

Faced with Otherness: A Few Remarks on Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*

Justyna Dąbrowska

University of Łódź

Abstract: *Dancing at Lughnasa* by Irish playwright Brian Friel is a play marked by the notion of the Other. In the present article this concept is understood in two ways as either an inferior term in each of the binary oppositions that the drama is rich in or as a notion denoting an unfamiliar, alien quality that is very different from the typical Western point of view. The former means of reading the term can be elaborated on with the use of the Derridean concept of logocentrism which leads to a display of various binary terms present in the play. The latter understanding of the term "the Other" comes from Edward Said's reading of "the Orient" as the Other for the Occident. These two renderings of the term lead to the conclusion that the Other is omnipresent in the play and that the understanding of this concept facilitates the decoding of the message conveyed by the play.

Key words: Brian Friel, the Other, Jacques Derrida, Edward Said, binary oppositions

Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a story of five unmarried sisters whose lives focus solely on household chores. They live with Michael, the son of Chris (one of the sisters), and are accompanied by their elder brother Jack, who has come back from Africa after serving as a priest in a leper colony. On two occasions they are visited by Michael's father - Gerry. The only moment of their rebellion against patriarchal rules represented by the Church and the State comes in a dance which the Mundy sisters perform in the silence of their rural kitchen. The Church and the State are visible in the play due to the omnipresence of a local priest who has a great influence on the inhabitants. Friel's dramatic piece is rich in many oppositions between female and male experience, power relations and body-language dichotomies. This

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article is an attempt to show that these oppositions function as binary terms which deconstruct themselves in the course of the play. What will be essential in order to explain these dichotomies and, simultaneously, to show that they co-exist, is Jacques Derrida's notion of logocentrism and the idea of oppositions where one term is culturally constructed as superior to the other, which is seen as worse and inferior (the Other), yet, in fact, defines the essence of the former. *Dancing at Lughnasa* reveals a number of such binary terms at the core of the play: man vs. woman, Catholic vs. pagan, order vs. disorder. I will try to show that these oppositions are omnipresent in the play.

Moreover, when it comes to the notion of the Other, it will be necessary to mention Edward Said's definition of Orientalism in relation to the Orient being the Other for the Occident, as the characteristics attributed to the Orient fit very well with some characters from *Dancing at Lughnasa*, especially Father Jack, described as one who "went native." My analysis of Orientalism will show that the traits associated with the Orient are not only comparable with Jack's characterization, but also congruent with the Mundy sisters and Ballybeg itself, the place where they live and where the Lughnasa dances are held.¹

To discuss binary oppositions in a critically and theoretically informed way, it is crucial to draw on Derrida and his ideas. In *On Deconstruction*, Jonathan Culler quotes Derrida's argument and asserts, in an attempt to elucidate Derridean thought, that

[p]hilosophy has been a "metaphysics of presence," the only metaphysics we know. "It could be shown," Derrida writes, "that all names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated the constant of a presence." (Culler 1982, 92)

¹ The third theory that could be used here to show how paganism and the Orient are connected with the Mundy family and Lughnasa celebrations is the process of interweaving cultures in performance as described by Erika Fischer-Lichte. When interwoven with the superficially Catholic family of Ballybeg, the concepts of the Orient and otherness present the Mundy sisters in a totally different view and thus shed a new light on the sisters' rebellious behaviour. However, given the limited length of this paper it would be impossible to address the issue of post-colonialism and the political meaning of interweaving cultures in performance, as understood by Fischer-Lichte, in detail, as it would require thorough explanation.

He then mentions concepts such as "consciousness, subjectivity, co-presence of the self and the other" (1982, 92-3) and asserts, after Derrida, that

[e]ach of these concepts, all of which involve a notion of presence, has figured in philosophical attempts to describe what is fundamental and has been treated as a centering, grounding force or principle. In oppositions such as meaning/form, soul/body, intuition/expression, literal/metaphorical, nature/culture, intelligible/sensible, positive/negative, transcendental/empirical, serious/nonserious, the superior term belongs to the logos and is a higher presence; the inferior term marks a fall. Logocentrism thus assumes the priority of the first term and conceives the second in relation to it, as a complication, a negation, a manifestation, or a disruption of the first. (Culler 1982, 93)

The binary oppositions present in *Dancing at Lughnasa* can also be characterized in this way. One of the two terms is always seen and culturally constructed as the superior term, whereas the other seems to be worse in relation to the former and its significance is actually built on the priority of the former and in opposition to it – thus it is *the Other* one.

