repeated three times in a clockwise direction around the fire. He does not, however, provide any further information. He states that on May Eve – also known as Walpurgis Night – it was believed that witches were particularly active in casting spells and doing general mischief. Danaher cites an account from the Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society which not only cites dancing but also is a clear example of syncretism:

“On May Night the latter [candles] were lit, and dancing took place around the May bush. This custom is of Pagan origin, though at the present time it is thought by the people that it is carried out in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom the month of May is dedicated.”

(Omurethi in Danaher 1972, p.90)

Other features were likewise attributed to Bealtaine. One of the most prominent features was the lightening of bonfires, around which people celebrated the festival. There was music, “dancing, shouting, revelry, and debauchery of every description succeeded, till, at an advanced hour of the night, the scene partook more of the nature of the ancient Saturnalia.” (Danaher 1972, p.96) Another tradition, still related with fire, was purification, when cattle that had been kept indoors during winter were passed through bonfires to be purified before going out to summer pastures. (Whelan 2010) Another characteristic of this festival is the Flower Maiden that represents the young mother as well as the earth Goddess’s fertility – the return of fecundity to the land. Whelan (2010) states that the Flower Maiden was honoured by young girls carrying flowers and singing in processions. Eventually, the Flower Maiden was wooed by the God Maponos\textsuperscript{17} who won her from the winter king, and married her. This mythical marriage is a strong symbolism of the sacred marriage of masculine and feminine energies, likewise an important aspect of the Bealtaine festival and more explicitly represented by the

\textsuperscript{15} Belenos (or Belenus) is cognate with Bel and B’ile. He is known to be a solar God and healer. (Ellis 1992)

\textsuperscript{16} Ó Caoimhín Ó Danachair, his name in Irish which he used to publish his academic works.

\textsuperscript{17} Maponos is a warrior and hunter Celtic God. His name means “Divine Son” or “Divine Youth”. It is believed his Welsh cognate is Mabon ap Modron and his Irish equivalent is Aengus Mac Óg. (Ellis 1992)
Maypole and the dance around it\textsuperscript{18}. The mythical marriage between the Flower Maiden and Maponos is also an obvious allusion to the ending of winter and beginning of summer. Whelan (2010) advocates that in the Celtic tradition masculine and feminine energies are depicted by fire and water. Both energies are believed to be more potent when working in harmony – it was assumed that the early morning dew on the May morning had magical properties, as it consisted of both water and fire. A similar belief applied for the water from holy wells which was touched by the May rising-sun rays. Danaher also mentions a very interesting tradition – similar to several others explored in Elisabeth Barber’s book \textit{The Dancing Goddesses}\textsuperscript{19} – from places in Counties Louth, Meath and Monaghan of May celebrants carrying an effigy called “The May Baby”. It is probable, however, that this effigy was made originally to represent Flora, the Goddess of flowers and fecundity; the festival itself might have been reminiscent of the Roman Floralia. Couples would dance around the figurine with great exhibition and merriment; childless married women would also be present to look at the effigy, believing it would grant them fertility. Once more the fertility theme is present with dancing associated as a manner of honouring the deity responsible for granting this bounty.

J. Lawton Winslade (2009) claims that in many Neo-Pagan festivals celebrants dance around fires, using their bodies as means of expression, healing, learning, exploration, and even conflict resolution. This phenomenon occurs in a festival setting, and not necessarily within a ritual or theatrical frame. Moreover, he states that festivals function as laboratories to develop and experiment new ways of performing rituals. He states: “Rituals are common at most festivals.” (Winslade in Lewis and Pizza Eds. 2009, p.248) Sarah M. Pike (2001) argues that Neo-Pagan identity is mainly expressed within a festival context with music and dance. She further claims that dancing around fire creates energy for the ritual, and assists the ritual in working as a collective experience. (Pike 2001)

Certainly, dance has been performed in rituals of different religions throughout history. Tikva Frymer-Kensky (1992) states that in many ancient Pagan religions, cults of fertility were performed in order to experience and aid the perpetuation of nature. In these fertility rituals singing and dancing were largely executed. The next section will further explore the role of the dance in rituals.

\textsuperscript{18} The Maypole consists of a tall pole set on the ground and decorated with ribbons. More information on the Maypole, the Maypole Dancing and its meanings are provided in Chapters Three and Four.

\textsuperscript{19} More details in the next section.
2.3. Dance in Rituals

According to Adrienne Kaeppler (1992) “dance is created out of culturally understood symbols within social and religious contexts and it conveys information and meanings as ritual, ceremony, and entertainment.” (Kaeppler in Garfinkel 2003, p.4) Dance is indeed a central aspect of ritual in many cultures, as exemplified below. Anca Giurchescu (2001) states that dance is not only a specific mode of social interaction in its essence but it is also a powerful symbol which alludes to the changing world, as well as becoming a tool of change. According to her: “Dance has always been an important symbolic instrument in ritual contexts, in art events, in social communication and political action.” (Giurchescu 2001, p.110) There are no ‘ritual dances’, however, but dance in rituals – as Joann Keali’inohomoku (1983) states, ‘primitive dances’ do not exist, but there are primitive peoples who perform dances. The same principle applies to dance and ritual. There are certain dances which are performed inside a ritual context, or as part of rituals, but no dance is a ritual per se; neither does a “ritual dance” genre exist.

The oldest records of dance in rituals are from Neolithic rock paintings, and as such only conjectures can be made regarding their function in the society at that period. Garfinkel (2003) advocates that according to archaeological research, dance, since the beginning of agriculture, has been used in public calendrical rites of the early farmers. Moreover, he further argues that communal assemblies with the purposes of religious ceremonies – where dance played an important role – have also been used to promote community bonds. He states: “As dancing activity is closely associated with public religious ceremonies, dancing opens a window onto the cognitive map of early village communities’ rituals.” (Garfinkel 2003, p.14) According to Professor E. Louis Backman (1952) the use of dance in religious context, not only in pre-Christian and Pagan practices but also in the Christian church’s practices, was widespread. It is very likely that dance has been an important part of the liturgy in almost every religion. Pre-Christian religions, Christianity, Judaism are examples of religions that have, or still do, engage in dancing as an essential part of their rituals. The same is true for communities that have developed particularly around Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Italy. (Backman 1952) Dancing is likewise present in religious rituals of Vodou, Santería, and Candomblé. (Hume 2013) Backman also claims that dance customs of Pagan cults were highly developed, especially those of the Slavonic and Germanic peoples. These dances were usually performed at worship, funerary rites, and as protection against malicious spirits. (Backman 1952)
Bell (1992) argues that the body is a social construction which reflects the society’s ethos, as well as a microcosm of the universe. The body is not only a means of expression but it is also fundamental to the relationship of self and society. In relation to ritual, Bell contends that: “A ritualized body is a body invested with a ‘sense’ of ritual.” (Bell 1992, p.98) Therefore, through physical movements ritual practices can construct environments designated for specific goals – and in fact dance has been a widely used form of physical movement in rituals. Garfinkel (2003) states that dancing has been linked to public religious ceremonies since early village communities’ rituals. McNeill (1995) advocates that dance and dance-like behaviour have played an important role in religion for millennia, at times as a means to achieve an ecstatic state – perceived by many cultures as the most reliable method to communicate with the spiritual world. He further states that dance is one of the most dependable approaches of generating inspirations in rituals, and when a society keeps together in time by dance at religious ceremonies it creates a strong emotional impact of collective solidarity while erasing personal frustrations. This statement is supported by Bonewits (2007): “Even if tradition and orthodoxy are important to you, you can still invent ways to spice up what you are doing through music, dance, drama, costumes, or props.” (Bonenwits 2007, p.183).

Elizabeth Wayland Barber’s book (2013) *The Dancing Goddesses: Folklore, Archaeology, and the Origins of European Dance* is the result of in depth research based on fieldwork, archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics. It provides valuable and new insights regarding the origins of European dance as well as dance in rituals. In her book Barber deeply analyses how the belief in mystical female spirits has developed into dances in rituals for fertility and healing. Moreover, Barber also displays a variety of customs and traditions of villagers that have survived to the present day in Europe as symbols, superstitions, and calendar customs (such as Easter, midsummer, Christmas, and May Day). Barber argues that the marking time instigated seasonal rituals – which embody ritualisation, one of the six modes of ritual sensibility described by Grimes (1995) and in which frequently involves dancing. She states that two highly celebrated festivals for various peoples are midsummer and spring. As birches were considered signs of spring, Russian village girls of marriageable age (thus, of unused fertility) performed follow-the-leader dances around them singing songs. It was magic through analogy, due to the belief that “as the girls dance, so may the goddesses; and as the goddesses create life by dancing, so may the girls.” (Barber 2013, p.39) The fertility theme is widely present in many festivals from various cultures and with similar aspects, including the Celtic Bealtaine. In midsummer festivals villagers executed bonfire jumping for spiritual purification and bodily health, and as magic to make the crops grow. It was believed that the
higher the person jumped, the higher would the crops grow. This phenomenon is what James Frazer (1959) describes as the principle of Law of Similarity. According to these principles, the practitioner assumes to be capable of reproducing any desired effect by imitating it. Moreover, a person can influence nature accordingly to his/her acts or state. For instance, girls of unused fertility (exemplified above) are more powerful when performing magic to grant fertility for the land than women who have already “used” their fertility (non-virgins). Charms based on the Law of Similarity are called homeopathic or imitative magic by Frazer (1951). Frymer-Kensky (1992) provides a very interesting insight regarding the nature of fertility rituals and homeopathic magic. Opposing Frazer’s ideas, Frymer-Kensky (1992) argues that people who performed these practices were not ignorant. She elucidates that fertility rituals where homeopathic magic was present were practised long after humans domesticated animals and developed agricultural skills to ensure their food supply. However, farmers realised that certain conditions could influence the success of crops, for instance appropriate weather, quality and contamination of the soil, predators, etc. Hence, there were still various reasons as to why crops would not thrive, and it was perceived to be a miracle when they did. Fertility rituals were, thus, a celebration of this miracle as well as an acknowledgement of human’s dependence on fertility. Moreover, it is a way for humans to participate on guaranteeing the perpetuation of life. (Frymer-Kensky 1992) Furthermore, it can be argued that this is one of the reasons why such rituals are still performed today. One of the most well-known dances performed in fertility rituals is Maypole Dancing, executed at Bealtaine or midsummer festivals. Maypole Dancing is further discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

Barber (2013) notably shows that several aspects of current agrarian rituals in Europe are actually two to three millennia old. There are two main sources of evidence of beliefs and customs: material culture and linguistic remains. The former are comprised by archaeological artefacts while the latter consists of inscription, oral literatures, manuscripts and etymologies. For the medieval Christian priests fertility was not to be celebrated, and thus the Dancing Goddesses were enemies of the “one true god”. Numerous accounts from this period come from priests’ and missionaries’ writings as well as from funerary monuments. Barber (2013) also presents and analyses rituals of diverse cultures and various deities that carry several cross-cultural similarities: in Italy, Croatia, Switzerland, France, and Germany village women and some men would fall into trances and perform dance feasts to the Good Lady (the Good Goddess, associated with Diana/Artemis20) in order to be blessed with abundant crops and

20 The Roman/Greek Goddess of the hunt and the moon.
healing. This practice is similar to the Serbian Duboka. According to Barber (2013) the Celtic Goddess/Saint Brigid’s rituals are like many Balkan rituals. Semele (Earth), God Dionysus’ mother, was divine and was called up every spring by women who danced to awaken the earth and renew growth; as did the Lazarki in Bulgaria. Barber (2013) also surprisingly reveals from archaeological finds (for instance, frescoes and sculptures) that Minoan women performed dance. Moreover, this Cretan civilization from about 3200 to 1200 BC also worshipped maiden spirits. So did agrarian cultures from the Neolithic period. For these peoples, dance was one of the methods to create collective bonds.

As this chapter has illustrated, dance in rituals, as well as the rituals themselves, have played important roles in diverse societies for hundreds of years. Today, however, rituals have been significantly impacted by globalisation and postmodernism. This will be explored below.

2.4. Globalisation and Postmodernity

To understand the impact that globalisation and postmodernism have had on rituals, the terms first need to be theoretically unpacked and examined. Although globalisation and postmodernism have influenced Neo-Pagan rituals in Ireland, globalisation and postmodernism are not the focus of my thesis.

