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MCDONAGHLAND AS A GLOBAL VILLAGE

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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I declare that the following diploma thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michaela Konárková". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michaela Konárková

Prague, January 14, 2006

Děkuji Ondřejovi, Pavlovi a mamince

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MCDONAGHLAND AS A GLOBAL VILLAGE

0. Introduction

Parody as the 'mode' of the ex-centric, of those who are marginalized by a dominant ideology has [...] been a favourite postmodern literary form of writers in places like Ireland and Canada, working as they do from both inside and outside a culturally different and dominant context.¹

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The objective of this essay is to explore various possible perspectives of looking at Martin McDonagh's work. The author of so far six extremely successful plays premiered between the years 1996-2003 has engaged much critical attention as belonging both to the British and Irish theatrical context. However, another important circumstance of his work is that of the globalized, supranational context. I would like to prove that it is in this context where the parodic strategy of his plays is most powerful. The theoretical background of this thesis is represented by Marshall McLuhan's book *War and Peace in the Global Village*, Zygmund Bauman's book *Globalization* and Linda Hutcheon's *Poetics of Postmodernism*.

Titik ?

Although McDonagh's parents both come from the West of Ireland, McDonagh is also a true Londoner, having spent all his life in South London. His experience of Ireland is limited to shorter stays and the regular contact with the Irish

immigrant community.² Nevertheless, five of his six plays – *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Skull in Connemara*, *The Lonesome West*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* – are set in the most iconic part of Ireland, the West. The first three plays together form a trilogy called by the name of the village of its setting *The Leenane Trilogy*, the latter two plays represent two parts of the proposed *Aran Islands Trilogy*. (His latest play to this date – *The Pillowman* – is set in an east European country and therefore it is not included in the scope of this essay.)

McDonagh, though, is not yet another playwright of Irish origin engaged in the representation of the Irish identity and Irishness in the realist tradition of the Western peasant play. His context is also that of the in-yer-face theatre sensibility that began to form in the second half of the 1990s. The outstanding British critic Aleks Sierz included McDonagh to his book on ^{in-yer-face?} in-yer-face theatre due to McDonagh's engagement with violence and "pessimism about humanity."³ The specific Irish locale does not determine any notion of authenticity of Ireland in McDonagh's plays, as he merely uses the icons of Irishness, such as the proverbial combination of friendliness and fierceness of the people, the beauty of their nature, their reverence for tradition and the ideal of a peaceful rural life in symbiosis with nature.

All of these signs of Irishness have become a part of the global culture. The parodic approach to the icons allows McDonagh the "revisitations of the past."⁴ As Linda Hutcheon writes "to parody is not to destroy the past, it means both to enshrine

¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge 1992) 35.

² John Waters, "The Irish Mummy: The Plays and Purpose of Martin McDonagh", *Druids, Dudes and Beauty Queens. The Changing Face of Irish Theatre*, ed. Dermot Bolger (New Island Books, 2001) 36.

³ Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001) 219.

⁴ Sierz 225.

and to question it.”⁵ Definitely, McDonagh is engaged with the tradition of the western play, despite his claims that he has never read the basis of its canon, Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*. McDonagh’s parody, though, is not aimed at Ireland and the Irish (although his protagonists are portrayed in a very unmerciful light) but rather at the very genre of the realist plays. By setting his plays in traditional rural settings, he “instigates in his audiences particular genre expectations” and as Pilný [?] promptly adds, “[t]hese he proceeds to thoroughly subvert.”⁶

As I have already mentioned, McDonagh is also engaged in another kind of parody. After the expectations of a realist genre are thwarted, it becomes clear that despite the exact location of the plays in the West of Ireland the community portrayed is an artistic creation, not an image of reality. That is why Aleks Sierz called the location portrayed by the playwright McDonaghland, suggesting its ✓ fictitious character.

I would like to suggest that the McDonaghland that the protagonists inhabit is a global village, which is a term that tries to capture the state of interconnectedness of different regions in the world through various media. The conditions of life in the global village are described in McLuhan’s book and in Bauman’s chapter on “Tourists and Vagabonds.” Although McLuhan is optimistic about the future and claims that the fragmentarity and violence of the global village is only a result of a transitory period bridging the era of fragmentarity into that of tribality, Bauman is pessimistic about human nature and the developments that form it.

The chaotic condition of life in the global village as portrayed by McDonagh produces humorous situations in the plays. The plays are also bursting with brutality

⁵ Hutcheon 126.

as are contemporary television and films. Within the sensibility of the nineties drama in Britain, McDonagh decided to shock through a medium that is not easy to switch off or that is not consumed in the quiet of a living room. The brutality is shared.

Unlike the traditional Anglo-Irish canon and even the ~~in-fer-face~~ ^{in-fer-face} plays that deal with serious topics in a serious manner and through poetic and violent language respectively, McDonagh thinks that “a play should be a thrill.”⁷ That is why the playwright confronts his version of reality in Ireland with the cinematographic one: “I’m coming to the theatre with a disrespect for it. I’m coming from a film fan’s perspective on theatre.”⁸ Like in films, the dialogues in his plays consist of short lines and though a lot of the humour revolves around language, compared to the Irish canon, the plays are action centred. By attracting attention to the action, McDonagh “is restoring the original dimension of drama as ‘action.’”⁹

On the other hand, such writing is a necessity in the times of the electronic media. As Clare Wallace argues, “theatre at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century faces more competition than ever before.”¹⁰ McDonagh reacts to this situation by employing melodramatic, grotesque and violent images and banter in order to compete with the stimulation which the audiences are used to getting from the electronic screens.

Using Bauman’s description of the relationship between the inhabitants of two opposing worlds, the tourists and the vagabonds,¹¹ I would like to suggest that McDonagh’s plays are parodies precisely of such relationship of the disadvantaged

⁶ Ondřej Pilný, “Martin McDonagh: Parody? Satire? Complacency?” *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2. 2004: 228.

⁷ Alannah Weston, “Starlife”, *The Daily Telegraph* (magazine), 12 July. 1997: 74.

⁸ Fintan O’Toole, “Nowhere Man,” *Irish Times* 26 Apr. 1997.

⁹ Werner Huber, “The Plays of Martin McDonagh”, *Twentieth-Century Theatre and Drama in English. Festschrift for Heinz Kosok on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Jurgen Kamm (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1999) 570.

¹⁰ Clare Wallace, “Versions and Reversions: The new Old Story and Contemporary Irish Drama”, *Engaging Modernity*, eds. Michael Boss and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2003) 113.

towards the advantaged, those with means against those ~~that~~ are without. Both groups' image of 'the others' is influenced by the exchange of icons produced by the different worlds.

The icons of Ireland that McDonagh's plays peddle are already an established part of the global exchange of icons, in which case it may seem that his plays, too, cannot be but icons without a deeper meaning, as they have to be globally intelligible. Unless the plays are seen as parodies of the situation in the global village, they may be viewed as mere commercial product on the market of theatre plays, and a successful product indeed. One of the reasons for that may be, for example, the violence in his plays, which is – in line with contemporary fashion – not just suggested but graphic. It would be possible to think that it does not say or mean more than an exposed brutality, as it has become the unifying product of globalization. This could be true were it not for McDonagh's fifth staged play, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, where the violence is so thematized and over-exaggerated, that it becomes its own target in McDonagh's 'political' satire.