In order to explain further how the binary oppositions work, it is pertinent to mention Derrida's words quoted by Culler: "[a]ll metaphysicians have proceeded thus, from Plato to Rousseau, from Descartes to Husserl: good before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc." (Culler 1982, 93). Thus, in each binary opposition, one term is as if privileged and the second one becomes "the Other" element, something worse, marginalised and inferior. Such process works perfectly in every opposition of terms that could be formulated on the basis of the play.

The most visible binary opposition in the play is that of man vs. woman, where the masculine perspective is highlighted from the very beginning of the drama by means of the presence of the male narrator Michael. It is thus shown that the interpretation of the play and the story it conveys will be based on the subjective remarks expressed by a boy who is a constant observer of his aunts. The male perspective dominates over the female one, and as Harris observes, "Friel has cast Michael in the roles of both on-looker and representative of the writer at different stages of Friel's understanding

of the action" (1997, 47). Thus, the sisters are not only controlled by the male environment in the play (the priest's surveillance of the dancing body and bodily conduct, the State and the Church controlling the dances, Jack's going native, which starts the downfall of the whole family), but also supervised by Michael, the narrator, whose words serve Friel as a way to reveal his own mastery of events. Although Kiberd notes that "by focusing on five unmarried but sensuous sisters, Friel brilliantly avoids the usual stereotypes – mother, martyr, virgin" (2001, 24), it is even more frustrating that, devoid of stereotyped roles, the women's lives are finally embraced by a failure as their momentary rebellion does not let them avoid the lingering doom of the family and their dissatisfaction with life. Men are the controlling force and with a spontaneous moment of insurgency the sisters are finally doomed to calamity.

The above-mentioned opposition of man vs. woman is the most vivid example of women being constructed on the basis of what men allow or forbid them to do. Yet, Friel is very successful in showing the rebellion on the women's part—their outburst of emotions in the form of a dance. As McMullan observes, "[i]f, on a reflexive level, the activity of dancing |in the play is posited as the 'other' of narrative authority, diegetically it is presented as the subversive other of institutionalised ideology" (1999, 92). Thus, dance is also a kind of "Other" in a binary opposition, which McMullan posits as an "opposition between language and its corporeal 'other', dancing, which reverberates throughout the play" (1999, 90). On the basis of McMullan's observation another kind of binary opposition, that is language vs. dancing, may be formulated.

The sisters dodge the patriarchal restraints by wielding corporeal power, that is by engaging in a dance. At the same time, they are, by this very token, doing something regarded as inferior, because dance expresses emotions rather than intellectual ideas and its exact message is much harder to construe than that of language, which remains a potent tool of patriarchal, logocentric culture. Furthermore, Ojrzyńska rightly observes that

[b]ased on the gendered dichotomy between body and language, dance is presented by Friel largely as a female attribute that has the power ... to subvert the patriarchal order in an often explosive fashion, which may be seen as a form of rebellion ... against imposed restrictions and inhibitions. (Ojrzyńska 2015, 60)

McMullan observes: "[a]s it is the women who are most corporeally restrained by the prevailing religious discipline, it is the dance amongst women which subverts that discipline most radically" (1999, 93-4). She later adds that "[t]he women become 'other' to their usual, controlled selves" (1999, 94), and it is not surprising that in his final monologue Michael remarks:

Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement – as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. (Friel 1999, 107-8)

Another very important binary opposition that underscores the rebellion on the sisters' part is order vs. disorder. Order is undoubtedly superior in relation to disorder which contains the notion of otherness in its meaning, being the negation of order (dis-order). Disorder is an element of the sisters' rebellion, sexuality and women's dancing bodies, as opposed to order which is indicative of patriarchy, purity, and language. Thus, order comprises institutions such as the Irish Dancing Commission or Gaelic League² which, despite not being directly mentioned in the play, show in the characters' awareness of many prohibitions to dance in public or to display a woman's body in front of a male viewer.