The term globalisation originated in the 1960s and it means, at its core, shifting forms of human contact. (Steger 2009) Friedman (1995) advocates that globalisation is “an increasing world-wide interconnectedness, interchanges and movements of people, images and commodities.” (Friedman in Featherstone et al. eds. 1995 p.69) According to Featherstone and Lash (1995) globalisation has become since the 1990s an influential paradigm. I agree that globalisation has been widely discussed by scholars as a central theme in social theory in order to understand the sociocultural changes of modernity and postmodernity. Moreover, globalisation can likewise be regarded as a result of the global logic of modernity. Giddens (1990, 1991) states that globalisation is an outcome of modernity, and supplements that while at the same time globalisation requires time and space distanciation, it is also a juxtaposition of tradition and modernity – a very interesting and accurate perspective. Robertson (1995), on the other hand, advocates that globality is less a consequence of modernisation than a condition of divergent modernisation. He states that: “Globalisation refers both to the compression of the world and to the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole.” (Robertson in Featherstone et al. eds. 1995, p.70) Moreover, Robertson further advocates that there is an
increase and awareness of global interdependence, and that the compression of the world has been happening for more than a millennium, albeit with different characteristics – a likewise correct statement.

Arjun Appadurai (1990) provides a set of dimensions of global cultural flow which inform my discussion below. According to Scott Reiss (2003) these five dimensions are broad and fluid categories of human action and interaction on a global scale. The first dimension is *ethnoscape*, defined by the traffic of large amount of people such as immigrants, refugees, tourists, etc. The second dimension which is very influential on the masses is *mediascapes*, characterised by the wide production and dissemination of information via newspapers, TV stations and films productions studios, magazines, etc. *Technoscapes*, the third dimension, are the global outline of technology, both mechanical and informational, regarding the rapidity and easiness of their barrier crossing. *Finanscapes*, the fourth dimension, stands for the velocity with which large sums of money are transferred globally through currency markets, stock exchanges, etc. The last of Appadurai’s ‘scapes’ is *ideoscapes*: commonly political ideas dealing with ideologies of state, as well as the counter-ideologies of movements aiming to capture state power.

In my thesis I will be using and applying three of Appadurai’s scapes: *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, and *technoscapes*. Appadurai’s ‘scapes’ are significant in my research as they provide a medium for locating and beginning to understand the changing aspects of rituals and, in consequence, the dances performed in them. The majority of Pagan adherents travel constantly around the world, or are immigrants. Consequently, they commonly incorporate and mix foreign features to their practices. This is a clear example of *ethnoscapes*. *Technoscapes* allows for the dissemination of other cultures’ beliefs and their rituals. Also, in certain paths of Paganism the use of social media for the purposes of advertising their rituals, arranging for lifts, and finding religious groups is very common. In the past decades, there has been a rise in TV shows and movies (*mediascapes*) portraying witchcraft and Paganism, which has contributed in raising people’s interest in engaging with those practices. In this thesis I argue as an ethnochoreologist that globalisation and postmodernism have impacted significantly on dances in rituals as well as on Pagan rituals. More details are provided below in this chapter.

2.4.1. Celtic Inspired Rituals and Invention of Tradition

The notion of invention of tradition (Hobsbawm 1983) is also relevant to my discussion on dance in Pagan rituals due to the common fallacies that for centuries have been inculcated
regarding Celtic Paganism. Eric Hobsbawm (1983) boldly opens the introductory chapter of the book *The Invention of Tradition* affirming that traditions claimed to be old and linked to an immemorial past are actually the very opposite: commonly they are invented and recent – as exemplified in Meso-Paganism and Neo-Paganism. Both are influenced by Freemasonry, alchemy, Rosicrucianism, spiritualism, theosophy, etc. (Hume 2013) Many adherents, however, perceive these influences as original and traditional to indigenous beliefs. Hobsbawm also explains that the term “invented tradition”, although used in a broad sense, is not imprecise as it includes truly invented traditions – created and formally instituted, as well as those traditions that are more difficult to trace but which rapidly establish themselves. Invented traditions can be defined as a set of practices perceived as rules or rituals of a symbolic nature teaching values and behaviours by systematic repetition. In other words, inventing traditions is a formalisation and ritualisation process in which the past is referenced. According to Hobsbawm this is a disparity between the progress of the modern world and the attempt to maintain a structure related to the past. Hobsbawm also explains clearly the distinction between “custom” and “tradition”: customs are not fixed and can be modified to suit a society’s needs while tradition resists innovation. Occasionally new traditions use a basis from old traditions, and according to Hobsbawm examples of sources that can be cited are official rituals, symbolism and folklore. Furthermore, while old traditions formed strong binding social practices, new traditions tended to be vague regarding the values and obligations of the community while serving to promote patriotism, duty, loyalty, etc. (Hobsbawm 1983) Bell (1992) agrees with Hobsbawm that constructing tradition is a way of maximising a group’s identity while supporting their statement. This is clearly the case in several Neo-Pagan groups that claim to be perpetuating ancient traditions, when in fact they are inventing traditions in order to construct their own identity. On the other hand, various Neo-Pagan groups conscientiously mix practices from different cultures in order to adapt their customs to present day circumstances.

According to James R. Lewis (2009) “Celticity” is a recent phenomenon of the British Isles that combines romantic attachment to a perceived Celtic heritage with animist spirituality and mysticism. The lack of respected information on Celtic spirituality of the 18th century AD allowed writers of that time to romanticise about Celtic people’s customs, making the pre-Christian Celts attractive. As a result various “druid orders” were founded, albeit based on contemporaneous secret societies and later on esoteric societies. (Lewis 2009) Lewis further advocates that however massive the “Celtomania” was in the past, the present Celtic revival is

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21 See Glossary in Appendices.
22 The term *animism* derives from the Latin *anima*, which means ‘soul’. (Harvey 2009)
more expressive. Philip Bowman (2000) states that the present day Celtic revival phenomenon is more diverse and broad, including even commercialisation of Celtic-inspired objects. The most distinguished aspect, however, of the current Celtic revival from its predecessors is the number of followers engaged in religious practices believed to be Celtic. A very interesting fact is that a large amount of these adherents is not of Celtic descent – many are what Bowman termed as “cardiac Celts”: those who “feel in their hearts that they are Celts. For cardiac Celts, spiritual nationality is a matter of elective affinity.” (Bowman, cited in Lewis and Pizza eds. 2009, p.480)

As previously stated the Celtic peoples did not leave any written record, neither of their faith nor of their practices, and the unwritten poems of the druids are likewise lost (MacCulloch 1944). Lewis (2009) concurs with MacCulloch’s statement and complements that, excluding few tempting remarks from classical authors and remaining names of Gods and Goddesses, there is no direct or written knowledge of Celtic religious practices. Nevertheless, when Irish monks from between the 8th and 11th centuries AD transcribed old legends and tales that had been preserved as oral literature, they were able to provide several insights as to the nature of the early Celtic religion. Indeed, according to Lewis and Pizza: “The notion that traditional Celtic religion was similar to the beliefs and practices of indigenous tribal groups is, in fact, a key element in current attempts to reconstruct Celtic spirituality.” (Lewis and Pizza eds. 2009, p.486) In my experience as a Druidry practitioner, I agree with this statement. Lewis explains that the main reason for inventing a religious tradition is to confer “legitimacy to religious claims and practices”. (Lewis and Hammer in Lewis and Pizza eds. 2009, p.494) He further claims that Paganism legitimates itself to an idealised past by real or imagined links and it is very likely that modern Paganism is the most conscious religion regarding its own invented nature. I argue, however, that when studying people and their religion it is irrelevant whether their beliefs are “invented” or not, but rather how these people perceive their religion and act upon it. As Fiona Bowie states: “It is certainly possible to remain open to another culture and its beliefs, and perhaps be profoundly affected by them, without feeling it necessary to enter into discussion of truth or falsity.” (Bowie 2005, p. 9) This notion is supported by Ár nDraíocht Féin (A.D.F) 23. When asked whether Neo-Pagan druids are “real” druids, the A.D.F. replied:

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23 Ár nDraíocht Féin (A Druid Fellowship) describes itself as a “Pagan church based on ancient Indo-European traditions expressed through public worship, study, and fellowship.” Available https://www.adf.org/ [accessed 01 June 2016].
“Historically, there are no “real” druids left. The Paleopagan Druids were swept out centuries ago and only fragments of their traditions survived, despite the claims of some would-be con-artists. Spiritually, we believe we are following the paths once trod by our namesakes and that no other name is nobler and suited to our modern traditions – and that makes us real as far as we are concerned.”

(Maignant in Cosgrove et al eds. 2011, p. 273)

The final section of this chapter provides a background of the practices of present day Pagan rituals in Ireland within the concepts explored above.

2.4.2. Present Day Pagan Rituals in Ireland

Undoubtedly globalisation and post-modernism has influenced significantly western culture, as well as dance in rituals and the rituals themselves. Andrée Grau (2001) states that the majority of researchers when studying ritual and traditional dance forms most often interpret the term “modernisation” as synonym of “westernisation” and as a negative occurrence. Grau (2001) advocates that the Tiwi – her research ethnographic community in Australia – were not an isolated tribe. Foreigners brought new ideas for new dances and songs, thus changing – in a minor and easily to be incorporated manner – the content of some of the rituals. Conversely, as Grau sensibly states: “Although one may not particularly appreciate them, one could argue that they are culturally valid responses to a changing environment.” (Grau 2001, p.77). Her statement clearly supports Giddens argument (see above) regarding the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. According to Grau, undeniably “rituals not only celebrated the perpetuation of social values, they also spoke about cultural change.” (Grau 2001, p.79) Sometimes a mystic past is used to explain customs to foreigners, therefore creating prestige and mystery. Buckland (2001) found evidence of this account regarding the ‘Pagan origins’ theory of the Coco-Nut Dance in northwest England, as it was used to authenticate the practice and satisfy “the apparent need for an exotic theory to match the exotic appearance of the dancers and the dancing.” (Buckland 2001, p.440) Overall, according to Buckland both visions and desires of performers, local community and visitors in Bacup, are to maintain the singularity and mystery of the Coco-Nut Dancing. Supported by their myths, collective identities were established, serving as a foundation for resisting the changes of a

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24 See Glossary in Appendices.
25 Aboriginal peoples from the islands of Melville and Bathurst in the northern part of Australia.
26 The Britannia Coco-Nut Dancers is a group comprised by eight adult male dancers that perform on Easter Saturday through the streets of Bacup, a town in northwest England.
global world. This is accomplished by a perception of dancing and ritual that sustains an image of continuity, foolishly denying the inevitable influences – however slight or significant they may be – of modernisation and globalisation. These examples can be applied – along with the concept of the invention of tradition and Celtic inspired rituals approached above in this Chapter – to Neo-Pagan practices in Ireland.

The Republic of Ireland is considered to be one of the most globalised western countries. (Ernst and Young 2010) The recent increase in migration, travel, and media exposure has cleared the path for broadening the Irish religious landscape and accepting religions other than Roman Catholicism, (Cosgrove 2011) including Paganism. Magliocco (2009) advocates that, historically, magical and spiritual practices are among the most easily transferable forms of folklore. Moreover, both have crossed cultural boundaries “as easily as music and foodways.” (Magliocco in Lewis and Pizza Eds. 2009, p.238) This fact is indeed observed in the variety of aspects from different religions incorporated into Celtic Paganism in Ireland; a fact examined further in this thesis. As Magliocco further explains: “In regions where modern pagans have direct contact with member of non-European cultures, a certain amount of transculturation is inevitably taking place.” (Magliocco in Lewis and Pizza Eds. 2009, p.238) Appadurai’s ethnoscapes is, like the Tiwi example cited above, influencing Pagan rituals in Ireland. Moreover, as technoscapes allowed for improvement of some aspects of Tiwi ritual life, technoscapes likewise contribute to the development of Paganism in Ireland. Helen Berger (2009) advocates that one reason for the growing of Paganism worldwide since the 1990s is due to the Internet and the somewhat positive portrayal of Witches in the media. Aloi (2009) agrees that the proliferation of the Internet contributes to the increasing number of people involved in Paganism worldwide. However, the media (mediascapes) – especially in the shape of TV shows and movies – has influenced Pagan beliefs and practices even before the advent of the internet. (Aloi 2009) In fact an impressive number of Pagan adherents use the Internet not only to study and conduct research on their practices but also as a very efficient means to locate groups and festivals they might join. Facebook, for instance, is a very used social network for this purpose.