¹¹ Bauman, *Globalizace, Důsledky pro člověka* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 2000).

I. McDonagh and the Contexts

I. 1 Martin McDonagh and How He Wrote the Plays

The aim of this chapter is to introduce Martin McDonagh, his background, personality and the era that surrounds his dramatic activity.

McDonagh entered the British and Irish scene with a 'meteoric rise', the image of a rough man¹² and an exciting playwright. After his tremendous arrival with *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, the newly emerged playwright received great critical acclaim and media attention for his talent of dialogue writing, specific humour, language and the entertainment offered by his work.

Nevertheless, after the emergence of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and the rest of *The Leenane Trilogy*, attention was brought to possibly problematic aspects of his plays. As Vladimír Mikulka summarizes, McDonagh is most frequently criticised for: cannibalising other Irish and Anglo-American authors, weak postmodern pastiche which is amusing but shallow, creating nothing new, only parodying and paraziting on a rural Irish play, mechanically using the principle of a sudden twist, vulgarity and tasteless humour and thus pandering to the TV audiences or being cold and cynical. The greatest medial reproach, however, was caused by his cynical and clichéd portrayal of Ireland and the Irish.¹³

On the other hand, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is considered by some critics as a progress in his dramatic career for its engagement with a hot political issue - the

¹² As Sean O'Hagan writes that McDonagh "would be known primarily not as a new major writer, but as a man who told James Bond to "fuck off", referring to an incident at the 1996 Evening Standard Theatre Awards evening. "That wanker journalist, Max Hastings was toasting the Queen... me and my brother, John, were taking the piss, and next thing I know there's a hand on my shoulder, and Sean Connery is standing over me, saying, 'Shut up, or leave', in that James Bond voice of his. Quoted in: Sean O'Hagan, "The Wild West," 10, *June* 2004
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/weekend/story/0,3605,461983,00.html>>.

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Northern Irish terrorism. Currently his image is that of a sobering though still ambitious man in his thirties, who now takes it as his duty to challenge the audiences by provocative violence and attack their nostalgia for the past.

Martin McDonagh was born in 1970 among the mostly Irish immigrant community in South London. His parents came to London from the West of Ireland with a wave of economic immigrants in the 1960's and decided to return to Ireland in the early nineties.¹⁴ After leaving his studies at the age of 16, McDonagh decided for a most comfortable way of earning his living: inspired by his older brother, he began to write screenplays and radio plays. They were plenty (22) and not at all entirely successful, although *The Wolf and the Woodcutter* was awarded a prize at a London festival of radio plays in 1995. In one of his early interviews, McDonagh states the motivation for beginning of his career as a playwright: "I only started writing plays because I had been rejected everywhere else. It was the only literary art form left. [...] I think stage plays are one of the easiest art forms. Just get the dialect, a bit of a story and a couple of nice characters and you're away."¹⁵

And indeed, McDonagh's stage debut, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* was produced in 1996 as a significant joint project of The Druid Theatre Company of Galway and London Royal Court Theatre Upstairs and won the author three prestigious awards: an Award for Most Promising Playwright; an Evening Standard Drama Award for Most Promising Newcomer to the British Stage and Best Fringe Theatre Play. It is also the play that started McDonagh's triumphant ride on the stages of the USA after the Tony-awarded Broadway production in 1998. In 1997, *A Skull in Connemara* and *The Lonesome West* were produced simultaneously in

¹³ Vladimír Mikulka, "Martin McDonagh: Z Londýna do Prahy (přes Irsko)," Kritická příloha Revolver Revue č. 25 2003: 33.

¹⁴ Joseph Feeney, SJ, "Martin McDonagh: Dramatist of the West", Studies 87: 345 1998: 25.

¹⁵ Jane Edwardes, "Into the West," Time Out 22 Nov. – 4 Oct. 1996.

Dublin and London as well as *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the opening part of *The Aran Islands Trilogy*. This abundance of premieres enhanced McDonagh's powerful medial image by frequent suggestions that McDonagh had become the first playwright after Shakespeare to have four plays premiered within one season.¹⁶ The second part of the proposed Aran Islands Trilogy, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, though written in 1995 was not produced until 2002,¹⁷ after several years of disputes caused by its provocative topic – Irish terrorism. After it was refused for 'artistic' reasons by the Royal Court and the National Theatre, McDonagh "vowed not to work in England again until it was staged."¹⁸ *The Lieutenant* was finally produced by Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford upon Avon. After a scandalous success the play was transferred to the commercial West End Garrick Theatre. The third part of the Aran Trilogy, *The Banshees of Inisherin*, is still waiting for its production.

To identify the multiple character of his plays, it is necessary to explore the possible contexts of McDonagh's writing. In the following chapters I would like to explore to which dramatic and cultural tradition McDonagh belongs. Two dramatic contexts are at hand: that of his British contemporaries and the context of Irish realist tradition. Both these contexts are in McDonagh's work incorporated into a kind of wider, global aesthetic.

I. 2 The Context of In-Yer-Face Theatre

The renowned British theatre critic Aleks Sierz included Martin McDonagh in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre, British Drama Today* (2000) as the bearer of a certain sensibility that has come into existence in mid-1990s when more and more

¹⁶ Mikulka 30.

writers produced plays that were explicitly and directly “blatant, aggressive or emotionally dark.”¹⁹ The turning point in the 1990s drama was the revolutionary production of Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* on 18 January 1995. Its impact can be compared to that of the first night of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* in 1956 in the same theatre: “*Blasted* was both shockingly radical in form and deeply unsettling in content. It was attacked by critics with unprecedented fury and the resulting uproar demonstrated that, far from being irrelevant, theatre could be highly provocative and controversial.”²⁰ *Blasted* was staged at The Royal Court by its new director Stephen Daldry together with other totally new ‘provocative’ plays by young writers like Mark Ravenhill (*Shopping and Fucking*), Philip Ridley (*Ghost from a Perfect Place*), Patrick Marber (*Closer*) or Anthony Nielson, David Eldridge, Joe Penhall, Rebecca Prichard and Martin McDonagh.

Despite its radical novelty in portraying contemporary reality in a shocking manner, such strategy, as Sierz argues, has roots in tradition, as “drama has always represented human cruelty,”²¹ which is the reason why the work of these artists is often called ‘neojacobeanism’, or ‘new brutalism’. Another name, ‘the cool wave’ stemmed, as Sierz explains, from the “highly hyped moment of cultural confidence known as Cool Britannia.”²² This name could be a good marketing device but Sierz argues for the name ~~in-ye-r-face~~ *I-Y-F*:

4 — “The widest definition of in-ye-r-face theatre is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation.”²³ The characteristic features of the new writing indicating that a

¹⁷ Mikulka 35.