The binary opposition between man and woman is dominated by the hierarchy that privileges man. It is man that has the characteristics of "higher presence," the woman being just the other, a poorer addition and realisation. In the opposition of man vs. woman, language is the attribute of men (Michael – narrator, Friel – writer, the priest – preaching patriarchal rules enforced by the Church), whereas the body and dance become women's attributes (the dances performed by the sisters as a means of liberating themselves from the enforced rules). This shows that reason, understood in abstract terms, is men's domain, the body (irrationality) being the domain of women. Nevertheless, in this relationship the dance becomes for the women in the play a way to show their momentary but powerful rebellion.

² The Irish Dancing Commission was set up in order to classify the dances according to their origins, and only the native ones could be danced by the people of Ireland. The Gaelic League was at first concerned with the preservation of Irish language but later developed into an organization that also focused on dance and was an initiator of the Irish Dancing Commission.

It is important to mention that Western culture's logocentrism as understood by Derrida, as Culler argues, "assumes the priority of the first term and conceives the second in relation to it, as a complication, a negation, a manifestation, or a disruption of the first" (Culler 1982, 93). Dance is, in fact, such a disruption of language, which is a male domain and accords well with the assumption which underpins the ideas reflected in the play and thus can be a hint at its interpretation, mainly that men are associated with language and women with the body. Ojrzyńska rightly notices in *Dancing at Lughnasa* the presence of "the contrast between the depiction of male and female characters in the play, corresponding to the traditional opposition between body and language" (2015, 91). Hence, what can be observed in the play is also an opposition of language vs. body, the first being the attribute of men and the latter a female domain. Ojrzyńska further adds that Michael and Gerry, the lover of one of the sisters and Michael's father, use language either in order to convey the narration or to seduce, mislead the women, whereas the sisters prefer dancing as a way of dodging their problems (2015, 91). It is also important to underscore that the body in the play is, sometimes, something inferior to language, as some of the words spoken by Michael shape the sisters' story and the audience's knowledge and understanding of their behaviour. Additionally, the audience must rely on Michael's narration (i.e. words) as it is not possible to grasp certain messages conveyed by the play only on the basis of the dance.

According to Culler, the terms seen as inferior in binary oppositions can "be defined as complications, derivations, and deteriorations" (1982, 93) of the superior ones. Such is the case with all the above-mentioned binary oppositions and also with the ones that will follow. An important set of terms is also constituted by the public vs. the private. While quoting Glassie, Ojrzyńska mentions that "a typical Irish kitchen [was] an intermediary area between public and private space" (2015, 73). She immediately adds that "the kitchen in the play has lost its role as a space for integrating the members of the family with the local community" (2015, 73), as the sisters are lonely and not visited by any guests from the village and their house is also located on the outskirts. It can be argued that the sisters' alienation is accentuated by the fact that they live in a house located on the periphery of the town and spend most of their time in the kitchen, which should be a place for many meetings and social gatherings, but in the play becomes a venue where only the five spinsters dance and talk to one another. The sisters' kitchen may thus

be a site of conflict between the public and the private, where the former may be seen as a "deterioration" or a "complication" of the latter. The public is culturally constructed as better because it stresses communal good exercised through the scrutiny of all the people who can observe and control one another in public space. The private is something Other, something peculiar, endowed with connotations with potentially dishonest or improper deeds that can be committed in the privacy of somebody's home. In this way, the private (being in the play the sisters' house and especially their kitchen) becomes something odd, and morally secondary to the public space and thus suspicious.