According to Berger (2009), census data gives an estimate as to the extent of Paganism worldwide. Aidan Kelly estimated in 1992 that there were 300.000 Neo-Pagans in the United States of America (Berger 2009). James R. Lewis reported in 2007 an increasing number of Pagans since the 1990s to 2001 in Canada (from 5.530 to 21.085), in Australia (from 9.498 to 23.460), and in New Zealand (from 318 to 5.862). In the United Kingdom the number was 42.336 in 2001 – the question of religious affiliation was not included in the census before that
date. Following Mika T. Lassander (2014), there is no data available from the Irish census as to the number of Pagans in Ireland. However, the 2006 census recorded 1,106 pantheists, which may or not be regarded as Pagan. (Lassander 2014) The 2011 census indicates that more than 84 per cent of people in the Republic of Ireland, 3.86 million, are Roman Catholics. Catholics were followed by those who declared themselves as having no religion, numbered 269,800. Members of the Church of Ireland numbered 129,039, while Presbyterians numbered 24,600 and Methodists 6,842; 72,914 people did not state their religion. Further numbers were: Muslims 49,200; Other Christians 41,299; Apostolic or Pentecostals 14,000; Other 81,000.

There is no “Pagan” box to be ticked in the Irish census’ religion question. As a result, many Pagan adherents – as well as people who follow an earth-based spirituality or magical practice, but who do not identify themselves with any specific tradition – might have ticked “No Religion” in the 2006 and 2011 census. (Pagan Life Rites) In an attempt to avoid the same situation in the last census, held on 24th of April 2016, many Pagan groups joined a campaign in social networks and newsletters. Adherents were encouraged to tick the “Other” box and write “Pagan” as a means to provide a more accurate measure of how many Pagan practitioners really are in Ireland today. Moreover, it would also avoid the Central Statistics Office from breaking the “Other” category into very small numbers with different Pagan practices such as Druid, Pantheist, Wiccan, etc. separately. This division makes more difficult

![Figure 2.3: Picture used by several Pagan groups in the Census 2016 campaign.](image)

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27 See Glossary in Appendices.
28 Pagan Life Rites e-zine (March 2016).
to form a full image of the present day Pagan practices in Ireland. The picture above (Figure 2.3) was used in the campaign, along with the caption: “Have you ticked your box? For best results simply state ‘PAGAN.'”\(^{29}\) The census 2016 final results will be released in April 2017 by the Central Statistics Office\(^{30}\).

**Summary**

According to Bozena Gierek (2011) the Celtic spirituality movement emerged in the 20\(^{th}\) century as a consequence of the emptiness provoked by a modern and postmodern world and their beliefs. Celtic spirituality is a concept wider than Neo-Paganism and may include other religions. However, Neo-Paganism is strongly linked to Celtic spirituality and its values. As Gierek (2011) further advocates, a reason for the popularity of Celtic spirituality is its universality: it represents values accepted my many, regardless of race and location, and is compatible with diverse philosophies. Conversely, Celtic spirituality can be linked to a sentimental attachment to old traditions – either real, imagined, or invented. (Hobsbawm 1983; Bell 1992; Lewis 2009; Gierek 2011) Joining this resurgence of Celtic spirituality are not only descendants from Celtic peoples; “Cardiac Celts” form a large number of the adherents of this movement. I would argue that this is clearly one of the consequences of globalisation and postmodernism. *Ethnoscapes, technoscapes* and *mediascapes* allow the interconnectedness and exchange of information between peoples of distinct cultures. What is more, despite the lack of first-hand records of Pagan Celtic religious practices, there is evidence that dance and body movements were indeed executed in ancient Celtic rituals, although their characteristics are unknown. (Danaher 1972; Ó Duinn 2000)

The performance of expressive acts of worship has been part of religious rituals for millennia, as through physical movements in ritual practices can construct environments designated to specific goals, especially to achieve ecstatic state, perceived by many cultures as the most reliable state to communicate with the spiritual world. It has become reasonably clear from archaeological and folklore accounts that dance has been used as one of the main physical movements in Pagan rituals to achieve this goal. (Backman 1952; McNeill 1995; Garfinkel 2003; Barber 2013) Dance is commonly performed in rites where ritualisation, magic and celebration are present: seasonal, agricultural, fertility, divinatory, funerary, healing, and festivals. (Grimes 1995; Barber 2013) In various Pagan festivals adherents perform dances as a

\(^{29}\) Pagan Life Rites. Available: [https://www.facebook.com/PaganLifeRites/photos](https://www.facebook.com/PaganLifeRites/photos) [accessed 02 Jun 2016].

\(^{30}\) [http://census.ie](http://census.ie).
means of expression, healing, learning, and exploration. (Winslade 2009) The old Celtic festival of Bealtaine, also known today as May Day and which is the focus of this thesis, is a very celebratory ritual in which dancing is performed (Danaher 1972; Ó Duinn 2000; Barber 2013)

This chapter provided a background on the concepts of ritual, dance in rituals, globalisation and postmodernism, practices of present day Paganism in Ireland, and Celtic celebrations – including the Bealtaine festival. A Bealtaine festival is ethnographically described in the next chapter.
3. Chapter 3: Experiencing Ritual through Body Movements

“Witches, pagans, curious and respectful friends and family, those new to our community and mostly frolickers and mischief makers needed for the Tipperary pagans Beltane Rite! Enjoy Pole dancing as in Ye Olden Days, Jump the Beltane Fire, Beat the ground, dance and make merry with bells on! Come frolic with us for a good old-fashioned Beltane Rite!” Excerpt from the invitation on the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine festival event page 2016. Available: https://www.facebook.com/events/466378123558976/ [accessed: 02 Jun 2016].

This chapter presents the ethnographic data of the fieldwork in a Bealtaine celebration performed by the Tipperary Pagans group. It describes the ritual, the dance and body movements performed in that ritual – Maypole Dancing, Jumping the Bonfire, and the Puck Hunt – and the people studied. Explanation and analysis on the meanings and symbolisms of the Bealtaine ritual’s features are provided in the next chapter.

3.1. The Tipperary Pagans Group

Established in 2013 by Rachel Mcgirr who wanted to connect with like-minded people, the Tipperary Pagans group is run today by Rachel herself, Isabelle Gaborit, Diane Gallagher\textsuperscript{31} and Virginia Maughan. According to Gaborit\textsuperscript{32} the Tipperary Pagans is neither a Wiccan group nor a Druidry group, but rather a Neo-Pagan group that provides different ways for Pagans to express their beliefs. The group was originally created as a moot for people with same minds to meet. After a while, however, the organisers assumed that constantly meeting at the same place would become somewhat tedious. Consequently, and as the attendees needed practical experience, days out started to be arranged, as well as barbecues, open rituals, and workshops. Activities where people with similar ideas could connect with each other began to take place frequently and in different locations. Currently an average of eight people attend the events sporadically, albeit approximately five people form the “core group”. The “core” people always attend the events and rituals for the reason that, according to Gaborit, they probably feel the need to be there and connect with the energies on a more regular basis. Eight people participated in this Bealtaine celebration including myself – six female and two male participants. One participant attended to accompany his partner. Another participant was not a

\textsuperscript{31} This is a pseudonym, as per the interviewee’s wish to remain anonymous in this research.

\textsuperscript{32} In recorded interview with the author. (27\textsuperscript{th} May 2016)
member of the group, however she was invited by one of the members to attend and be acquainted with the group. The participants who agreed to be interviewed and/or answer some of my questions are presented below.

Diane Gallagher is a 30 year old Irish woman who works in an accountancy firm. She has been interested in Paganism since she was about 11 years old. Nevertheless, she has been studying Paganism more in depth for 3 years. Gallagher describes her involvement with Paganism as being “always drawn to it; like a pull towards something.”33 Moreover, she considers her approach in Paganism a mixture, albeit mainly Wiccan. Gallagher joined the Tipperary Pagans group in October 2015 after a Facebook search “for like-minded people”. (Gallagher 2016)

Deirdre Hayes34 is a 35 year old midwifery student. She is originally from Dublin but had lived in the United States and Belgium. Hayes has been practising Paganism for approximately 20 years, mostly as a solitary practitioner. She is a bard with the Order of Bard, Ovates and Druids35 and is also connected with Buddhism. Hayes joined the Tipperary Pagans group shortly after its establishment in 2013. Her main reason for joining the Tipperary Pagans group is the same as several other participants: to meet other Pagans.36

Marie Therese O’Brien, 52 years old, is an Irish woman primarily trained as an IT analyst. However, she has always been interested in health and people. Therefore, she took up training in psychoanalysis and counselling. She was introduced to Isabelle Gaborit by her 32 years old daughter Siobhan and has been involved with the Tipperary Pagans group since November 2015. O’Brien is very interested in connecting with nature, in studying her Irish ancestors and Irish history. She does not, however, consider herself a Pagan. She is interested in various religions, and what they have to offer that might be beneficial to her: “I see they are all connected. I describe myself as everything and nothing, so to speak.”(O’Brien 2016)37

33 In email correspondence with the author. (2016)
34 This is a pseudonym, as per the interviewee’s wish to remain anonymous in this research.
35 The Order of Bard, Ovates and Druids (OBOD) is a worldwide group whose aim is to develop and teach Druidry practices. For further information visit http://www.druidry.org.
36 In chat correspondence with the author. (2016)
37 In recorded interview with the author. (7th July 2016)
Isabelle Gaborit is a French woman who has been living in Ireland since 1993, when she moved to Galway as a student and in Ireland discovered her home, the way she never did in France. She is a professional working artist as an encaustic painter. She has a life-long passion for Paganism, Magic and Witchcraft, being ordained as a third degree Wiccan High Priestess, and has been practising sorcery since she was 13 years old. Gaborit has attended rituals in France, Ireland, and England. She was the presider of the Bealtaine ritual that took place at Saint Berrihert's Kyle, Co. Tipperary, on the 24th April 2016 (see Figure 3.1 below).

![Figure 3.1: Location of Saint Berrihert's Kyle, Co. Tipperary, Ireland](image)

### 3.2. Body Movements at a Bealtaine Ritual

It was 1pm on the 24th of April 2016 when I met Isabelle Gaborit in front of the Hunt Museum in Limerick city, as it was agreed she would give me a lift to the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine celebration. Along with her was her partner Paul Maloney, who is also a member of the group, and her nine-year-old daughter. As Isabelle Gaborit’s daughter is a minor and this research concerns only people over 18 years old, she was not interviewed and neither is she taken into account in this research. The other attendees arrived...
shortly afterwards – the gathering was scheduled for 2pm and the beginning of the celebration was scheduled for 2:30pm. They were all very excited about meeting each other again as well as for the ritual. The attendees were likewise welcoming towards my presence at the celebration, and interested in my studies.

While Gaborit and Maloney were setting up the altar and other apparatus for the ritual, the attendees enjoyed the time taking photographs of the landscape, of the kyle, and of the holy well nearby.

The Saint Berrihert’s Kyle is a small groove of oak and holly trees located in the town of Ardane, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. According to Gaborit this place was chosen because it is a place of worship where “magic runs free…You have the oak grove, which was obviously one of the reasons I think a church was placed there…Maybe 2000 years ago.” (Gaborit 2006) Gaborit claims the oak grove is important as it represents one of the aspects of the oak God. Moreover, she relates the relevance of the site to the Bealtaine ritual for its closeness to the well, as Bealtaine, according to her, is about water as well as fire.

One of the key features of the Bealtaine festival is the Maypole (see Plate 3.3). In this ritual, the setting up of the pole was gender divided: the men brought the pole and put it in the socket, making sure it was secure; the women put the garland on the pole as well as untied the pole’s strands. There were ten satin strands measuring nearly 4 metres long – five strands were red and the other five strands were white; the pole itself was approximately 2,10 metres high and made from birch tree.
The ritual started with all celebrants standing in a circle and holding hands – those who wished put on masks either brought by them or provided by Gaborit. According to Gaborit, in the context of the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual the mask did not have the function to hide the celebrant’s identity, but rather it had the purpose for the celebrant to incorporate the spirits or deities, or to transform themselves into either human or animal spirits – the latter for those celebrants wearing animal masks. As a result, the mask functions as a bridge between the mundane world and the realm of the Gods. She also stated that the mask is not only a form of possession but also a means to engage with one’s ancestral stream. With the exception of the masks, no other accessories or special attire of any kind were worn – presider and celebrants were wearing their regular clothes. Gaborit closed the circle and called the powers of the four directions – quarter’s powers of the east, south, west, and north: “We welcome you, come and protect this place and guide us in our working, hail and welcome!” Casting the circle is standard in most Pagan rituals, and its performance varies according to whom performs it. The circle’s main function is to create a sacred space for the ritual to be enacted and into which the deities will be called. Four other celebrants, previously specified, called for each direction and proclaimed this in their own words.

