

Explore the dramatic affects of ‘the dance’ half way through act 1

Dance is one of the most natural forms of movement. Dance first originated from people who could naturally feel the beat. So in ‘the dance’ when Maggie relates to the loud and steady beat of the Irish dance music, it is a very natural thing to do. However, when the audience suddenly sees four women stop what they are doing and suddenly start dancing in the middle of their kitchen, it comes as a great surprise. This is not what we expect to see.

It is as though all five sisters have been possessed. Each sister’s dance is concentrated and personal and emotional. It is as though they are wearing masks. Maybe the sisters feel that they have to be masked or hidden in order to let themselves so free and wild. For instance Maggie covers her face with flour before she dances and Chris throws the surplice over her head before she dances.

“...the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves....”

It seems as though ‘the dance’ is something that they don’t actually want to do. ‘The dance’ is more like a kind of ritual and the heavy traditional Irish music emphasises this.

This sudden release of energy sends the audience into confusion. ‘The dance’ changes from a normal dance into a frenzied hysteria:

“..the sound is too loud; the beat is too fast; and the almost recognizable dance is made grotesque...”

The greatest part of ‘the dance’ is when Kate starts to dance. Although the other sisters are concentrated on the dance, we can still hold on to reality, as Kate has not, as we expected, joined in. But when Kate does suddenly decide to join, we know that this dance is definitely not the norm.

Kate is a firm Christian and the Christian church has always disagreed with dancing so when Kate joins in, it comes as a great shock to the audience. Kate’s dance is the most intimate and emotional. Her dance is described in the most detail, as this is the hardest dance to understand. Kate dances solely for herself and the audience can see that this is not the kind of dance meant for entertainment. Kate has completely opened up, so much in fact, that it seems to us, as the audience, as though she has closed up. This is because we cannot understand the emotions that Kate is feeling here:

“Kate dances alone, totally concentrated, totally private; a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic...”

‘The dance’ seems to change all the sisters. For one thing, they all seem to become younger than they actually are. Rose who is ‘simple’ and therefore has always been on a

lower 'level' than her sisters, has finally reached their 'level'. They are all united in the midst of all these emotions.

When the music suddenly stops it is a shock for us but it is also a great shock for the sisters. At first they carry on dancing for they haven't quite noticed the decline in music. Kate stops first and returns back to 'reality'. She is then followed by Agnes, Chris and Maggie. Eventually only Rose is left:

“Rose is dancing her graceless dance by herself.”

Then finely she notices and stops. There is no sound but the short bursts of static from the radio and their gasping breaths. An uncomfortable silence envelopes the stage and even into the audience, where we begin to feel slightly embarrassed ourselves:

“They look at each other obliquely; avoid looking at each other; half smile in embarrassment; feel and look slightly ashamed and slightly defiant.”

Finally Chris moves towards the radio and the static tension breaks. For the audience, this is a great relief. We can breathe out and sit back to enjoy the rest of the play.

'The dance' has such a dramatic effect on the audience that we are able to submerge completely into the emotions of the dance and even begin to feel these emotions ourselves. We can relate very well to the emotions here, yet I think that the intimacy of 'the dance' and the way that each dance is made completely personal, leaves us with an overall sense of confusion, curiosity and a longing to help and relate with the characters.