The conflict between the public and the private makes it possible to introduce another binary opposition, namely that of purity vs. sexuality. As Lojek observes, the play "focuses on difficulties facing women struggling to realize themselves in a society whose revolution produced not greater opportunities for women but a codification of secular and religious paternalism" (2006, 78). Women have to comply with the rules of proper conduct enforced on them by men. In this binary opposition the superior term is, undoubtedly, purity, enforced by the local priest, whose gaze Kate is very much aware and afraid of. Purity is the term denoting "higher presence" as Derrida would have it, as, in the play, it is a state accepted by the institutions and laws controlling society. On the surface level, it can be claimed that the sisters are chaste, because they are five spinsters and do not have men in their lives, but, on the other hand, on a deeper level, the audience are aware of Chris's illegitimate child or Rose's "affair" with Danny Bradley. Additionally, Ojrzyńska asserts using Dean's words: "[d]ance is the only form of physicality associated with pleasure and, at least for Chris, with sexuality" (Ojrzyńska 2005, 81). Hence the sisters who long for a dance behave as if they also longed for some kind of sexual satisfaction. Thus, the craving for a dance and the final outburst of this yearning exercised by the sisters may, perhaps, be an indication that what they want is not only physical movement but a kind of sexual, orgasmic pleasure. This places the sisters on the sexual side of the opposition purity vs. sexuality and makes them function as the Other with regard to the standards of Purity prevalent in their society. McMullan mentions that

female performances [in Friel's plays] may provide liberation from confining gender roles, but they often reproduce uncritically the gendered construction of women as the non-rational and corporeal 'other' to both social and symbolic authority. (2006, 145)

This shows that, on the one hand, women are in an inferior position in the man vs. woman dichotomy, on the other hand, their association with “corporeal other” posits them as sexual creatures as opposed to the ideal purity endorsed by the male-governed institutions.

McMullan mentions more oppositions in *Dancing at Lughnasa*: “[i]n his initial speech, Michael sets up the play’s oppositions: Catholic/pagan; control/spontaneity; language/dancing; past/present” (1999, 98). The control/spontaneity opposition is contained in many of the previously mentioned ones, as it is man, the public, order, and language that are associated in the play with control, and it is woman, the private, disorder, and the dancing body that are aligned with spontaneity. Spontaneity and all the “feminine” terms mentioned along with it hint at freedom, bodily rebellion and women’s power that is constantly quenched by patriarchal men who want to keep in check women’s frivolous desires. As Ojrzyńska rightly hints, quoting Dean’s words, “[d]ance emphasizes the women’s bodies” (Ojrzyńska 2015, 81), and, one might add, in this way disturbs the order enforced by men.

The last binary opposition which slightly differs from all of the above-mentioned in the sense that it refers not so much to the male/female binary but relates to the subject of religion instead, is the dichotomy of Catholic vs. pagan. Robbins explains:

Michael talks of how Maggie wanted to name the radio Lugh, after the old Celtic god of the harvest, thus symbolically uniting the pagan past with the present age of progress. Jack’s descriptions of pagan practices in Africa parallel those of the Irish Festival of Lughnasa, making the point that both countries had Christianity imposed on them, layered on top of a pre-existent religion that on some level, the people remain faithful to. (1992, 85)

Robbins also acknowledges the opposition of the past and the present as it has been mentioned by McMullan, and, moreover, he connects it with paganism and progress respectively. The sisters’ longings for dancing and Jack’s memories of the Ryangan community are yearnings for the past that has now been replaced by the modern age, which is totally different and alien to them. The sisters hanker after times when they were young and had many opportunities ahead of them, which is contrasted with the pre-

sent that offers little consolation to them. Jack's memories function in quite the same way, as he often recalls the time when he met people

to offer sacrifice to Obi, [their] Great Goddess of the Earth, so that the crops will flourish. Or maybe to get in touch with [their] departed fathers for their advice and wisdom. Or maybe to thank the spirits of [their] tribe if they have been good to [them]; or to appease them if they're angry. (Friel 1999, 73)

The fact that Robbins juxtaposes pagan practices mentioned by Jack with Lughnasa Festivities serves as an additional marker of the fact that the binary opposition between pagan and Catholic is very volatile. Guided by the priest, the people of Ballybeg seemingly rebel against the pagan practices and it is obvious for everybody in this society that they should follow the strict code of conduct and Catholic moral rules, but such behaviour is visible only on the surface level. When one looks at the deep level, it is clearly discernible that society is involved in a conflict between the forces of paganism and Catholicism. People in the village are absorbed with what the harvest dances may bring and with celebrating Lughnasa on the back hills where the priest's watchful eye does not reach.