Plate 3.2: Saint Berrihert’s Kyle Groove, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. Photograph by the Author.

Plate 3.3: The Tipperary Pagans’ Maypole. Photograph by the Author
for this part of the ritual. The calling of the centre as well as the purpose of the Bealtaine festival was made by Gaborit. A blessing and placing of a crown of flowers on the altar was performed by Gallagher. According to Gaborit its meaning and function is twofold: as an offering of something beautiful to the spirits of the place – according to my experience, a Pagan custom in rituals – and to represent the crowning of the May Queen. The latter is the representation of the Goddess, which can be a specific deity for each group or celebrant. As this ritual was an open one\textsuperscript{39} and as previously stated the Tipperary Pagans group is inclusive in terms of beliefs, no particular deity was attributed, and the deity’s representation was generalised.

Following this opening, bonfires were lit symbolising the purifying and fertility’s energy of this season.

**3.2.1 Jumping the Bonfire**

After the opening the women started walking around the fire – while the two men were kindling it – in clockwise direction\textsuperscript{40}, simultaneously drumming or making noise with tambourines, maracas or clapping, and singing the fire jumping chant: “Dark to light, night to day, through the fires lies the way.” Gaborit claims learning the chant – and the other chant described below – possibly from other people who taught her or from books. According to her,

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Tipperary Pagans Group performing Jumping the Bonfire on a Bealtaine Celebration. Photograph by the Author.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{39} An open ritual means that individuals who are not member of the host group can attend, as well as people from other religions.

\textsuperscript{40} For the Celts, clockwise direction (or sun-wise direction) was related to good fortune, blessings and “good” magic. (Phelan 2015)
she has various sources of learning and cannot pinpoint exactly where specific knowledge was acquired. This chant is called Fire Passing Chant and it is an excerpt of a text – apparently a Bealtaine ritual liturgy – called Firestar Beltaine and dates from 1986\textsuperscript{41}. The author of this text, however, could not be ascertained.

After approximately one minute and a half the fire was strong enough and the men joined the women in the circle. The speed was similar to a regular walk, as well as the posture. Nearly thirty seconds after the men joined the circle Gaborit asked who would be the first to jump the bonfire. Paul Maloney, then, did not jump as much as took a long step over the fire, resuming the circle walking afterwards. The two following participants performed a quick run and leapt over the bonfire – the latter stopped clapping during the leap and resumed it when she landed. One attendee executed a \textit{sissonne}\textsuperscript{42}: she stepped out of the circle, performed a quick run and performed the \textit{sissonne} over the fire. The other participants leapt over the fire without the need of impulse by means of running; they performed the leap straight from walking. One participant after the other jumped, leaped or performed a \textit{sissonne} over the fire while the others remained in circle and moved the circle in a clockwise direction. It was very interesting to notice that nobody executed an actual jump\textsuperscript{43}. The mood was cheerful and people cheered every time someone jumped over the fire. Some celebrants jumped more than once. It was clearly noticeable that the mood was improved after the fire jumping; people were singing and playing their instruments or clapping more energetically.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Plate3-5.png}
\caption{Tipperary Pagans Group performing Jumping the Bonfire on a Bealtaine Celebration. Photograph by the Author.}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{41} See full text in Appendix Three.
\textsuperscript{42} See Glossary in the Appendices section.
\textsuperscript{43} See Glossary in the Appendices section.
\end{flushright}
The use of a bonfire is an old Irish tradition in Bealtaine celebration. (Frazer 1959; Whelan 2010) Farmers used to walk their cattle through two bonfires in order to cleanse and grant protection for them. Frazer (1959) advocates that this practice – along with fire jumping – is virtually universal in Europe. Moreover, he states that fire is believed to promote the growth of crops and welfare of humans and animals. These practices are still present in many contemporary rituals, albeit with humans walking between the bonfires instead of livestock. According to Gaborit Jumping the Bonfire functions as cleansing as well as protection. Moreover, fire jumping helps inducing trance state, which was the aim of the practice in this ritual. The drumming and noise making during Jumping the Bonfire, according to Gaborit, had likewise the function of achieving a trance state by means of facilitating physical detachment. She relates this practice to a shamanic and Dionysian\(^{44}\) wild, chaotic, and frenzied state. Diane Gallagher reported performing Jumping the Bonfire fun. Deirdre Hayes, however, stated feeling awkward. Marie Therese O’Brien perceived Jumping the Bonfire as an “ancient” activity, and as such felt connected to the earth as well as to her ancestors. I also participated in the ritual and as far as I was concerned, while leaping over the bonfire I tried to picture being cleansed by the purifying properties of fire. In other rituals I attended walking through two bonfires was performed with the same aim and it felt very pleasant to me. I perceive this practice as a means to connect to one of the most powerful elements of nature (fire) and, like O’Brien, I also felt connected to the earth and to ancestors\(^{45}\).

When Jumping the Bonfire was finished, which lasted for approximately four minutes, all celebrants started circling the Maypole – in a clockwise direction – with quicker steps, similar to a skip, while playing their instruments or clapping and chanting:

“Oak, and Ash, and Thorn good sirs, all of a Beltane’s morn! Surely we sing of no little thing in Oak, and Ash, and Thorn.”

This particular chant is an excerpt from \textit{A Tree Song} by Rudyard Kipling, which is in fact a midsummer celebration and of English tradition. Gaborit, however, states that this chant fits Bealtaine as well.\(^{46}\)

Nearly thirty seconds later Isabelle Gaborit hits her drum on a quicker beat and shouts:

“May the hunt begin!”

\(^{44}\) Dionysus is the Greek God of wine and ritualised ecstasy.

\(^{45}\) According to my experience in Druidry, ancestors can be those of the place, of spirit or by blood.

\(^{46}\) Gaborit changed “All of a Midsummer morn!” as in the original lyrics for “All of a Beltane’s morn!” See the full original lyrics in Appendix Two.
3.2.2. The Puck Hunt

Paul Maloney, embodying the Puck, had to catch the celebrants and tie them to the Maypole strands. Meanwhile, all other celebrants ran around still singing. The cheerful mood remained and people laughed – somewhat out of breath – while they tried to escape from the Puck. One celebrant did not run at all, he simply remained walking and was the second person to be caught by the Puck. The majority of the celebrants continued running and jumping about even though the Puck was nowhere near them. It was interesting to notice that two celebrants flapped their arms at their sides while running; one celebrant did the opposite: she kept her elbows bent and close to her body. The latter was, however, caught by the Puck first. The people who were caught and tied to the Maypole stood still, albeit laughing and cheering. When I was the last one left to be caught Gaborit shouted “make him run Ana!” and the others laughed and cheered.

According to Gaborit the Puck Hunt is an English tradition and represents a trickster God. The idea of making people run is to utilise the body as a means to achieve a trancelike state by increasing the bloodstream. Hayes and Gallagher reported experiencing the same feeling as in Jumping the Bonfire. While the former felt awkward, the latter had fun: “Great fun. Like a lease of energy burst through you.” (Gallagher 2016) According to O’Brien’s report she enjoyed performing the Puck Hunt, as it was another means to connect with nature and the earth: “That’s what the animals would be doing this time of year…It is like we are enacting that too. We are one with nature,” (O’Brien 2016) I had never performed the Puck Hunt before and found it to be very amusing, although it did not make me achieve a trancelike state. The act of
running, particularly running away in a playful context, indeed provided a very pleasant feeling in the body that was reflected in the mood; I felt mundane anxiety disappearing.

The Puck Hunt lasted for approximately five minutes. When all celebrants were attached to the Maypole, it was time for the Maypole Dancing to begin.

3.2.3. The Maypole Dancing

The same chant sung during the Puck Hunt was likewise chanted throughout the Maypole Dancing (Plates 3.8 and 3.9) – the excerpt from *A Tree Song* by Rudyard Kipling. This dance consisted of the celebrants circling the Maypole in order to “to raise power”. Each celebrant secured a strand from the pole in their hands – men held red strands and women held white strands. The directions of the circling were likewise gender divided: men moved in a clockwise direction and women in an anticlockwise direction – therefore weaving both colours of strands. The body movements varied from regular walking – akin to the same performed around the fire before Jumping the Bonfire – to skipping, and even small hops; there were no rules and some celebrants changed their steps during the performance while others continued executing the same type of steps. While the majority of the celebrants used both hands to secure the strand, two celebrants used only one hand and as a consequence the use of the arm was more accentuated as compared to the celebrants that utilised both arms.
There was no specific order as to which person would bend for the other to cross when two people faced each other – it was decided on the spot with smiles and laughter. However, the taller person usually would lift the strand for the shorter person to bend and pass under it; however that was by no means a rule. By the end of the dance the difficulty level was increased, as most of the strand was weaved and there was little room to move the bodies under the shortly loose strands. Consequently, deeper back and knee bending movements were necessary. The speed of the circling, however, remained constant – except at the very end of the performance when moving around the pole was no longer possible, and therefore the celebrants continued weaving the strands in place. Upon completing the weaving, a moment of silence occurred while all participants were still touching the Maypole and very close to each other. As the Maypole is perceived as the *axis mundi*\(^{47}\), dancing around it creates a connection with other realms which results in a rise of power and energy. When the climax is reached the celebrant feels fully connected to the divine essence, and according to Gaborit the only way to show this communion is through silence.

The Maypole Dancing is one of the most popular traditions of the Bealtaine Festival. According to Gaborit, it is paramount to know how to read between the lines in order to comprehend the Maypole Dancing. As an obvious phallic symbol, placed within the omphalos, the pole becomes a power representation of fecundity and immortality. The weaving of the Maypole as well as the dance around it assists in connecting with the divine and with the higher

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\(^{47}\) *Axis mundi* is a Latin expression for “centre of the world” or “pillar of the world”. It represents the connection among other spiritual dimensions.
self: "This is why we do it you know. It is not because we look good, not because we sound fabulous...That’s ego. The idea is to get out of that...To release yourself." (Gaborit 2016)

The white and red strands of the Maypole used in the Tipperary Pagans ritual represent the alchemy of the White Queen (moon/mercury) and the Red King (sun/sulphur) – the reason for the Maypole Dancing to be performed in opposite directions by males and females is to balance these energies. Moreover, the act of women circling the pole in an anti-clockwise (moon-wise) direction while men circle in a clockwise (sun-wise) direction symbolises the unselfish act of union, active and receiving powers of male and female, growth and renewal, and functioning with consciousness and unconsciousness. As Gaborit explained, the pole itself is a symbol of fertility, and dancing around it is not only a celebration of life but also a means of empowering the fertility through homeopathic magic. Gaborit further states that the Maypole Dancing is a cosmic dance, and sometimes body movements are more important in the ritual than words: "I think the way people position themselves, the way they move...They are ritual." (Gaborit 2016)

In other words, according to Gaborit, she perceives dancing or body movements not as a part of ritual or liturgy, but as the ritual itself. According to Gaborit, cosmic dance is literally the movement of the stars, planets and moon. She did not, however, want to explain it in depth to me: “I’m not going to tell you everything. I’m going to ask you to go out at night when the sky is clear to look at the stars. They always move. They turn... [Cosmic dance is] literal and poetic, but both of them are connected...This is what we recreate on the dance.” (Gaborit 2016)

This concept of cosmic dance and people connecting with the universe by re-enacting the
perceived dance is visibly another way for Pagans to express their relation to nature and their belief of the interconnectedness of all living things.\textsuperscript{48}

Gaborit does not consider herself a dancer, even though she frequently incorporates dances and body movements in her festivals. According to her, these dances can be ecstatic or processional dances, and include different patterns such as spirals, circles, and figures of eight. Those patterns are used as they refer directly to the cosmic dance\textsuperscript{49}. Hence, they are perceived as re-enactments of the movements of the cosmos and a means to deepen the celebrant’s connection with the Universe. Gaborit further states that the patterns mentioned above are also present in the English morris dancing. According to her, several morris dances repeat spirals, circles, and figures of eight. According to John Cutting (2005) folklorists suggest that the term morris (or morisco) was brought into England and mixed to an existing dance custom – probably dances in pre-Christian rituals. In fact, Rodney Gallop (1934) suggests that the term Moorish might have been used to mean Pagan. Regarding this statement, Cutting states: “If this was so, then a pre-Christian dance was a Moorish dance by definition and all that is left for us to imagine is the transfer of the word, together with its special meaning, from Portugal to England.” (Cutting 2005, p.54) Sharp and Macilwaine (1974) consider morris dancing reminiscent of earlier religious ceremonies. Considering the relationship between morris dances and Pagan rituals (see Chapter Two), it can be speculated that performing those patterns (spirals, circles, and figures of eight) might bring celebrants closer to a Pagan past perceived by themselves. The body movements and dances are not the same in every one of the rituals that Gaborit presides. According to her the dances differ according to the time of the year and the flow of energies and tides. Conferring with the wheel of the year (see Chapter Two), there are opposite festivals, for instance the Bealtaine and Samhain festivals. Picturing a spiral, while celebrating the Bealtaine festivals the movements turn outwards (ascending) – celebrating the beginning of the summer and light half of the year – in the Samhain festival the spiral turns inwards (descending) – for this one is a more introspective festival, marking the beginning of winter, celebrating the dead and the dark half of the year. “It is all about balance...The same happens with the solstices and equinoxes.” (Gaborit 2016) Hence, the dances are performed accordingly. Gaborit reports that she acquired knowledge of the body movements and dances incorporated in her rituals via her initiator\textsuperscript{50}, through personal gnosis gained via rituals and

\textsuperscript{48} See Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{49} The term “cosmic dance” has been likewise used by scientists as a cosmological metaphor to describe the harmonious nature of the universe. For more information see Del Re, G. (2000) The Cosmic Dance: Science Discovers the Mysterious Harmony of the Universe. Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press.