¹⁸ Dominic Cavendish, “He’s Back, and Only Half as Arrogant,” *Sunday Telegraph* 6 Apr. 2001.

¹⁹ Sierz 30.

²⁰ Sierz xii.

²¹ Sierz 30.

²² Sierz xii.

²³ Sierz 4.

theatre is in-yer-face are: filthy language, unmentionable subjects, nudity, sex, humiliation and violence.²⁴ In-yer-face authors use shock tactics to transform the content of plays, with the tool of a “direct, raw and explicit”²⁵ language. Similarly, one of the main principles is the change in the relationship between the stage and the audience. When the audiences witness an unpleasant scene close up and moreover are forced to share the same atmosphere with other people, the force invades the personal space of the spectators. Shock tactics is used as one way of waking up the audiences and provoking, attacking the prejudices of sex, race, class, etc.: “instead of being observers willing to grapple with the issues raised by the play, [...] spectators had become part of the problem.”²⁶

Sierz distinguishes two kinds of in-yer-face theatre: hot and cool. The hot plays use aesthetics of extremism, open aggression and heightened emotions that all create an unforgettable experience. Cool plays, on the other hand, use distancing devices, for example that of comedy: “[c]omedy is the most effective device and can sometimes completely defuse an emotionally fraught situation. After all, a common reaction to terror is either to ignore it or to laugh at it.”²⁷ Cool plays are characteristically written in a more naturalistic style and/or traditional structure.

As Sierz puts it, “[t]he most successful plays are often those that seduce the audience with a naturalistic mood and then hit it with intense emotional material, or those where an experiment in form encourages people to question their assumptions.”²⁸ Thus McDonagh’s work can be placed into the stream of cool plays. McDonagh’s naturalistic set introduces the audience into a typical rural kitchen, that

²⁴ Sierz 5.

²⁵ Sierz xiii.

²⁶ Sierz 32.

²⁷ Sierz 6.

²⁸ Sierz 5.

becomes the site of a traditionally plotted and compact ‘well-made play,’²⁹ using the tactics of tension and suspension. This mood is gradually subverted by violence. The shock in McDonagh is made mainly “by the disrespect for Irish traditions, verbal inventiveness and confident theatricality.”³⁰

Sierz states, that “[s]ome shocking emotional material can be made more acceptable by being placed within a theatrical frame that is traditional, either in its tone or form.”³¹ In that sense Mikulka sees McDonagh as an author with “a surprisingly conservative ideology.”³² Unlike most of his in-ye-face contemporaries he ignores the typical urban or political issues of drugs, homosexuality or ethnic minorities by placing his characters to the Irish backwaters, where they “get drunk, lie, kill and are foul in a traditional way.”³³

As McDonagh, the in-ye-face authors of the new sensibility were challenging the oppositions as they employed the strategy that “[o]ften shock comes from demolishing the simple binary oppositions that hold society together”³⁴ such as normal/abnormal, healthy/unhealthy, good/evil, true/untrue and what is central for this thesis – the global and the local.

In the rest of *The Trilogy* Sierz sees the same postmodern trick repeated in variations on the futility of life in such a community. Although for Sierz McDonagh lacks compassion for the characters, he still views McDonagh’s drama as intellectually exciting, because he “offers a method of attacking nostalgia”³⁵ A country needs to break its cultural myths of the past, and McDonagh shatters it to pieces.

²⁹ Sierz 221.

³⁰ Sierz 225.

³¹ Sierz 6.

³² Mikulka 34.

³³ Mikulka 34.

³⁴ Sierz 9.

³⁵ Sierz 225.

I. 3 The Context of Irish Realism

Most of these postmodernist contradictory texts are also specifically parodic in their intertextual relation to the traditions and conventions of the genres involved

*[...] it is often ironic discontinuity that is revealed at the heart of continuity, difference at the heart of similarity.*³⁶

2 section
In this chapter I will focus on the local aspect of McDonagh's plays. The fact that McDonagh has situated his plays in Connemara and the Aran Islands places him within a rich Irish literary canon of the playwrights of the West. Moreover, in his plays the author echoes these literary precursors, most significantly J.M Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*³⁷ and challenges the iconographic image of the West that was created by the Revivalists.

According to Mária Kurdi, the genre of the 'western play' and "the dramatic heritage of Synge seems to incarnate the greatest challenge for [McDonagh]."³⁸ Despite the fact that McDonagh refuses to be aware of his dramatic predecessors, several analyses of his work consider him to be Synge's direct descendant. In his

³⁶ Hutcheon 11.

³⁷ Synge was also a visitor to the West of Ireland, an Anglo-Irish citizen, who met W.B. Yeats in Paris in 1896 and may have been inspired by him to visit the Aran Islands. There he got to know life that is so hard to find an expression for and he (re)created it in a new, artistic form. After his return from the Islands, Synge cooperated with the newly established Abbey Theatre. The premiere audience of *The Playboy of the Western World* in January 1907 was infuriated by the images of a descriptive and horrifyingly real violence underlined by the raw language of the play that was not afraid to pronounce words deeply uncomfortable for the Irish ears – moreover, these "offences" took place on the sacred soil of the National Theatre which was meant to support the Irish people in their pride. Instead, from the point of view of the Sinn Féiners "the enterprise of Synge, WBY and Gregory represented the corruption and decadence of modern Ireland."

R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 563.

³⁸ Mária Kurdi, "Ireland mustn't be such a bad place, so, if the Yanks want to come here to do their filming,' Reflections on the West and Irishness in Martin McDonagh's Plays", *Codes and Masks:*

italic?

essay “*The Outpouring of a Morbid, Unhealthy Mind’: The Critical Condition of Synge and McDonagh*,” Shaun Richards views McDonagh’s achievement as “a contemporary engagement with the world staged by Synge.”³⁹

In *The Playboy*, Synge ~~has~~ portrayed a close-knit community in a secluded village in the West of Ireland, where people long for distraction and stories of glamorous deeds. (In Synge’s drama, the characters are anxious to admire the violent deed of the hero, Christy Mahon, who claims to have killed his father and whose story of killing gradually gains a sensational dimension before it is thwarted by the arrival of the merely injured father, who eventually has to save his son/the false murderer from the hands of the disappointed countrymen.) As well as in *The Playboy*, McDonagh’s world is full of deprivation and both verbal and graphic onstage violence.

In his plays, McDonagh reacts to his Irish predecessors and the iconography that has been established by the Revivalist movement and continually developed since then. The genre that McDonagh pretends to work within and which he satirizes is Irish dramatic realism. As Pilný writes, what counts for an Irish play is characterised by “the predominance of the realistic mode.”⁴⁰ It was already the Irish Literary Theatre led by William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and later – when transformed into the Irish National Theatre Society – by John Millington Synge that concentrated at the true representation of Ireland and “Irishness”. The theatre that later became the Irish National Theatre – The Abbey – in 1904, rose from a programme of opposition against the derogatory version of Irish characters as colonised drunkards and foolish figures – the Stage Irishmen. What customarily

Aspects of Identity in Contemporary Irish Plays in an Intercultural Context (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2000) 41.