Robbins is right to point out that

[t]he sources of spiritual inspiration in Friel's plays exist outside the boundaries of traditional religion. The 'faith' or 'way of seeing' that Friel hoped was emerging from his work appears to be sourced more often in pagan traditions than in Christian ones. (Robbins 1992, 76)

Thus, it can be argued that some similarities of Lughnasa to pagan African rites show that the community of Ballybeg, the sisters, and especially Jack, are people who cannot fit their spirituality into the rigid rules of Catholic morality and that they search for spirituality, which the Church's practices and guidelines lack. Grant stresses that

[t]he importance of ceremony and ritual was central to the play and the sister's horrified reaction to the return of their uncle priest from Uganda with his enthusiastic reports of tribal rites, seen

against the background of so much domestic ceremonial in their everyday lives, was richly ironic. (Pine et al. 1990, 10)

Friel wants to stress this irony in order to show that the sisters are horrified by Jack's behaviour but this is, in fact, the kind of behaviour that they would like to perform themselves. The short period of their spontaneous dance is a sheer moment of precisely such a desire to forget about the gazes of others and let the body move similarly to a ritualistic tribal practice of pagan Africa.

It is the Other, the secondary term in the opposition Catholic vs. pagan, that is closer to the sisters' feelings and desires. This is an inferior term in the above relation, but just as the sisters are communally posited as inferior to men and to the public sphere of society as such, and their dancing bodies are secondary to language, they also feel more inclined to paganism. They become "the Other" to society in which they live and, above all, to the authoritative forces of the Church, but only such a position allows them to identify with what they actually crave for – freedom.

While elaborating on the binary oppositions and the notion of logocentrism as formulated by Derrida, it is essential to mention that the pattern of the binary terms may be deconstructed. As mentioned above, in every binary opposition there is one superior term, and "the Other," that is the inferior one, which is always culturally constructed as a mere supplement of the former. Derrida focuses on the inherent conflict in each of the binary oppositions to point out that what has always been marginalized is, in fact, the structural backbone of the logic behind the superior term as, for example, in the case of presence vs. absence:

... the issue has been the hierarchical opposition presence/absence. A deconstruction would involve the demonstration that for presence to function as it is said to, it must have the qualities that supposedly belong to its opposite, absence. (Culler 1982, 95)

Thus, what distinguishes the superior notion from the inferior one can be undermined, just as what defines the secondary notion can be shown to be the basis of the definition of the primary one.

Following this argumentation, it can be noticed that although the sisters have a conviction that how Jack behaves and what he talks about have a strong

sense of otherness to them, Jack is no different or "Other" with regard to Ballybeg, as the whole place is full of rituals because people yearn to see and experience them on the back hills. There are many ritualistic performances in Ballybeg, as we learn from the character of Rose: "First they light a bonfire beside a spring well. Then they dance round it. Then they drive their cattle through the flames to banish the devil out of them" (Friel 1999, 29). This is exactly in accordance with what Jack describes when he talks about tribal beliefs and when he depicts how African people worship the dead. It cannot, therefore, be definitely stated that paganism, indeed, functions as an objectively secondary term to Catholicism in Ballybeg, for the formally Catholic community views the idiosyncrasies of Jack's native-style behaviour and beliefs as different or "Other" only to try to expel its own demons.