\textsuperscript{50} Initiators introduce and guide adherents to a spiritual path.
meditations, as well as by connecting with guiding spirits. Those experiences are very private and Gaborit did not wish to share any further details.

As far as Gaborit is concerned not all celebrants were aware of the functions and/or meanings of the body movements in the Bealtaine ritual. However, she believes the body movements might have been a means for celebrants to gain spiritual knowledge and connect to what they needed to connect at the time. In order to accomplish that through dance and body movements, according to her, it is not necessary for celebrants to know their meanings and functions. Moreover, she does believe that overall the purposes of the dance and body movements were achieved in the Bealtaine ritual. Nevertheless, Gaborit is aware of the implications of an open ritual, for instance the amount of energy that is possible to share with unfamiliar people: “Yes, it [purpose of the ritual] was achieved for what was needed at the time and the day, which was enjoyment and spending the time together, and the sense of community… However, it was more exoteric than esoteric.” (Gaborit 2016) 

According to my observations and reports from celebrants, I concur. Indeed not all celebrants were aware of the “actual” functions and/or meanings of the body movements in the Bealtaine ritual. Nevertheless, each celebrant attributed his/her own meaning to the dance and the body movements, and as a result the performance was effective. Gallagher enjoyed the dancing. According to her “they [body movements] add a bit of you. Your energy, your vibrations…By giving our energy to the ritual you are adding your vibrations, a piece of you…Energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only be changed from one form to another – First Law of Thermodynamics.” (Gallagher 2016) Hayes, on the other hand, did not: “For me personally I found it detracting. I hate dancing… I’m not a fan of ritual in general, it’s what I tried to escape from with Catholicism and add the dancing and silliness and it’s just not me. I love music, but pomp and circumstance is not my thing at all.” (Hayes 2016) For O’Brien performing the Maypole Dance was lovely: “This was the old kind of ritual that the tribes would do and it just feels like I’m one with the people that have gone before me. I am connecting with the old, old ways.” (O’Brien 2016) I myself had performed Maypole Dancing in other Bealtaine rituals and always found it to be fun. I believe that this Maypole Dancing in particular, besides being very amusing, created a sense of community. This is so because it provided an opportunity for all celebrants to interact very close and cooperatively with each other. Unquestionably the sense of community and enjoyment was achieved. Hayes, who did not enjoy the dancing and body

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51 The level of intimacy and familiarity among participants determines what practices can be done and how strong psychic and psychological barriers stand. For more information regarding the implications of familiarity and group identity in Neo-Pagan rituals see Bonewits 2007, pp. 47-56.
movements, concluded about the Bealtaine ritual: “This particular one [Bealtaine ritual] was a nice way to meet lovely new people and spend the afternoon.” (Hayes 2016)

After the Maypole Dancing, which lasted for nearly seven minutes, cake and ale were divided among the celebrants. Following that, Gaborit and Maloney performed the circle opening and then the festival continued, with picnic and merriment in order to celebrate the coming of the summer.

Summary

In this particular Bealtaine ritual, performed by the Tipperary Pagans group, three body movements were executed: Jumping the Bonfire, Maypole Dancing, and the Puck Hunt. Both Jumping the Bonfire and Maypole Dancing are traditional Irish Bealtaine practices. (Danaher 1972; Ó Duinn 2000; Whelan 2010; Barber 2013) According to Gaborit, the Puck Hunt, on the other hand, is an English custom not particularly related to Bealtaine. The main objective of Jumping the Bonfire and the Puck Hunt was to help celebrants to achieve a trancelike state and to facilitate physical detachment. The aims of the Maypole Dancing were: to assist in connecting with the divine, to represent of fecundity, to celebrate life, and to empower fertility through homeopathic magic. (Gaborit 2016)

According to my observations and reports from celebrants, apparently no trancelike state was achieved in the ritual. However, performing Jumping the Bonfire, the Puck Hunt, and the Maypole Dancing indeed improved participant’s mood and energy by physical detachment. Moreover, the celebrants seemed to have succeeded in feeling connected with divine as well as with ancestors. However, those connections are very personal and private to be shared. According to Gallagher “they [body movements] add a bit of you. Your energy, your vibrations…By giving our energy to the ritual you are adding your vibrations, a piece of you.” (Gallagher 2016) In contrast, Hayes stated that the body movements were detracting: “I’m not a fan of ritual in general, it’s what I tried to escape from with Catholicism and add the dancing and silliness and it's just not me.” (Hayes 2016) For O’Brien those body movements were a means to connect with her ancestors: “…it just feels like I’m one with the people that have gone before me. I am connecting with the old, old ways.” (O’Brien 2016)

When performing Jumping the Bonfire the body movements were diverse. Celebrants executed *sissonnes* or leaps over the fire; one did not jump as much as took a long step over the fire. Some individuals needed to perform a quick run as in an impulse; other celebrants leapt over the fire without the need of an impulse by means of running. What was very interestingly
was that nobody executed an actual jump. The mood notably improved after Jumping the Bonfire, even if no trance state was indeed achieved, and remained during the Puck Hunt. Celebrants were singing and playing their instruments or clapping more energetically. The body movements while performing the Puck Hunt were, again, very diverse. Some participants remained walking, however the majority started running and jumping about – at times even when the Puck was nowhere near them. Two participants flapped their arms at their sides while running and one celebrant kept elbows bent and close to her body. Again, even if no clear trance state was indeed achieved, the overall mood was uplifting.

According to Gaborit Maypole Dancing is a cosmic dance, and sometimes body movements are more important in the ritual than words: "I think the way people position themselves, the way they move...They are ritual." (Gaborit 2016) The patterns commonly used in Maypole Dancing, although not all of them appeared in this particular performance, refer directly to the cosmic dance. Hence, they are perceived as re-enactments of the movements of the cosmos and as a means to deepen the celebrant’s connection with the Universe. Those patterns usually are spirals, circles, and figures of eight. In this performance only circle was present, although interweaved by men and women circling in a clockwise and in an anti-clockwise direction. Gaborit argues that in order for celebrants to gain spiritual knowledge and connect to what they needed to connect at the time of the ritual through dance and body movements, it is not necessary for celebrants to know their meanings and functions. According to my observations and reports from celebrants, I concur. The purposes of the dance and body movements were achieved in the Bealtaine ritual. Nevertheless, Gaborit is aware of the implications of an open ritual, for instance the amount of energy that is possible to share with unfamiliar people: “Yes, it [purpose of the ritual] was achieved for what was needed at the time and the day, which was enjoyment and spending the time together, and the sense of community.” (Gaborit 2016)

In the next chapter I will analyse the ethnographic data while applying the theoretical framework from Chapter Two. I will also discuss my findings.
4. Chapter 4: Reading between the Lines

“By dismantling ritual as a theoretical construct, it is possible to uncover some of the more hidden but decisive practices by which a body of theoretical knowledge is generated and theoretical activity is differentiated from other forms of social activity.” Bell 1992, p.5.

This Chapter examines the role of body movements and Maypole Dancing within a Bealtaine celebration by exploring its ritual’s features and background. This is accomplished by one, analysing the ethnographic data from my fieldwork at the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine festival; and two, by applying the theoretical framework reviewed in Chapter Two. I begin by analysing the broader aspects (Analysis of the Bealtaine Ritual Background) in the first section of this chapter. In the second section of this chapter (Analysis of the Bealtaine Ritual Features), I analyse more in depth features that were present in the Analysis of the Bealtaine Ritual Background section focusing on Maypole Dancing and other body movements performed at the ritual.

4.1. Analysis of the Bealtaine Ritual Background

4.1.1. Concepts Unravelled

As previously explained\textsuperscript{52} the old Celtic festival of Bealtaine is a very important calendrical rite in the wheel of the year. Bealtaine is a celebratory ritual connected with fertility and the beginning of the light period. Of Grimes’ (1995) six modes of ritual sensibility, three modes did appear during this Bealtaine ritual: magic, celebration, and ritualisation. Ritualisation, magic and celebration are usually present at calendrical rites (Turner 1969), normally comprised of seasonal, agricultural, fertility, and festival rites. Ritualisation, when meaning or performance are more important than functionality (Grimes 1995), is evident in the Tipperary Pagans ritual as most of the performances are more symbolical than functional. For instance, the objectives of casting the circle, calling the powers of the four directions, blessing and placing a crown of flowers on the altar are symbolisms directed to deities, and as such it is not possible to ascertain whether they fulfil their perceived purposes.\textsuperscript{53} According to my extensive experience in participating in Pagan rituals, many Pagan

\textsuperscript{52} See Chapter Two.
\textsuperscript{53} See Chapter Three.
adherents do not perform these practices, and in their perception the results are identical. I argue that such practices are most likely performed to enrich liturgy in public rituals. Magic, a mode of ritual that overlaps with ritualisation, is understood as any element of ritual which functions as a means to an end. (Grimes 1995) Fertility rites, in particular, can be categorised as magic. As previously stated, Bealtaine is mainly a fertility festival, explicitly symbolised by the Maypole and in some cases the Maypole Dancing. More details on the Maypole and the Maypole Dancing will be provided in the next section. Celebration is a ludic sensibility expressed by dancing, singing, and festivals. Celebration is connected to the arts as its rites derive from expressive culture. (Grimes 1995) In the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine festival, celebration was evident in the body movements performed, which were not only ludic but also included dancing. Celebration was also apparent in the picnic that happened after the ritual. What is more, the very nature of the Bealtaine festival is to be a celebration. (Danaher 1972; Ó Duinn 2000; Whelan 2010)

As confirmed in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual, rituals can be considered similar to artistic productions and expressive acts of worship towards deities is indeed part of religious rituals. (Garfinkel 2003; Magliocco 2009) This was so in this ritual as a way to provide the celebrants with religious ecstasy through elements such as masks, chants, dance and other body movements. Consequently, these elements of ritual combined are aimed to transport the celebrant out of the ordinary world into a place “between the worlds” where ecstatic states could be experienced – albeit very personal and individual.54 The use of masks, especially in a ritualistic milieu, is very old. Garfinkel (2003) advocates that masks hold a strong importance in many dances and festivals in various locations. According to Napier (1987) masks are not only the main expressive sign of festival but also possess intricate symbolic value – hiding the identity of who is wearing them while disclosing another persona. According to Garfinkel: “The mask brings to the outside what in daily life is an invisible entity, a hidden double personality or a secret dream.” (Garfinkel 2003, p.36) There are references of use of masks by Celtic peoples. Masks were used at Samhain festivals as disguise for celebrants to blend with the dead.55 In the context of the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual the mask did not have the function to hide the celebrant’s identity, however. The masks had the purpose of creating a bridge between the mundane world and the realm of the Gods. It is clear that masks were used in an attempt to achieve this goal. Conversely, roughly half of the celebrants did not use masks

54 More details in the next section.
at all during the ritual and they achieved the goal nonetheless. It can, then, be argued that the use of masks is not mainstream.