³⁹ Shaun Richards, “The Outpouring of a Morbid, Unhealthy Mind’: The Critical Condition of Synge and McDonagh”, Irish University Review 33.1. Spring/Summer 2003: 209.

counted for a Stage Irishman was among other things the comical, loquacious, wild but also amiable native of the island.⁴¹ The characters have a heavy brogue, dirty and shabby clothes, red hair, they boast and are pugnacious, “always anxious to back a quarrel, and peerless for cracking skulls at Donnybrook Fair.”⁴² The Irish Revivalists and those associated with the Celtic Renaissance reacted passionately to such representations of the Irish. “We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of ancient idealism.”⁴³

In the chapter Varieties of Celticism, W.J. Mc Cormack claims that thanks to “the popular perception of a Celtic fringe as an aesthetic survival in the industrial age,”⁴⁴ the late nineteenth century Revivalists created the figure of a primitive but proud peasant Celt that became idealized and a subject of frequently produced peasant plays at the Irish National Theatre.⁴⁵

The outcome of such idealism as a version of the national identity has necessarily become a “target of critique and parody by younger generations of playwrights.”⁴⁶ Also the traditional setting of the Revivalists’ plays in the region of the West of Ireland (a wildly beautiful ground nursing the virtuous Irish peasants who live in a continual struggle against the sea and rough weather conditions) has transformed the perception of the area into one of paradise. As Kurdi argues, the

⁴⁰ Pilný, Martin McDonagh: Parody? Satire? Complacency? 225.

⁴¹ Maurice Bourgeois, John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre, (London: Constable&Company Ltd, 1913) 65-68.

⁴² Bourgeois 109-110.

⁴³ Lady Augusta Gregory, Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1972) 20.

⁴⁴ W.J. Mc Cormack, From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994) 228.

⁴⁵ According to Mc Cormack, E. Renan, describes Celts as “a race, living virtually outside history, materially disadvantaged, but wonderfully spiritual and poetical. [...] The Celt vicariously maintains a piety and nobility now rendered impossible for Normans or Britons obliged to live in the world of time, happiness, plenty, and vulgarity. He is a godsend.” Mc Cormack 227.

West of Ireland is both “a geographical and historical unit as well as a cultural construct.”⁴⁷

✓ McDonagh works with the expectations of this construct. As the director of The Druid Theatre Company Garry Hynes states, had McDonagh’s plays been taken to a theatre workshop “he’d have been told ‘we don’t write plays like that anymore.’”⁴⁸ In the same way, in the introduction to McDonagh’s collected plays, Fintan O’Toole compares the appearance of the plays to “the superimposed pictures [of] a black-and-white still from an Abbey play of the 1950s: west of Ireland virgins and London building sites, tyrannical mothers and returned Yanks, family feuds, clerical crises of faith.”⁴⁹ Thus, in contrast with the advertised connection with ~~in-~~ ^{face} ~~face~~ theatre and shocking material to be found in the plays, the audiences are not introduced to any present day urban setting but a typical West of Ireland countryside.

I. 4 McDonagh’s Subversion of Irish Realism

Leenane, the setting of McDonagh’s completed trilogy, is a small village in North Connemara. The Leenane plays are all set in a “living-room/kitchen of a rural cottage”⁵⁰ except for scene 2 in *A Skull*, which is set in “a rocky cemetery”⁵¹ and a scene in *The Lonesome West* that is set on a “lakeside jetty.”⁵² Each play presents a

⁴⁶ Ondřej Pilný, “Proměny irského dramatu,” Program Národního divadla k inscenaci Conor McPherson, *Na cestě duchů* (*The Weir*) (Praha: Národní divadlo, 2000) 4.

⁴⁷ Kurdi 41.

⁴⁸ “Garry Hynes in Conversation with Cathy Leeney”, Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners, eds. Lilian Chambers, Ger Fitzgibbon, and Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000) 204.

⁴⁹ Fintan O’Toole, “Introduction,” Martin McDonagh Plays 1 (London: Methuen, 1999) xi.

⁵⁰ Martin McDonagh, The Beauty Queen of Leenane (London: Methuen, 1996) 1.

All subsequent quotations from *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* are from this edition.

⁵¹ Martin McDonagh, A Skull in Connemara (London: Methuen, 1997) 21.

All subsequent quotations from *A Skull in Connemara* are from this edition.

⁵² Martin McDonagh, The Lonesome West (London: Methuen, 1997) 32.

All subsequent quotations from *The Lonesome West* are from this edition.

bleak and absurd life of four protagonists living among the tightly knit community of McDonagh's Leenane. Already the titles of all three plays introduce the setting: a geographical location appears in all of them, together forming a kind of address of the characters: Leenane, Connemara, the West.

The place is defined but the time of the setting is not at all obvious. From the set of a rural kitchen with a ubiquitous crucifix hanging above the unholy actions and words of all three households, at first sight it is not clear what era we entered, the rooms seem timeless and universal – an iconic kitchen. An exception to that is “a small TV [...] an electric kettle and a radio [...] and a framed picture of John and Robert Kennedy”⁵³ in *The Beauty Queen* suggesting a vaguely contemporary era, unlike in the following plays.

The plays of the second proposed trilogy are set on the western-most place in Ireland, Aran Islands. His choice was – as if random – the bastion of untainted Celticity, a place where Gaelic is still spoken and the traditional lifestyle is preserved (though only for the tourists who daily come flooding the Aran Islands). *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the only play set distinctly in a concrete year, that of the shooting of the pseudo-documentary *Man of Aran* (1934), uses multiple settings chiefly on the island of Inishmaan: the country shop, the sea shore, bedroom of Mammy O'Dougal, a Hollywood hotel room or a church hall adapted for *The Man of Aran* screening. Also the number of characters has grown from four to nine. The claustrophobia of the Leenane life, which is always shared by only four characters and mostly within a single room, is in the case of the Aran plays not created by a limited space and the number of characters but by the play's location on an island. The last play, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* shifts between “a cottage on Inishmore circa 1993,”⁵⁴ “a

⁵³ *The Beauty Queen* 1.

⁵⁴ Martin McDonagh, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (London: Methuen, 2001) 3.

desolate Northern Ireland warehouse,”⁵⁵ “a country lane,”⁵⁶ and two different roadsides. In the tradition of the naturalism of the typical Abbey country kitchen, the spectators at first seeing the traditional rural setting might expect a return to the heart of the idealized Ireland of :

Paraphrase

a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums for the wisdom of serene old age.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, all the iconic settings of Ireland – the kitchen, lake, or cemetery, though present in the plays refuse to play their parts as they become uncomely, dull, depressive and altogether degenerated.

With the first lines of the dialogues, McDonagh’s scenographic realism is revealed to be fake – language becomes the first indicator that the West of Ireland is going to be twisted. McDonagh’s as well as Synge’s version of Irish English mirrors the reversed syntax and phraseology of the Irish language. However, where Synge who was in the spirit of the literary movement concerned – to use the words of W.B. Yeats – with “poetry and the countryman, two things which have always mixed with

All subsequent quotations from *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* are from this edition.