While elaborating on the subject of deconstruction, Culler mentions Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his discussion of "education as a supplement to nature" (1982, 104). Culler observes that according to Rousseau:

[n]ature is in principle complete, a natural plenitude to which education is an external addition. But the description of this supplementation reveals an inherent lack in nature; nature must be completed—supplemented—by education if it is to be truly itself: the right education is needed if human nature is to emerge as it truly is. The logic of supplementarity thus makes nature the prior term, a plenitude that is there at the start, but reveals an inherent lack or absence within it, so that education, the additional extra, also becomes an essential condition of that which it supplements. (1982, 104)

The example provided by Rousseau and used by Culler while explaining the process of deconstruction is applicable to each binary opposition that is introduced in the present article. In the opposition man vs. woman, it is the female part that seems to be inferior but in order for the man to function, "the Other" term, that is woman, has to be present. Although woman seems an "external addition," it turns out that man lacks some complementation and has to be "supplemented" by woman. The patriarchal rules that men impose as being the forces of either the State or the Church would not be possible if there were no women on whom these rules could be enforced. Thus, within the framework of Western culture woman

has to function, as it was already ordained by God when he constructed the woman from man's rib, in order to be a supplementation for the forces that men generate and embody.

The same description is applicable to the opposition between language and dancing and language and the body. Dance and body function as additional terms in order for the language to fully show its powers of control and forces of restriction imposed on the female dancing body. In this way, an alleged degree of order is posited within society, which conceals the inequalities and hierarchies of the binary oppositions that underpin it. Sexuality is, in turn, the secondary term in the opposition of purity vs. sexuality, as in order for the chaste behaviour to be distinguished and formulated there is a need for the sexuality to be described and for some individuals to be denounced as non-compliant and immoral. The same logic is relevant to the oppositions between order and disorder, the public and the private, or Catholic and pagan.

Dancing at Lughnasa shows that these binary terms actively operate in the play and structure it; in each case the superior terms, though culturally constructed as ordinary, genuine and primary, involve "the Other," "inferior" elements in their constitution. In this way, the notion of otherness functions in the play and is a powerful accent facilitating the understanding of the play and its oppositions.

The play stresses "the otherness," which is present in the sisters' lives and shapes the action of the play. Despite it being visible in the binary oppositions which have been already mentioned, "the Other" is visible also in the construction of some characters, especially Jack, or of Ballybeg itself. Coming back from Ryanga, Father Jack is a priest who "went native," and he is, hence, one whose characteristics are very similar to those attributed to the Orient, understood not so much as a notion of the actual geographical East – Jack comes from Africa rather than the Middle or Far East – but as a cultural construct set in opposition to the rational Western world of Christendom. In order to contextualise Jack's otherness, the notion of Orientalism as put forward by Edward Said can be of great help.

When the oriental people are described in Western discourse, they are thought to be secondary to those living in the West, and as French philologist and historian living in the nineteenth century, Ernest Renan, put it, "[e]very person, however slightly he may be acquainted with the affairs of our time, sees clearly the actual inferiority of Mohammedan countries"

(Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2001, 51). He adds that it is also applicable to Africa as

[a]ll those who have been in the East, or in Africa are struck by the way in which the mind of the true believer is fatally limited, by the species of iron circle that surrounds his head, rendering it absolutely closed to knowledge. (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2001, 51)

The oriental people are thus seen in the West as limited, inferior to the westerners and narrow-minded. This description is very similar to how Jack's behaviour is interpreted by the people of Ballybeg, who do not visit him and thus exclude him from the proper society. Jack's arrival also brings nearer the lingering doom of the family, as we are informed by Michael that "The parish priest didn't take her [Kate] back when the new term began; although that had more to do with Father Jack than with falling numbers" (Friel 1999, 64). Jack becomes "the Other" of the village and by being an inferior element inadvertently makes the whole family become "the Other" as well, even if the sisters are often horrified by Jack's pagan practices, as if knowing that they all will have a negative reception in the community.