Garfinkel’s four acts of worship\(^{56}\) were present in the Tipperary Pagans ritual. As the first act of worship that requires – at the same time as it induces – a special state of awareness, the attention-focusing devices used were body movements, namely Maypole Dancing, Puck Hunt and Jumping the Bonfire. Second, the boundary zone as the focus point of the ritual was the circle, casted by Gaborit. The circle created a sacred space where ritual was enacted and into which the deities were called. Third, the presence of the deity was represented by: the crown of flowers placed on the altar by Gallagher; the embodiment of the Puck by Maloney; and the Maypole, which actually symbolised two deities – a male and a female. Finally, the crown of flowers was placed as an offering, which is the fourth act of worship described by Garfinkel.

4.1.2 Traditions Invented and the Implications of Globalisation on Tipperary Pagans Group and Bealtaine Ritual

As previously explained invented traditions can be defined as a formalisation and ritualisation process in which the past is referenced. As observed at the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual various practices and features were perceived by the celebrants either as ancient or as traditional. For example, it can be cited that circle casting is very popular among Wiccan practitioners. There is no evidence however that such practice used to be performed by the Celts, either at Bealtaine or at any other festival. Notwithstanding, for many Neo-Pagan adherents today this is perceived as a “traditional” practice and thus is present at several rituals, as confirmed by the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual. As another example, Marie Therese O’Brien perceived Jumping the Bonfire to be an “ancient” activity. Consequently, she felt connected to the earth and with her ancestors. This idea is not exclusive to her – it is shared by others celebrants. Such a fact illustrates that whether there is evidence or not that certain practices are indeed ancient, Neo-Pagan adherents accept those ideas as they enjoy having a familiarity or closeness with ancestors. Those ancestors can be either by bloodline or by spiritual nationality – “cardiac Celts”, according to Bowman’s (2000) label. Connection with ancestors is very important to many Neo-Pagans. Hence, practices may be perceived to be “ancient” in order to maintain this connection and thus invented traditions can perpetuate. I

\(^{56}\) See Chapter Two.
argue that this is one of the reasons Neo-Pagan adherents attend rituals, including the Tipperary Pagans.

As previously discussed\(^{57}\) various Neo-Pagan groups conscientiously mix practices from different cultures in order to adapt their customs to present day circumstances. As the very definition of Neo-Paganism is to reinvent ancient Pagan practices and to create new traditions (Pike 2001), the use of old traditions as a basis for new traditions (Hobsbawm 1983) is expected. It is also a consequence of globalisation as an outcome of modernity: globalisation is a juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. (Giddens 1990, 1991) It is clear that constructing tradition is a way of maximising a group’s identity while supporting their statement or objective. (Hobsbawm 1983; Bell 1992) This fact was confirmed regarding the Tipperary Pagans. Not only did they wish to adapt customs to present day circumstances, but they also wished to adapt their customs to different approaches of Paganism (Wiccan, Druidry, Shamanism, etc.). They mixed practices to create a unique tradition. From analysis, various aspects of different cultures were present in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual, mainly influenced by Isabelle Gaborit’s background – a French woman who studied and practiced Paganism in France, England and Ireland. As globalisation can be defined as “an increasing world-wide interconnectedness, interchanges and movements of people, images and commodities” (Friedman in Featherstone et al. eds. 1995 p.69), the above-mentioned fact confirms not only an invention of tradition but also the impact of globalisation and post-modernism on the Tipperary Pagans ritual. The body movements performed at the Bealtaine ritual (analysed below) are also a clear example.

In addition, of the highlighted Appadurai’s ‘scapes’ in Chapter Two, technoscapes and ethnoscapes were evident in the Tipperary Pagans group and their Bealtaine ritual. The Tipperary Pagans use social media, especially Facebook, to communicate with each other, organise day outs and rituals, exchange information, and arrange for lifts. Furthermore, various members claim having found the group through internet searches (technoscapes). Several Tipperary Pagans members travel or have lived abroad. One of the organisers, Isabelle Gaborit, is an immigrant from France. As a result, foreign features are commonly incorporated into their practices. This is a clear example of ethnoscapes. There was no evidence, however, of mediascapes among the Tipperary Pagans group or their ritual.

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\(^{57}\) See Chapter Two.
4.2. Analysis of the Maypole Dancing and Body Movements Performed at the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine Ritual

Most features of Pagan rituals, and consequently Neo-Pagan rituals, are imbued with symbolisms. Jumping the Bonfire, the Puck Hunt, and the Maypole Dancing are the main symbolic aspects performed at this Bealtaine ritual and are analysed below.

4.2.1. Interpretation of Jumping the Bonfire and the Puck Hunt

Jumping the Bonfire is indeed an Irish tradition in Bealtaine celebrations – as opposed to other features present at the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual. In the past, Irish rural people would walk their cattle through two bonfires in order to cleanse and grant protection for them. (Danaher 1972; Ó Duinn 2000; Whelan 2010) It also had a practical aspect, as herbs would be put in the fire that, through smoke, would help eliminate flea and other parasites. Human participants also jumped the fire for the sake of spiritual cleansing as well as homeopathic magic to help crops grow (see Chapter Two). It was believed that the higher the individual jumped the higher would the crops grow. This is not, however, an exclusive Irish practice. Barber (2013) advocates that in some cultures, for instance the Tyrolean farmers, jumping in the appropriate rituals was perceived as crucial for the crops to grow in the fields – otherwise the crops would fail: “Jumping, like dancing, promotes life.” (Barber 2013, p.128) Jumping the Bonfire is therefore a method of homeopathic magic, or magic by analogy – the pillar of most mythical and magical thinking. (Frazer 1959; Grimes 1995; Barber 2013) As magic used to be linked to various aspects that deal with transformation – from seed to plant, ore to metal, milk to butter, etc. – magic rituals pursued the success of the transformation. (Barber 2013) Furthermore, Frymer-Kensky’s (1992) argument was confirmed. The Tipperary Pagans’ members are by no means ignorant. Their Bealtaine ritual is indeed a celebration of the success of crops, an acknowledgement of human’s dependence on fertility, and a way to participate on Guaranteeing the perpetuation of life. In the context of a globalised world today, according to my extensive experience attending Neo-Pagan rituals and relating to adherents, the same belief as of the Tipperary Pagans is shared among other Pagans worldwide.

Another aspect of fire jumping is the effect of increasing the bloodstream in humans, regardless of the size of the fire. Intense body movements with increased bloodstream, along with noise making and chanting, may cause a trance state, which was the aim of this practice in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual: to make people let themselves go. The drumming and
noise making during Jumping the Bonfire, according to Gaborit, had likewise the function of achieving a trance state by means of facilitating physical detachment. Celebrants at the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual reported their enjoyment in performing Jumping the Bonfire – either because they had fun or because they felt connected to the earth as well as with their ancestors. Although Deirdre Hayes stated feeling awkward, the overall mood notably improved after Jumping the Bonfire, even if no trance state was achieved. Celebrants were visibly singing and playing their instruments or clapping more enthusiastically.

The main objective of the Puck Hunt, like Jumping the Bonfire, was to assist participants in achieving a trancelike state and to facilitate physical detachment. According to Isabelle Gaborit, the Puck Hunt is an English tradition and represents a trickster God. The Puck also depicts the change, the chaos, the dangerous, and the unexpected. Trickster Gods have bad reputations as challengers and seducers. However, they also epitomise opportunity, choice, and movement. According to Bonewits (2007) trickster Gods should be treated with greatest care and respect. However, some of them have a playful personality. Hynes and Doty (1993) advocate that trickster deities have been serving to highlight significant social values for centuries, or even millennia, in a variety of cultures and religions. Furthermore, tricksters are associated with growth and change, providing cultural and critical reflection. (Hynes and Doty 1993) According to Mary Douglas (1968) trickster figures have the social function of showing that “any given social order is absolute and objective.” (Douglas in Hynes and Doty 1993, p. 21) Joseph Campbell (1959) considers tricksters as a less developed and Palaeolithic form of the hero archetype. Some western trickster deities are the Greek Hermes and the Norse Loki; Irish Gods usually considered to be tricksters are Lugh and Aengus Mac Óg. As the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual was an open one and the group is inclusive in terms of beliefs, no particular deity was attributed to the Puck, and the deity’s representation was generalised – as occurred with the depiction of the May Queen (see Chapter Three).

Celebrants at the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual did not seem at all bothered by the representation of a trickster God, even though many reported being aware of the meanings and the representation of a trickster God. The manner celebrants engaged with the Puck during the Bealtaine ritual clearly expressed that the trickster’s playful aspect was dominant. This fact was assessed judging by the cheerful mood that, achieved with Jumping the Bonfire, was enhanced during the Puck Hunt. Celebrants’ responses to the Puck Hunt were similar to those at Jumping the Bonfire. Most celebrants reported having enjoyed the performance – either because they had fun or because they felt connected to nature and the earth. I speculate that the Puck Hunt was a preparation of both mind and body for the Maypole Dancing.
4.2.2. Understanding the Maypole Dancing

There is no concrete evidence or sources regarding the origins of Maypole Dancing. However, it is believed that Maypole Dancing originated from Pagan fertility rituals in Germany.\(^{58}\) If this was so, this custom seems to have proliferated greatly, as many different cultures execute this dance in rituals during May Day or sometimes midsummer festivities. Barber (2013) advocates that similar rituals happen in March in the Balkans, on Semik\(^{59}\) in Russia, and at the summer solstice in Scandinavia. The reason for this delay between one location and another, according to her, is because the farther north the location, the later the date of the blooming and budding, and consequently the celebration. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: “Such [Maypole] dances are survivals of ancient dances around a living tree as part of spring rites to ensure fertility…They are widely distributed through Europe…and also are found in India.”\(^{60}\) Later, Maypole Dancing became a very popular form of competition dance in England. W. Shaw (1910) compiled a booklet with instructions, songs and accompaniments for Maypole Dancing competitions. He states that steps vary according to the teacher’s inclination. However, running, skipping, hopping, bowing or polka can be employed, as well as more complex steps and dances. (Shaw 1954) Excluding the polka, all other steps were performed at the Tipperary Pagans Maypole Dancing. Shaw also provides a Maypole Dancing representation of the crowning of the May Queen – as likewise depicted at the Tipperary Pagans Maypole Dancing:

“Let the one selected as May Queen turn outwards (away from the pole) and kneel down. The others trip towards her directly, forming two semi-circles around her. The girl directly behind places the crown …on her head and bow to her. She rises and faces them, and they bow again, and then trip to places.”

(Shaw 1910, p.6)

I argue that the ritual influences were still strong in competitive Maypole Dancing. Moreover, Sharp and Macilwaine (1974) state that in Oxfordshire, England, Morris dances were performed around the Maypole for luck.

In a ritualistic sphere, one of the Maypole’s representations is that of the axis mundi. As a phallic symbol, the pole is a representation of fruitfulness, and dancing around it is a means of empowering fertility through homeopathic magic as well as to celebrate life. Moreover, the

\(^{58}\) [http://www.historicalharmonies.org/mapyledanceorigins.htm](http://www.historicalharmonies.org/mapyledanceorigins.htm) [accessed 28 Jul 2016].

\(^{59}\) The seventh Thursday after Easter.

\(^{60}\) [https://www.britannica.com/art/Maypole-dance](https://www.britannica.com/art/Maypole-dance) [accessed 28 Jul 2016].
weaving of the Maypole as well as the dance around it is perceived by Pagan celebrants as a means to connect with the divine and with the higher self. Seasonal, agricultural, and fertility rites embody ritualisation processes most wholly because they clearly show the symbiosis between people, their bodies and their environments. (Grimes 2004; Magliocco 2009) The Maypole Dancing, with its cosmic dance characteristics that mimic the movements of the cosmos, thus, creates a connection of the performer with the universe. This is a clear example of embodiment of ritualisation in a rite that is seasonal, agricultural, and fertility. It was evident by accounts from a number of Tipperary Pagans celebrants that Maypole Dancing helped them to engage with nature and the earth.