⁵⁵ *The Lieutenant* 10.

⁵⁶ *The Lieutenant*, 17.

⁵⁷ (Eamon De Valera, “St. Patrick’s Day Broadcast,” 1943, in: Terence Brown, Ireland - A Social and Cultural History 1922-1985 (London: Fontana Press, 1985) 146.

one another in life as on stage”⁵⁸ and used highly poetic expressions, McDonagh replaced them by countless vulgarisms.

These vulgarisms are embedded into the language that McDonagh absorbed on his visits to Ireland.⁵⁹ As he says, “there is something about that stylized way of talking that appeals to me [...] there is a core strangeness of speech.”⁶⁰ It is also this hybrid language “of contemporary street talk and rural Irish speech,” which according to Huber subverts the realist mode by opening up “an enormous incongruity between the world of [McDonagh’s] plays and traditional images of Ireland.”⁶¹

McDonagh’s work with the above described aspects of the traditional Irish locality can be described by a metaphor of bones and old dug out skeletons from the play *A Skull in Connemara* which McDonagh as one of his characters, Mick Dowd, is in charge of shattering to pieces. On the remnants, McDonagh builds a completely new realm which is not a realistic reflection of an admirable rural life with its little peculiar characters required by ‘traditional’ Irish drama. Instead it is an artificial space described by Aleks Sierz as McDonaghland.⁶² Rather than taking it for the true representation of the West of Ireland, the patronymic McDonaghland emphasizes the separation of the concrete region of Ireland from the fictitious creation. This name, of course, also blends and alludes to the famous popular symbols of the globalized world’s pleasure and entertainment – McDonald’s and Disneyland.

However, as I have already mentioned, McDonagh’s plays are often viewed as a postmodern parody based on the use and abuse of the iconic Ireland and Irish

⁵⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Explorations* (New York: Macmillan, 1962) 96.

⁵⁹ Sierz 222.

⁶⁰ Hagan.

⁶¹ Huber 557.

⁶² Sierz 224.

identity⁶³ the aim of which is to show the other side of eulogizing any kind of specific or common identity, (cf. the idea of the Celt as an exclusive and noble race footnote 45). In that way, according to John Waters, McDonagh “is not creating a new vision but an original take on the old one.”⁶⁴ Waters views McDonagh’s texts “as a play with 100 year old construct of Irishness and its fragments of the present days.”⁶⁵ He writes, that before McDonagh challenged it, “Irishness was like a mummy”⁶⁶ and that McDonagh approached it as a “creative tourist” who knows Ireland from the mummified versions of the Irish neighbourhood in London and from the regular visits to the West which enables him to challenge the preserved stereotype.

What enables McDonagh to create an exaggerated picture of Ireland is according to Waters and other critics the fact that he is an outsider, a London-Irish and also a film and TV soap fan. As Jan-Hendryk Wehmeyer claims, McDonagh’s writing and “cultural consciousness” is not defined by a “binary opposition - Irish/English - but by a multitude of oppositions”⁶⁷ characteristic for the postmodern age.

That is why McDonagh’s work has been called ‘hybrid’ by several critics.⁶⁸ According to John Waters McDonagh’s ‘hybrid’ position of a London-Irish playwright enables him to show a truthful picture of Ireland through merciless comedy and exaggeration and allow the Irish audiences to laugh with relief that they

⁶³ “Postmodernism signals its dependency by its use of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic abuse of it.”

Hutcheon 130.

⁶⁴ Waters 50.

⁶⁵ Waters 34.

⁶⁶ Waters 36.

⁶⁷ Jan-Hendrik Wehmeyer, “‘Good luck to ya’: Fast-food Comedy at McDonagh’s,” The Power of Laughter: Comedy and Contemporary Irish Theatre, ed. Eric Weitz (Dublin: Carysfort Press 2004) 89.

⁶⁸ Wehmeyer calls McDonagh’s cultural consciousness hybrid (Wehmeyer 89); Huber speaks about his language as hybrid (Huber 557); Wallace writes about the hybrid convention “ranging from American gangster films to the classics of Irish drama” employed by McDonagh (Wallace 118).

“are not like that anymore.”⁶⁹ As such, he is claimed to work with Irish reality and searches for a truthful picture of what the Irish are and are not: “our best playwrights continue to present us with unsettlingly truthful versions of ourselves.”⁷⁰

For others, this hybridity does not reveal a certain truth about Ireland or enable a satire or parody on Ireland itself but, as Pilný writes, it rather serves to “satirize[...] the notion of Irish dramatic realism.”⁷¹ McDonagh’s work is thus not a satire of the Irish identity but of the *concern* with Irish identity, of Ireland and Irishness transformed to an icon. This play with representation of Ireland rather than with Ireland itself can be seen in either postcolonial or postmodern terms. In her argument Kurdi claims that McDonagh’s drama “*refuses* to encourage [...] to abstract or translate what it offers as a *re-presentation of Irishness*.”⁷² Instead, he “constitutes [...] a possible world that contains an undesirable alternative state of the actual to exorcize the [...] demons of colonial distortions and to expose the alienating effects of the present.”⁷³

Viewed as postmodern, McDonagh’s drama can work “both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples.”⁷⁴ Such play with representation might also be seen as pointing to a general ‘truth’ about postmodernity. Clare Wallace uses the suggestion of Jean Baudrillard that in the era of advanced capitalism “a movement from representation (of something real) to simulation (no secure reference to reality) occurs.”⁷⁵ McDonagh remains within the borders of traditional Irish realism, nevertheless, he transgresses it towards a

⁶⁹ Waters 53.

⁷⁰ Waters 53-54.

⁷¹ Pilný, “Martin McDonagh: Parody? Satire? Complacency?” 228.

⁷² Kurdi 54-54. [emphasis added.]

⁷³ Kurdi 55.

⁷⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994) 175.

⁷⁵ Wallace 114.

Look
up
Baudrillard!

‘possible world’ which however is strongly formed by the wider context of colonialism in the past or globalization in the present.

Thus by a distortion of the traditional representation of Ireland, McDonagh arrives at a simulation which can be considered as a truthful picture of not only Ireland but of any nation which is concerned with its own identity in the face of the global simulation, and it is precisely such hybrid which has been named McDonaghland. As Jordan claims, it is typical for a contemporary work of art to offer “a certain way of encountering reality,”⁷⁶ which in case of McDonagh can be understood not as an encounter with the truthful picture of Ireland but with that of a *simulation* or hyper-reality, which as I pointed out above arises from a multiplicity of genre strategies including both local Irish iconography and a global mainstream culture imagery. What McDonagh’s texts reveal is a global aspect of every village. It is represented by a kind of basic simulation typical of our world today and as such it may be seen as a version of what is termed a *global village*.

I. 5 McLuhan and the Global Village

*While bemoaning the decline of literacy and the obsolescence of the book, the literati have typically ignored the imminence of the decline of the speech itself. The individual word, as a store of information and feeling, is already yielding to macroscopic gesticulation.*⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Eamonn Jordan, “Introduction,” Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre, ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press 2000) xlii.