Jack's otherness has geo-political and cultural characteristics, since coming from Ryanga he immediately becomes "the Other" and is excluded from society. As Ashcroft and Ahluwalia assert, "the 'production' of Orientalist knowledge became a continual and uncritical 'reproduction' of various assumptions and beliefs" (2001, 51). This is just what happens to Jack when he is excluded from Ballybeg as being problematic and different. Although the description of Edward Said's Orientalism is always based on the distinction between the Occident and the Orient,³ his description of the Oriental is fully justifiable when it comes to "the otherness" of Jack, as Jack's rejection works precisely in the same way as with the Orientals being seen as "'primitive' ... 'exotic' and 'mysterious'" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2001, 53). Ashcroft and Ahluwalia mention also the "imaginative geography [that] legitimates a vocabulary, a representative discourse peculiar to the understanding

³ "Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (Orient, the East, 'them')" (Said 2003, 43).

of the Orient that becomes *the*⁴ way in which the Orient is known" (2001, 61). Jack's behaviour is thus interpreted on the basis of the country from which he has just returned. He becomes a native African to the people of Ballybeg and a subject to be scrutinised but at the same time kept apart from the local and Christian community.

Ashcroft and Ahluwalia also elaborate on the fact that, owing to the discourse of Orientalism, the repressed communities from "the Other" lands can also see themselves through the lenses of the colonisers and, in this way, "adopt the imperial view of themselves as 'intuitive' and 'emotional,' asserting a distinctiveness from the 'rational' and 'unemotional' Europeans" (2001, 63). The Irish were perceived by the British as savage and emotional, thus the colonialist belief that Irish people's playfulness should be somehow controlled and kept in bonds was something to enforce. Kiberd is right to point out that

[t]he Irish missionary campaign had no ulterior political imperial motive, such as disfigured other European efforts; and this meant that its exponents were more willing to identify with the struggles of native peoples for self-development. Both sides were involved, after all, in the attempt at decolonisation. (2001, 27)

Kiberd sees that Friel makes many comparisons between Ireland and Africa (2001, 28), and Jack may be an indication that his being "the Other" in the Ballybeg community parallels Ireland's "otherness" in relation to England.

Alluding to the notion of logocentrism as understood by Derrida, it can be stated that in the binary opposition of the Occident vs. the Orient, "the Oriental culture and perspective is viewed as a deviation, a perversion, and thus is accorded an inferior status" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2001, 64). Thus, Jack exemplifies the binary opposition of Ballybeg vs. Africa, in which his African practices and beliefs are placed as inferior in terms of the Catholicism prevalent in the community of Ballybeg.

As Said himself explains,

⁴ Emphasis original.

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient ... in short, Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (2003, 3)

Jack is perceived in Ballybeg as a visitor from the other land, from Africa, which people do not know, and thinking about which they use only some stereotypical and hearsay notions. Although we are not provided with direct quotes from the people in the play, the fact that Jack is "the Other" is evident by the lack of visits in the sisters' house, and also by the fact that we learn that, upon returning,

he didn't say Mass that following Monday. In fact he never said Mass again. And the neighbours stopped enquiring about him. And his name never again appeared in the *Donegal Enquirer*. And of course there was never a civic reception with bands and flags and speeches. (Friel 1999, 92)

Orientalism, according to Said, is

A *distribution*⁵ of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration*⁶ ... of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident). (2003, 12)

Thus, people from Ballybeg are prejudiced against the one who has come back from far-away Uganda and, additionally, there is a feeling that everybody knows that he "went native" there and this is why he has been sent back.

Said cites Cromer when he wants to show his readers how the oriental people were perceived by Europeans. The Occidental perspective was associated with reason whereas the Oriental people were thought to be intellectually inferior. Their reasoning was said to be illogical, somewhat distorted and narrow. They were believed to have to consider their statements longer

⁵ Emphasis original.

⁶ Emphasis original.

than Europeans, because they were viewed as narrow-minded, not to say stupid. They contradicted themselves, because they were not sure what they wanted to say (Said 2003, 38). Furthermore, Said stresses that in the description of the Orient, as used by Cromer and Balfour, “[t]he Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different;’ thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (2003, 40). All these descriptions fit very well Jack’s characteristics in the play. The memories of the practices, beliefs and traditions that Jack mentions are recognised as improper and irrational in the Christian community of Ballybeg, which Kate highlights when rebuking Jack for asking Chris if she has other love-children:

She certainly has not, Jack; and strange as it may seem to you, neither has Agnes nor Rose nor Maggie nor myself. No harm to Ryanga but you’re home in Donegal now and much as we cherish love-children here they are not exactly the norm. (Friel 1999, 64)