The circle formation, which occurred not only during the performance of the Maypole Dancing but also during Jumping the Bonfire, is the basic spatial organisation of dance depicted on archaeological artefacts. (Garfinkel 2003) When in circle participants are practically equidistant from each other and from the centre of the circle – the Maypole and the bonfire – enabling unified mood and action. Garfinkel (2003) further states that achieving trance and ecstasy is another aspect of specific dances, usually accompanied with rhythmic body movements in a circle, due to the physiological effects these dances have on the brain of the performer:

“Hyperventilation, exhausting, whirling, turning, and circular, rotational movements all affect the sense of balance and equilibrium…The trancelike properties of dance, if performed in particular circumstances and as a largely pleasurable experience leading to auto-hypnosis and ecstasy, must have been discovered very early on.”

(Garfinkel 2003, p. 42)

I argue that in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual the effect above was not achieved because the ritual was open and limited, and high levels of autohypnosis and ecstasy could not be reached by means of body movements. However, even if no visible trancelike state was achieved by means of Jumping the Bonfire and Puck Hunt, the Maypole Dancing created a sense of community. The reason may be either that the dance was performed in a circle, thus providing an opportunity for all celebrants to interact very closely; or that collaboration among celebrants was needed when weaving the Maypole strands.

Following Magliocco (2009), ritual is a creative form that helps celebrants transcend the everyday nature of human existence. Moreover, according to McNeill (1995) when a society keeps together in time by dance at religious ceremonies it creates a strong emotional impact of collective solidarity. As evident in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual, dance is a very
efficient means to achieve these goals. Each celebrant attributes his/her own meaning to the
dance and the body movements, and as a result the performance is effective. Unquestionably
the sense of community and enjoyment was achieved.

Summary

The analysis of the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual background and features
illustrates the role of body movements and Maypole Dancing. I argue that the performance was
effective as each celebrant attributed their own meaning to the body movements and the
Maypole Dancing. As spirituality is very personal and practices are experienced individually,
different meanings can be attributed for the same performance, albeit preserving relevance and
effectiveness. Moreover, indubitably the sense of community and enjoyment was achieved.

Rituals can be considered akin to artistic productions. (Garfinkel 2003; Magliocco
2009) This was so as a way to provide celebrants with religious ecstasy through elements such
as masks, chants, dance and other body movements. The Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual was
a celebration of the coming of summer and a way to participate in guaranteeing the
perpetuation of life. The overall mood notably improved after Jumping the Bonfire; celebrants
were visibly singing and playing their instruments or clapping more energetically. Celebrants’
responses to the Puck Hunt were similar to those of Jumping the Bonfire. Most celebrants
reported having enjoyed the performance – either because they had fun or because they felt
connected to nature and the earth. It was evident by accounts from a number of Tipperary
Pagans celebrants that Maypole Dancing helped them engage with the environment. I argue
that in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual any evident trancelike state was achieved as the
dance and body movements were not performed in appropriate circumstance because the ritual
was open and limited. Had the ritual with the dance and body movements been a closed one,
the level of intimacy and familiarity among participants would have lowered the psychic and
psychological barriers (Bonewits 2007). I argue this would be a more appropriate circumstance
to achieve a trancelike state in the ritual.

Connection with ancestors is very important to many Neo-Pagans. Hence, practices
perceived to be “ancient” in order to maintain this connection are invented traditions that
continue to perpetuate. I argue that this is one of the reasons Neo-Pagan adherents attend
rituals, including the Tipperary Pagans. Not only do the Tipperary Pagans wish to adapt
customs to present day circumstances, but they also wish to adapt their customs to different
approaches of Paganism (Wiccan, Druidry, Shamanism, etc.). Various aspects of different
cultures were present in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual, confirming not only the invention of tradition but also the impact of globalisation and postmodernism on the ritual. Evidence of Appadurai’s *technoscapes* and *ethnoscapes* were also present in the Tipperary Pagans group and their Bealtaine ritual. For example, the use of social media is very frequent. Furthermore, various members travel or have lived abroad. As a result, foreign features are commonly incorporated to their practices. There was no evidence, however, of *mediascapes* among the Tipperary Pagans group or their ritual.

In this Chapter I analysed the ethnographic data from Chapter Three by applying the theoretical framework explored in Chapter Two and argued my results. The next chapter draws the conclusion to my research.
5. Chapter 5: Conclusion

“A people who dance before their gods are generally freer and less repressed than a people who cannot.”
Cox 1969, p.48

This thesis uses mainly an ethnochoreological approach to examine how a specific group of Neo-Pagan adherents, namely the Tipperary Pagans, incorporate and perceive dance and other body movements in a Bealtaine celebration. The purpose of my research are: to identify the kinds of dances and body movements incorporated into the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual; to question how celebrants perceive these dances and body movements in their ritual; and to analyse the importance and meaning of body movements for the celebrants. This chapter reviews the methods, theory, and conclusions of this research.

To answer the above-mentioned research question, I provided a background on Paganism, on Celtic peoples and their spirituality (Chapter One). Moreover, the writings of primarily Ronald Grimes, Catherine Bell, Victor Turner, Andrée Grau, Elisabeth Barber, Yosef Garfinkel, and Kevin Danaher assisted in creating a theoretical foundation on the concepts of ritual, dance in rituals, and rituals in Celtic festivals. Furthermore, the notions of the invention of tradition, globalisation and post-modernism were likewise explored through the writings of Eric Hobsbawm, James R. Lewis, Philip Bowman, Michael Featherstone, and Arjun Appadurai. This theoretical framework was examined in Chapter Two. I conducted fieldwork at a Bealtaine celebration, performed by the Tipperary Pagans group on the 24th April 2016. In Chapter Three I introduced the ethnographic data of the field as well as the people who comprised the ethnographic community under study. Moreover, I presented the dancing as practised by this community at the Bealtaine ritual – Maypole Dancing and the other body movements, namely Puck Hunt and Jumping the Bonfire. In Chapter Four, along with the theoretical framework explored in Chapter Two, I analysed the ethnographic data from Chapter Three and argued my results.

It was corroborated by the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual that dance is particularly present in the ritualisation, magic, and celebration modes of ritual sensibility. (Grimes 1995) Moreover, the fact that rituals are similar to artistic productions as a means to provide celebrants with religious ecstasy (Garfinkel 2007; Magliocco 2009) was confirmed by elements such as masks, chants, dance and other body movements. As observed in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual, dance and body movements had not only symbolic functions – representation of deities and fertility and homeopathic magic – but also these body movements and dance had
practical functions – achieving a trancelike state, celebration, union of community. No trance state was visible or reported, however. Nevertheless, the overall mood notably improved after Jumping the Bonfire and the Puck Hunt. I argue that in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual no evident trancelike state was achieved as this ritual as an open one. An open ritual does not allow for the required level of intimacy and familiarity among participants to be reached, thus compromising the achievement of trance through body movements. Conversely, I claim that the performance was effective in other instances as each celebrant attributed his/her own meaning to body movements and Maypole Dancing. Moreover, undoubtedly the sense of community and enjoyment was achieved.

Various aspects of different cultures were present in the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine ritual, confirming not only the invention of tradition but also the impact of globalisation and postmodernism on the ritual. This follows the ideas that globalisation is a juxtaposition of tradition and modernity (Giddens1990, 1991) and that the characterisation of Neo-Paganism is to reinvent ancient Pagan practices (Pike 2001), using of old traditions as a basis for new traditions. (Hobsbawm 1983) Through observation and interviews with Tipperary Pagans, it was clear that they conscientiously mix practices from different cultures not only to adapt their customs to present day circumstances but also to welcome diverse approaches of Paganism (Wiccan, Druidry, Shamanism, etc.). Appadurai’s technoscapes and ethnoscapes were evident in the Tipperary Pagans group and in their Bealtaine ritual. According to my experience in Paganism and reports from Tipperary Pagans, connection with ancestors is very important to many Neo-Pagans. Hence, practices perceived to be “ancient” in order to maintain this connection are invented traditions that continue. I argue that this is one of the reasons particular Tipperary Pagans members attend rituals.

In closing, the kinds of dance and body movements incorporated into the studied ritual are the Maypole Dance, the Puck Hunt, and Jumping the Bonfire. Many different cultures execute Maypole Dancing in rituals during May Day or midsummer festivities, and this practice is a very traditional one in Ireland on Bealtaine. (Danaher 1972; Ó Duinn 2000; Barber 2013) The Puck Hunt is an English tradition. (Gaborit 2016) The manner Tipperary Pagans celebrants engaged with the Puck during the Bealtaine ritual clearly expressed that the trickster’s playful aspect was dominant. Jumping the Bonfire is indeed an Irish tradition in Bealtaine celebrations – albeit not exclusive to Ireland. (Danaher 1972; Ó Duinn 2000; Whelan 2010; Barber 2013) Overall, according to observation and reports from celebrants, the Tipperary Pagans perceived these dance and body movements in their ritual as fun and as a means to connect with ancestors and the earth. Maypole Dancing is perceived as a means to
connect with the divine; The Puck Hunt represents a trickster God, the unexpected and movement. Some celebrants were aware of the meaning of the Puck Hunt. According to observations, celebrants who were not aware of the meaning became so as these attributes were explicit through the very nature of the performance – run away from the Puck in order to avoid being caught. Jumping the Bonfire is perceived to promote spiritual cleansing and it is a form of homeopathic magic to help crops grow. (Frazer 1959; Barber 2013) This perception was corroborated by observations at the Tipperary Pagans ritual. According to observations, reports from celebrants and literature review, I argue that the Tipperary Pagans’ members are by no means ignorant. Their Bealtaine ritual is indeed an acknowledgement of human’s dependence on fertility and a way to participate on guaranteeing the perpetuation of life. (Frymer-Kensky 1992) Moreover, as a fertility rite, it is also a means to express the interaction between people, their bodies and their environments. (Grimes 2004; Magliocco 2009) Finally, the Tipperary Pagans Bealtaine festival is indeed a celebration of the coming of summer (Danaher 1972) and raising the sense of community. (Gaborit 2016; Hayes 2016)

5.1. Research Contribution and Further Studies

This research on Maypole Dancing and other body movements performed on a Bealtaine ritual by the Tipperary Pagans could not encompass all the kinds of dances and movements that could be performed at the Bealtaine festival. Neither the different kinds of dances and body movements present in other Celtic festivals (see Chapter Two) could be approached. Yet the insight attained from this ethnochoreological study has assisted in filling a gap in the research fields of Ethnochoreology and Ritual Studies pertaining dance in Neo-Pagan rituals in Ireland, especially from the perspective of a researcher who is both Pagan and dancer. This area of research has been very little explored, and there are many more instances to be investigated more in depth. For example, a comparison between dances in opposed festivals, such as Bealtaine and Samhain (see Chapter Two). Furthermore, as stated in Chapter Two there are no ‘ritual dances’, but dance in rituals. The Maypole Dancing, for example, has been performed in rituals for centuries, but more recently it has also been performed as a competitive dance and folk dance. (Shaw 1910; Barber 2013) Hence, Maypole Dancing cannot be classified as “ritual dance”. However, according to Gaborit (2016) sometimes dance or body movements are not a part of ritual or liturgy, but are the ritual itself (see Chapter Three). This is a very interesting perspective that should be further investigated as it can provide new insights on Rituals Studies and Ethnochoreology.
Bibliography


Additional References

Lectures

MA in Ethnochoreology
DA5021: Ethnochoreology: History and Theory
MD6021: Introduction to Fieldwork Techniques
DA6021: Dance Ethnography
MD6041: Introduction to Ritual Studies
MD6031: Media Technologies for the Performing Arts and Arts Research
MD6051: Independent Study
DA5031: Current Issues in Ethnochoreology
DA5022: World Dance Survey
DA6002: Critical Encounters with Irish Traditional Dance
September 2015 – May 2016
Dr Catherine Foley
University of Limerick

MD6132: Advanced Ritual Studies
February 2016 – May 2016
Dr Helen Phelan
University of Limerick

GA4012 Celtic Civilisation: Continuity and Change
January 2016 – February 2016
Dr Síle de Cléir and Dr Aengus Finnegan
University of Limerick

Figures and Sources

Figure 1.1: Map of Map of Celtic Expansion (First Millennium B.C.). Available: http://www.ivargault.com/bilder/ europa.jpg [accessed 02 Jul 2016].


Figure 2.2: The Wheel of the Year (Celtic Year Calendar). Available: https://fromthebottomofthebarrel.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/2261164_com_wheeloftheyear.jpg [accessed 02 Jul 2016].