⁷⁷ Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, War and Peace in the Global Village (Corte Madera, CA.: Gingko Press, 2001) 91.

The concept of the global village was coined by Marshall McLuhan⁷⁸ (1911-1980), a Canadian educator, philosopher, scholar, academic, professor of English literature, communication theorist and one of the founders of modern media studies. He was concerned with the society after World War II, which became dominated by pop culture and mass media. McLuhan chose the phrase 'global village' to highlight his idea that a global electronic nervous system, an extension of the human nervous system,⁷⁹ was rapidly integrating the planet through mass media:

" " needed here

"Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned."⁸⁰

Communication in the global village has become simultaneous, the distances have become contracted and the speed of information is similar to the speed of the spreading of news in small villages. People can now hear and see events that take place thousands of kilometres away in a matter of seconds, often quicker than they hear of events in their own families.

Taking into account the phenomenon of the global village, the characters of McDonagh's plays and the simulation of Ireland that they inhabit – McDonaghland – thus cannot be described as outsiders lost on the edge of the western world. The

⁷⁸ It is more precise to say that he was the first to use it in the way it is still used today, as the original source of the term is not known. McLuhan's son Eric McLuhan states that the source of the phrase maybe James Joyce's playful punning with the "Pope's annual Easter message to the City (of Rome) and the World: *Urbi et Orbi*" In *Finnegans Wake* ('the urb, it orbs', 'urban and orbal.'). It may also come from the book written by McLuhan's close friend Wyndham Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man* (1948) who writes that: "[...] the earth has become one big village, with telephones laid on from one end to the other, and air transport, both speedy and safe."

Dr. Eric McLuhan, "Frequently Asked Questions," 24 Mar. 2005
<<http://www.marshallmcluhan.com/faqs.html>>.

⁷⁹ "The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan," *Playboy Magazine*, Mar. 1969, 1994, 24 Oct. 2005 >. McLuhan sees all media as the extensions of men. Whereas the old mechanical media extended a single sense or function e.g. the wheel as an extension of foot, clothing as an extension of skin of the human or the phonetic alphabet as an extension of the eye, the electric media- telegraph, radio, films, telephone, computer and television enhanced and externalized our entire central nervous systems, thus transforming all aspects of our social and psychic existence.)

⁸⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: Mentor, 1964) 3.

nature of the concept of the global village as such would rather suggest that they are connected with the globalised “space that has no centre and no margin.”⁸¹ They are linked with the rest of the globe and participate in the media trade of idealised images of Ireland, in exchange for other images circulating in the present media such as tasty sweets, women’s magazines, heroes of detective series or soap operas. Those icons thus become the same integral part of Ireland -“the Celtic Tiger” as much as the image of Ireland - “the Emerald Island” (inhabited by people living in closely-knit, poetical and hardworking communities, drinking poteen, being rough and tender-hearted at the same time) becomes an icon of trade in other communities.

McLuhan had a vision of a post-literate society shaped by technology. He predicted that the verbal era would disappear with the arrival of the TV:

Handwritten mark: a vertical line with a diagonal slash and the word 'Handwritten' written vertically to its left.

The critical anxiety in which all men now exist is very much the result of the interface between a declining mechanical culture, fragmented and specialist, and a new integral culture that is inclusive, organic and macroscopic. This new culture does not depend on words at all.⁸²

The announced “forthcoming demise of spoken language”⁸³ is very characteristic for the speech of McDonagh’s characters, which is threateningly void of content and repetitive, though at the same time inventively created by the author, as I will later demonstrate.

Handwritten mark: 'caps?' written above the word 'Global'.

The concept of Global Village suggests the ability of new technologies to link the world. For McLuhan, television enables virtual movement in space by bringing the experiences of the most remote foreign cultures across the globe. The world McDonagh’s characters live in is virtually connected with the world of TV

⁸¹ The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan.

⁸² McLuhan, War and Peace in the Global Village 65.

⁸³ The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan.

programmes, advertised products and scandalous and tragic news, making them aware of a life that is exciting and thus so much unlike the one that they experience.

As for violence, in his book *War and Peace in the Global Village*, McLuhan's thesis arises from the statement that "every new technology necessitates a war."⁸⁴ People feel that they have the right to fight in order to protect the old values. Every innovation is accompanied by pain of the endangered identity, which strikes back in anger. Besides this protective, conservative violence, there is another kind of violence. Television creates a "new pervasive energy that penetrates our nervous system"⁸⁵ which may result in a demand or "craving for an in-depth involvement"⁸⁶ which only violence can satisfy.

The concept of the global village suggests the context within which the other two contexts – *brutality* of in-yer-face theatre and *iconicity* of Ireland – can be accounted for. I shall now proceed to explore McDonagh's plays from the perspective of the global village.

⁸⁴ McLuhan, *War and Peace in the Global Village* 98.

⁸⁵ McLuhan, *War and Peace in the Global Village* 76-7.

⁸⁶ The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan. ^a

II. McDonagh and the Global Village: General

Characteristics

The concept of the global village applies to Martin McDonagh's plays in a number of ways. One of them is a certain kind of superficiality which may be seen as a result of the condition of the globalized world which demands products to be easily intelligible and the symbols to be comprehensible to all kinds of different cultures. This call for intelligibility and transparency both limits the space for culture-specific features and leads to a general superficiality. In line with this, McDonagh's transcultural appeal has often been related to a certain shallowness of his plays (usually perceived in the lack of psychology in the depiction of the actions and communication of his characters). This leads to a question: is McDonagh yet another global 'product' and if not, what makes him different?

Another aspect of the global village in McDonagh's plays is apparent in the multiplicity of his sources and inspirations, the frequent use of the typical strategies of pop-culture such as conforming to the mainstream taste and re-consuming established products. As Pilný suggests, the reason for McDonagh's popularity is the fact that he "arrived at a time when the appetite of European audiences for the macabre and the grotesque combined with extreme violence and vulgarity has been whetted by 'in-yer-face theatre' [...]."⁸⁷

As I have pointed above, McDonagh also often receives critique for what is considered to be parasiting on the traditional Irish peasant play and mistreating cultural stereotypes mainly because he endows his protagonists with only a 'fragmentary' character. He has been blamed for bringing back the figures of Stage

Irishmen. The strongest opponent of such McDonagh's treatment of characters is Vic Merriman who blames McDonagh for populating "the stage with violent child-adults" and thus repeating "the angriest colonial stereotypes." All this is in Merriman's view done for the sake of the plays' "appeal to the new consumer-Irish consensus".⁸⁸ In other words, Merriman condemns McDonagh's plays as belonging to the dramas of the Celtic Tiger that "are expected to appear as entertainment commodities organised around visual spectacle and narrative closure."⁸⁹ These objections against the typical features of McDonagh's drama coincide with the objections commonly raised against the phenomenon of the global village in general.