Additionally, Ojrzyńska is very right to observe the childlike qualities which the sisters attribute to Jack. When describing the situation where Kate interrupts Jack’s dancing with two pieces of wood, which later serve Michael to make the kites, Ojrzyńska states that Kate’s request for Jack to leave the pieces of wood “is not only an effective way of convincing her brother to return the stolen property, but also an instance of Kate trivializing his unruly behaviour as childish or, perhaps, senile” (2015, 85). Thus, Kate perceives Jack’s behaviour as that of the Other and Oriental-like, which for her is, as Said would have it, quite childlike and different. Moreover, Ojrzyńska adds that “Kate’s ultimate reaction is far from surprising, for the traditions of native Ryangans must have been perceived as savage and particularly sinful according to the Irish Catholic criteria of the times” (85).

As Said observes,

[o]n the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things. (2003, 49)

Said mentions Arabs and also some other nations such as the Egyptians, but all the adjectives ascribed to the Oriental, and at the same time "the Other" nations, are, as it was already mentioned and elaborated on, fully applicable to Jack himself. Jack is "the Other" of the Ballybeg community, but it is an interesting fact that the Ballybeg community itself is not so pure, Catholic or moral, because, as it was stated before, people there are very much interested in the Lughnasa Festivities and Lughnasa is the topic mentioned in the streets of Ballybeg. Kate is very much afraid of what the local priest would say, but she cannot resist "the Other" forces and dancing, which is a free and quite a ritualistic kind of movement.

To conclude, *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a play where the presence of "the Other" is clearly visible. Many binary oppositions can be distinguished in the play, namely man vs. woman, language vs. dancing, language vs. body, purity vs. sexuality, order vs. disorder, public vs. private, and, finally, Catholic vs. pagan. These numerous conceptual oppositions which function in the play facilitate the understanding of the conflicts within the drama. In each of the oppositions one term can be discerned that is the superior one, and, at the same time, "the otherness" of the second term is stressed, for it is in each case a notion that is posited as a derivation or deprivation of the former one. It is a term that is deemed lacking and believed to be secondary. Using deconstruction as formulated by Derrida, however, one may notice that in order for the superior term to function, the inferior one must also co-exist with it and, in fact, the worse term is the basis for the constitution of the superior one. Thus, in every opposition the unprivileged term becomes a necessary existence, and in this way, woman is the root for the man to be present, the body is necessary for language to come into existence and so on.

In the play, the existing conflicts have to take place in order to show the true meaning of the drama and the fact that

the position of the Mundy household [is placed] between areas representing conflicting values, which results in the characters' need to constantly negotiate between the pagan, and the Catholic, the foreign and the local, the bodily and the verbal, and the real and the imagined, and which finds an accurate reflection in Friel's use of dance. (Ojrzyńska 2015, 64)

Moreover, “the Other”, as formulated and elaborated on by Edward Said, is of great help in showing that Jack’s behaviour and the beliefs and rituals presented by him are regarded by the community and even by his sisters as “Oriental” and “Other.” Jack’s “going native” and the fact that Ballybeg is so much against it exemplifies another conflict, namely Ballybeg vs. Africa, a version of the Occident vs. Orient dichotomy. This conflict is especially significant, as the people, even his sisters, who trivialise Jack’s behaviour or see him as “the Other” and different, are also filled with the desire “to be in touch with some otherness” (Friel 1999, 108). At the end of the play the readers are informed by Michael that

each new [i.e. Jack’s] revelation startled – shocked – stunned poor Aunt Kate. Until finally she hit on a phrase that appeased her: ‘his own distinctive spiritual search’. ‘Leaping around a fire and offering a little hen to Uka or Ito or whoever is not religion as I was taught it and indeed know it,’ she would say with a defiant toss of her head. ‘But then Jack must make his own distinctive search.’ (Friel 1999, 92)

And this final remark on the part of Michael can easily serve as a closing commentary on this article, which focuses on “the Other” in *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

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