Figure 2.3: Picture Used by Several Pagan Groups In The Census 2016 Campaign. Available: https://www.facebook.com/PaganLifeRites/photos [accessed 02 Jun 2016].
Figure 3.1: Location of Saint Berrihert's Kyle, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. Available: https://www.google.ie/maps/place/St+Berrihert%E2%80%99s+Kyle+and+Well+Shinganagh,+Co.+Tipperary/@52.9091513,-7.7141938,8.71z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x48434c8e35182d:0xcbaed1b88d17f0e4!8m2!3d52.4106758!4d-8.0927352 [accessed 11 Jul 2016].
Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary

Celebration: One of the components of Festivity. (Cox 1969)

Ceremony: One of the six modes of ritual sensibility – or embodied attitudes – that may appear during a ritual; a ludic sensibility expressed by feasts, carnivals, birthdays, dancing, singing, and festivals. Celebration is connected to the arts as its rites derive from expressive culture. (Grimes 1995)

Dance: A “complex form of communication that combines the visual, kinaesthetic, and aesthetic aspects of human movement with (usually) the aural dimension of musical sounds and sometimes poetry.” (Kaeppler in Garfinkel 2003, p.4)

Druidism/Druidry: For the reason that druids were so important in Celtic society, Celtic religion and its modern revival are usually called Druidism or Druidry.

Ethos: Is the moral and aesthetics aspects of a culture and how people act towards themselves and their world. (Bell 1992)

Festival: A special time when ordinary chores are set aside and people celebrate a particular event or memory of a deity or hero. (Cox 1969)

Festivity: “A capacity for genuine revelry and joyous celebration.” (Cox 1969, p.7) It is also “a socially approved occasion for the expression of feelings that are normally repressed or neglected.” (Cox 1969, p.22)

Hop: An aerial movement performed by leaving the ground from one foot and landing in the same foot.

Jump: An aerial movement performed by leaving the ground from both feet and landing in both feet as well.

Leap: An aerial movement performed by leaving the ground from one foot and landing in the opposite foot.

Meso-Paganism: The term relates to “religions founded as attempts to recreate, revive, or continue what their founders thought of as the Paleopagan ways of their ancestors (or predecessors), but which were heavily influenced (accidentally, deliberately or involuntarily) by the monotheistic and dualistic worldviews of Judaism, Christianity, and/or Islam.” (Bonewits 2007, p.5) As examples that can be cited are Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Spiritualism, and Santería.

Neo-Paganism: Religions that reinvent ancient Pagan traditions and practices, or create of new traditions, in order to best adapt to the present day.
Paleo-Paganism: This term relates to “tribal religions of Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, Oceania, and Australia, when they were (or, in rare cases, still are) practiced as intact belief systems. (Bonewits 2017, p.5)

Pantheism: Belief in many or all Gods.

Ritual: This term has multiple connotations and its meaning depends on the researchers and their disciplinary backgrounds. To use Grimes (2014) explanation, ritual is what one defines in formal definitions and characterizations.

Sissonne: An aerial movement performed by leaving the ground from both feet and landing in one foot.

Skipping: Moving in a light manner alternating hops on each foot.
Appendix 2: Lyrics of *A Tree Song*

*A Tree Song*
by Rudyard Kipling

Of all the trees that grow so fair,
Old England to adorn,
Greater is none beneath the sun,
Than Oak, and Ash, and Thorn.

Sing Oak, and Ash, and Thorn, good sirs,
(All of a Midsummer morn!)
Surely we sing of no little thing,
In Oak, and Ash, and Thorn!

Oak of the Clay lived many a day,
Or ever Aeneas began.
Ash of the Loam was a Lady at home,
When Brut was an outlaw man.

Thorn of the Down saw New Troy Town
(From which was London born);
Witness hereby the ancientry
Of Oak, and Ash, and Thorn!

Yew that is old in churchyard-mould,
He breedeth a mighty bow.
Alder for shoes do wise men choose,
And beech for cups also.

But when ye have killed, and your bowl is spilled,
And your shoes are clean outworn,
Back ye must speed for all that ye need,
To Oak, and Ash, and Thorn!

Ellum she hateth mankind, and waiteth
Till every gust be laid,
To drop a limb on the head of him
That any way trusts her shade.

But whether a lad be sober or sad,
Or mellow with wine from the horn,
He will take no wrong when he lieth along
'Neath Oak, and Ash, and Thorn!

Oh, do not tell the priest our plight,
Or he would call it a sin;
But--we have been out in the woods all night,
   A-conjuring Summer in!
And we bring you good news by word of mouth --
   Good news for cattle and corn --
Now is the Sun come up from the south,
   With Oak, and Ash, and Thorn!

Sing Oak, and Ash, and Thorn, good sirs
   (All of a Midsummer morn)!
England shall bide till Judgement Tide,
   By Oak, and Ash, and Thorn!

Appendix 3: Lyrics of *Firestar Beltaine*

*Firestar Beltaine* (1986)

BARD:(harp accompaniment)

This is the air, oh people; these are the creatures:
   Far-flying Goose; far-seeing Hawk;
   Owl who knows; Raven who talks;
   Crane who dances; Thrush who sings;
   Quail the humble; Wren the king;
   Lark who revels; Loon who weeps;
   Jay who scatters; Buzzard reaps.
This is the air I conjure, and this is the birth of the world.

This is the fire, oh people; these are the creatures:
   Drake who hoards; Kirin who gives;
   Angel heals; Chimera reaves;
   Coal the slow; lightning the quick;
   Salamander, power's wick;
   Soul who praises; Gryphon scorns;
   Phoenix dies and is reborn.
This is the fire I conjure, and this is the birth of the world.

This is the sea, oh people; these are the creatures:
   Whale who chants; Dolphin who speaks;
   Clam content; Salmon who seeks;
   Pike who rages; Shark who mourns;
   Walrus steadies; Carp transforms;
   Seal who gathers; Crab the lone;
   Otter wave-borne; Eel in stone;
This is the sea I conjure, and this is the birth of the world.

This is the earth, oh people; these are the creatures:
Deer who worries; Boar who schemes;
Cat who conjures; Sheep who dreams;
Hare the playful; Brock the stern;
Mouse who teaches; Horse who learns;
Wolf who wanders; Bear who stays;
Stag who guards; Puma who preys.
This is the earth I conjure, and this is the birth of the world.

Now is the darkness. Now is the pain. Now is the fear.
Now is the danger. Now is the hate. Now are the tears.
Call on our mother! She is the one! Hers is the way!
She will bring comfort. She will bring life. She will bring day.

PRIEST:

Earth Mother, Birth Mother, Birch Mother,
Sea Mother, Stone Mother, Star Mother!
Queen of night and death and birth,
Womb of deep and fertile earth,
Dame of heaven's silver wheel,
Lady of the greening field,
Keeper of the apple grove,
Mistress of the arts of love,
Shine out in the fearsome dark --
Teach us how to strike the spark.
People, we can feel Her near!
She is coming! She is here!

GODDESS:(emerging from hiding -- should be in green, with amber & copper)

Now the veils of worlds are thin;
To move out you must move in.
Let the Balefires now be made,
Mine the spark within them laid.

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This My gift: that people meet  
In peace and plenty made complete.  
This I give: the Sacred Way,  
The strength, the soul, the sight, the say.  
Move beyond the fiery screen  
Between the seen and the unseen;  
Shed your anger and your fear,  
Live anew in a new year!

FIREMAKER:(at each tree name, holds up twig, then binds all together into a torch)

The Nine I sing, the Nine blessed trees  
Which were empowered of old:  
Oak, thou druid's door, open the way for us.  
Apple, thou knowledge-giver, break our circle of blindness.  
Ash, thou world-supporter, drive away ill powers.  
Birch, thou tree-mother, help in our healing.  
Hawthorn, thou branch of May, give us light and hope.  
Willow, thou soul-leader, grant us safe passage.  
Holly, thou forest king, be our safe refuge.  
Hazel, thou wise-one's branch, give us true vision.  
Alder, thou river's love, let us flow outward.  
In peace let us flow outward; in power let us flow outward; in beauty let us flow outward.

(The Goddess lights the torch, the Firemaker lights the two fires, which have been saturated with some flammable material, ie charcoal starter. White Sage and Cedar chips may be thrown thereon.)

FIRE-PASSING CHANT: (drum)

Dark to light, night to day,  
Through the fires lies the way;
Old to new, death to birth,  
Between the worlds to our rebirth.

(Once all have passed between the fires)  
PRIESTESS:

Sky's Father, Wise Father, Wine Father,  
Sun Father, Sap Father, Song Father!  
Lord of forest, field and beast,  
Lord of harvest, hunt and feast,  
King of heaven's golden fire,  
Dancer of the soul's desire,  
Master of the drum and flute,  
Keeper of the vineyard's fruit,  
Shine on us and warm our souls --  
Teach us how to make us whole!  
People, we can feel Him near!  
He is coming! He is here!

GOD:(emerging from hiding, dressed in green, with leaves & horns)

Let the light of living blaze!  
Dance within the spiral maze;  
Cry of pipe and thump of drum;  
Out you go and in you come!  
Mine the living pole of May --  
Outside loving starts today!  
This My gift: that lovers join  
Touching at the lip and loin.  
This I give: the Joyous Dance,  
Music, song, the vine, the chance!  
Now do fear and anger cease:  
Dance the healing and release!
(A fairly simple triple spiral should be traced on the ground in lime
or flour, to give the people guidelines for dancing. The dance should
go on until satiation or until the circle forms again; there is no one
human focal point -- the intent should be for peace, understanding,
tolerance, etc.)

SPIRAL-DANCING CHANT:(drum)

Joy, health and peace be in the world
    That spins into the May-o,
    For summer is a-comin' in
    And winter's gone away-o.

BLESSING THE FOOD:

    God: Mine is the ripening sun.
    Goddess: Mine is the nurturing soil.
    God: Mine is the fruit of the vine.
    Goddess: Mine is the chalice of life.
Both: We are the blessing of wine! And the wine blesses us.

    God: Mine is the planted seed.
    Goddess: Mine is the fertile earth.
    God: Mine is the mower's blade.
    Goddess: Mine is the oven of making.
Both: We are the blessing of bread! And the bread blesses us.

Feasting, dancing, singing, party, etc. Some kind of grounding afterwards.

Appendix 4: Information Letter for Research Participants

Dear Participant,

My name is Ana Camillo and I am a student on the MA Ethnochoreology programme at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick. I am doing research on “Dancing in Present Day Pagan Rituals in Ireland” and I would like to invite you to participate in this project. The research aims one, to examine movement and dance within pagan rituals in present day Ireland; two, to ascertain what the importance of body movements are in present day Pagan rituals in Ireland; and three to ascertain the meaning of these rituals for participants.

I would like to interview you - either individually or in a group, which would take no more than 30 minutes in a public place suitable for both parties. You have the right not to answer questions or to request that the interview be terminated. I would like, if possible, to be present in the Pagan ritual(s) in order to conduct my fieldwork for my study. I would also like to take photographs and to video record some of the dance events if possible. This study is for research and educational purposes only and research materials will be stored at the University of Limerick. If you wish, you can request copies from me of the recorded materials relating to you. You have the right to withdraw from this research without having to give a reason. I do not envisage any risks for you if you decide to take part in this research.

I would like to name you in my research but, if you wish, you have the right to remain anonymous. Should you decide this please be sure to tick the “yes” box on the CONSENT FORM.

Your help and time in this study would be really appreciated. If you have any queries relating to this study please feel free to contact me or my supervisor (contact details below).

Many thanks in advance.

Contact details:
Research Investigator
Ana Camillo
Email: 15020215@studentmail.ul.ie

Supervisor
Dr Catherine Foley
Email: Catherine.foley@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (2015-12-25-AHSS). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
AHSS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel: +353 61 202286
Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie
Appendix 5: Consent Form for Research Participants

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSENT FORM

Consent Section:
I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in research for the project entitled “Dancing in Present Day Pagan Rituals in Ireland”.

- I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.
- The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.
- I am also aware that my participation in this study may be recorded (video/audio/photographs) and I agree to this. However, should I feel uncomfortable at any time I can request that the recording equipment be switched off. I am entitled to copies of all recordings made and am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once the study is completed.
- I fully understand that there is no obligation on me to participate in this study.
- I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without having to explain or give a reason.
- I am also entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details.

I wish to remain anonymous: ☐ YES ☐ NO

_____________________________                   _____________________
Signature of participant                                               Date