II. 1 Multiplicity of Genres

I would like to further explore the working of various dramatic genres employed by McDonagh. His use of various genres produced by the popular culture, such as soap operas, detective series and action movies as well as his inclusion in the book on the 1990s in-er-face sensibility, might suggest featuring the typical youth culture aspects of which this drama is founded upon – "drugs, pop music or trendy lifestyles."⁹⁰ However, due to his portrayal of a rural and depressed community as well as the frequent echoes and imitations of some of his Irish precursors, Karen Vandenvelde judges McDonagh's work as belonging to the traditional Irish canon. Despite that, she suggests that the sensational receptions of his plays resemble those

⁸⁷ Pilný, "Martin McDonagh: Parody? Satire? Complacency?" 229.

⁸⁸ Vic Merriman, "Settling for More: Excess and Success in Contemporary Irish Drama," *Druids, Dudes and Beauty Queens. The Changing Face of Irish Theatre* 60.

⁸⁹ Merriman 60.

⁹⁰ Karen Vandenvelde, "The Gothic Soap of Martin McDonagh," *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre* 292.

that are “generally attributed to radical contemporary art.”⁹¹ It is apparent then that the plays can be read as either “canonical or [...] radical.”⁹² The radical art of McDonagh’s storytelling according to Vandenvelde is not in “the plot, language, setting or theme”⁹³ of his drama but in the “stylistic fusion of Tarantinoesque gothic horror and melodramatic soap,”⁹⁴ where the dichotomies created by the two different genres do not cancel each other out but create and are “intensified into an effective hyper-realism.”⁹⁵ As was said earlier, the subversion of realism results in the presentation of a global village, thus the term hyper-realism seems appropriate, for it stresses “the experience of the inseparability of the virtual and the real.”⁹⁶ The term hyper-realism captures the importance of media, whose pervasive presence allows for one “reality” to be formed and infiltrated by an abundance of media transmitted icons or multiple ways of representations where fiction becomes an integral part of everyday life.

If we look at the genre through the perspective of the global village we may see that the subversion of realism opens passage for a plurality of genres to be mixed, the use of which may be regarded as one of the features of the global village. As Hutcheon writes, the genres challenged by postmodernism “have become fluid” and even very often the “conventions of two genres are played off against each other.”⁹⁷ The ‘stylistic fusion’ of McDonagh’s plays involves elements of much more than only two genres. And indeed the genre of all the three plays forming *The Leenane Trilogy* is variously described as country melodrama or its hyper-real form – melodramatic soap opera, black farce, black comedy, tragi-comedy with traces of

⁹¹ Vandenvelde 292.

⁹² Vandenvelde 293.

⁹³ Vandenvelde 293.

⁹⁴ Vandenvelde 293.

⁹⁵ Vandenvelde 296.

⁹⁶ Bauman 107.

⁹⁷ Hutcheon 9.

grotesque or dark gothic macabre plays in the style of Grand Guignol, (“a theatre which operated in Paris from 1897-1962 and which was remarkable for its grotesque and visceral performances.”⁹⁸)

There are several aspects of melodrama that characterise McDonagh’s plays. Namely, *The Beauty Queen*’s structure resembles that of traditional melodrama. As Rebecca Wilson claims in her essay *Macabre Merriment in McDonagh’s Melodrama, The Beauty Queen of Leenane*,⁹⁹ the author “offers us four iconic ingredients of traditional melodrama: secretive treachery, the letter, the oath and the thwarted escape.”⁹⁹ Indeed, *The Beauty Queen* is McDonagh’s most melodramatic work, as it is also the only one concerned with any psychological motivations behind the acts of the characters.¹⁰⁰

The success of melodrama also lies in its “ability to project pity and fear.”¹⁰¹ This is possible through the notorious device of outrageous coincidence and the artifices of plot.¹⁰² These aspects of melodrama are ostentatiously present in McDonagh’s *Beauty Queen*, e.g. when Maureen’s last chance to escape the life in the doomed kitchen is thwarted by her mother’s trick played on the impatient and simple-minded teenager who betrays his brother’s wish and leaves the letter with the wicked old woman instead of giving it directly to Maureen.

Another important feature of the genre are the set character types ranging from the virgin heroine, noble prince - the saviour to that of the villain. According to Richard Murphy, melodrama works with “employing polarised and manicheistic

⁹⁸ Wallace 118.

⁹⁹ Rebecca Wilson, “Macabre Merriment in McDonagh’s Melodrama, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*,” *The Power of Laughter: Comedy and Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eric Weitz (Dublin: Carysfort Press 2004) 136.

¹⁰⁰ The only other hints of psychological motives can be traced in *The Lonesome West*, although not in the behaviour of the leading couple, Valene and Coleman (as the reason for murdering their father is trivialised – an insult of a hairstyle - and not further explored by the play), but in the figure of Father Welsh and his frustrations and crises of faith.

¹⁰¹ Eric Bentley, *The Life of Drama* (London: Methuen, 1969) 200.

schemes, preferring to use 'types' as stock-characters (rather than closely-observed individuals with their own psychological complexity"¹⁰³ functioning largely as mere icons. However, as Wilson writes, with the development of the genre, such "attention to the clear division of the qualities of the hero, heroine and the villain has loosened" and "characterization became less rigid and character traits merged and/or overlapped".¹⁰⁴

In this sense, the variety of types in the Leenane trilogy and the two parts of the Aran Islands trilogy seem to be very limited; admittedly, there is not even the classical distinction of heroes and villains. As Wilson remarks, the protagonists of *The Beauty Queen* are 'victim-villains'.¹⁰⁵ The evil of *The Beauty Queen* is "disembodied,"¹⁰⁶ it is "allegorized by the foul-smelling kitchen – a hell's kitchen indeed."¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the kitchen is also a trap of the outside world which seeps in to old Mag through many pores like the radio, television or lumpy Complan and the least delicious kinds of biscuits that her daughter serves her to revenge on her for her terrorizing.

In the other plays, the relationship between the characters is equally unclear. In *The Lonesome West* Valene and Coleman Connor are also neither victims nor villains in their mutual dependence on each other's aggression and abuse. In *A Skull*, Mick Dowd, the implied murderer of his wife is intensely disturbed by the desecration of her grave. Cripple Billy sneakily leaves Inishmaan, and returns back unable to settle a successful living elsewhere, in an environment that would not be stifling. As Huber points out, the characters "are tied to their partners in complicated

¹⁰² Bentley 202.

¹⁰³ Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 143.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson 129.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson 129.

¹⁰⁶ Wilson 131.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson 131.

relationships [...], highly dependent on their opposite numbers.”¹⁰⁸ Thus in McDonaghland, Maureen takes the seat in the armchair of Mag, Mick forgets if and why he killed his wife, and drinks as the others do, brothers Connor go on with their game of fighting and old figurines are replaced by new ones.

The space of the “typical country-cottage of much Irish melodrama”¹⁰⁹ is also the source of comedy and violence, especially in *The Beauty Queen* and *The Lonesome West*. Such infernal comedy is manifested by aggression, which ? essentially belongs to comedy. In the same way, staged violence can provoke laughter. Similarly, as Wilson suggests, the bearers of “the integral comic element”¹¹⁰ in McDonagh’s plays, are not special clown figures, the comedy is rather carried by all the protagonists themselves.

Wilson characterises the prevailing perception of melodrama as “sensational [and] emotionally hyperbolic.”¹¹¹ Melodrama deliberately “revel[s] in absurdity through exaggeration,”¹¹² which “transcends the real in favour of an “excessive meaning”¹¹³ as opposed to a veritable portrait given by realism. This excessive character of melodrama allows for creating a simulation. Thus the genre of melodrama is suited for expressing the global village conditions which themselves have been described as a kind of simulation (hyper-reality).

Besides melodrama, two other genres crucial for McDonagh are farce and comedy. The elements of farce and comedy appear throughout all of McDonagh’s plays. Similarly to melodrama, farce is “notorious for the love of violent images”¹¹⁴ to the extent that “[i]n farce what lies beneath the surface is pure aggression, which

¹⁰⁸ Huber 565.

¹⁰⁹ Wilson 131.

¹¹⁰ Wilson 129.

¹¹¹ Wilson 129.

¹¹² Bentley 203

¹¹³ Murphy 177.

¹¹⁴ Bentley 219.

gets no moral justification and asks none. [...] Farce offers the one simple pleasure: the pleasure of hitting one's enemy in the jaw without getting hit back."¹¹⁵

Although aggression is common to farce and comedy, according to Eric Bentley there is an ethical difference between the two genres: in comedy, "the anger of farce is backed by conscience", "the bitterness and sadness [...] readily come to the surface" and it is "abundant" in feeling. Conversely, in farce we can never "be in the mood to feel sorry for the victims," because their feelings "stay repressed."¹¹⁶

Several definitions of Bentley's differentiation between farce and comedy are enough to make clear, that in McDonagh's case, the farcical elements resembling the tactics of the mainstream cultural production of the era of the global village overweigh the ones of the elevated genre of comedy. If the exaggerated reactions, broad humour, absurd situations or aggression of the characters are read as elements of farce, the criticism levelled at McDonagh by critics like Merriman loses its point. To sum up, the form of farce and melodrama thus illustrates the contents of McDonagh's plays, the violence, the imperfect hybridity, the exaggerated reactions in wrong situations, lack of emotions and morality. The genre of farce very characteristically mirrors the state of events in the global village as portrayed above.

Generally, it may be said that the postmodern and global character of McDonagh's plays is both explicit and implicit. Explicitly, he mixes genres, implants products of the global into the idyllic, protected, old and pure locale constructed by Irish Revivalists. Implicitly, McDonagh becomes a product of his era as he has a widespread popularity, amusing many and disgusting some. The plays resemble TV soaps and at the same time play with that genre. In other words, the plays satirize icons and become nicely marketable icons at the same time. Through their

¹¹⁵ Bentley 296-297.

¹¹⁶ Bentley 296-298.

shallowness, the plays become part of the global and they must function as icons to be intelligible for a world audience. McDonagh himself becomes the product that is successful in the global trade.

II. 2 The Clash of the Global and the Local

2a Tourists and Vagabonds

McDonagh's characters have so far been characterized as being a part of the global village as described by McLuhan, nevertheless trapped in the transitory period when people become aggressive and violent because the order of things is changing. For a more detailed account of the characters' situation it is useful to look at the portrayed world of McDonaghland through the optics of the distinction made by Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Globalization* in the chapter called "Tourists and Vagabonds."

According to Bauman's analysis, people in the globalised world inevitably become divided into two groups. Traditionally they are those rich and those who are poor. Today, according to Bauman, being rich is not important for its own sake neither because it allows for an accumulation of material wealth, but because it opens a possibility to participate in the postmodern world of hyper-reality. We all live in a world of choices, however only some can actually make their choices. The access to ^{??} hyper-reality is possible only for those who have the money or education or simply luck of family background. For the rest, the hyper-reality is reduced to its media image: they are able to watch it and consume it but they cannot live it.

Thus, the important distinction characteristic of today is one based on either mobility or immobility of people: the mobile ones (tourists) are free to choose where

and when to go to such a degree that place or space ceases to be a problem for them.

No Those immobile (vagabonds) either stay at one place or move not because they choose to but because they must. The global and culturally hybrid sphere is for élites and “postmodernism [...] expresses solely the experience of the relatively narrow caste of globals. [...] The rest lives on a periphery, a space with all the superficial global symbols, brands and functions that spread around the spiritually exterritorial, but physically fortified enclaves of the “globalized” elite.”¹¹⁷

Like McLuhan, Bauman also speaks about the dissolution of boundaries, but that of the “natural boundaries.”¹¹⁸ There are constantly fewer reasons for staying at some concrete place when the place is in incessant shift, in continual search for the permanently new objects of longing that engage us as consumers. However, Bauman claims, that “[i]n our incessant movement we are divided. We are divided according to the level of our mobility.”¹¹⁹ What is the level of the vagabonds’ mobility?

Vagabonds move because their local world is unbearably unkind to them. “Often they live in utterly unattractive places they would like to turn their backs to, but they have no place to go, because they are not welcomed anywhere.”¹²⁰ Their world is the world of the “locally bound,”¹²¹ movement has been denied them and they are forced to suffer every change that attacks the locality to which they are tied. Media make this form of deprivation even more painful by demonstrating the virtual availability, reachability of the distances in reality unreachable.¹²²

The other group, tourists, move because they are attracted to other destinations, for them travelling is easy. Everyone likes to see them. Their space lost

¹¹⁷ Bauman 118-120.

¹¹⁸ Bauman 95.

¹¹⁹ Bauman 104.

¹²⁰ Bauman 105.

¹²¹ Bauman 106.

¹²² Bauman 106.

the limiting quality and it is easily transcendable. Although McLuhan claimed that space was abolished, for most people only virtually, through media, and as Bauman points out, “those obtrusive media create a painful deprivation,”¹²³ which may result in violence, aggression, vandalism or various kinds of addictions.

A similar distinction can be made with the different perception of time. Tourists live in constant presence, they are always busy, always ‘have no time’. Unlike them, vagabonds live in space, which binds them and which they cannot control. Their time is empty, nothing ever happens in their time, which may correspond with the slow tempo of the characters’ conversations with many sentences just echoing each other, the pauses being as important as the messages of their dialogues. The time cannot be filled by any purpose.

The dichotomy tourists-vagabonds allows us to further explore McDonagh’s characters from the perspective of the global village for it seems clear, that Leenane is one of the many places on Earth occupied by vagabonds. The characters on one hand are an artistic creation, their vices are exaggerated and virtues blurred, they are the tools of the parody of their virtuously portrayed predecessors. On the other hand, the plays are satirical, an overblown satire of the contemporary fast progress. Hence parody arises from the longing of vagabonds to imitate the desired lifestyles of tourists and the deftness of their dynamic existence with all its importance and apparent possession of time and space.

The dynamism of the tourist’s world is thus contradicted by McDonagh’s highly comical version of immobility – psychic or locally bound. Where the tourist (known to the characters/ to the vagabonds either known from the TV screen, or rather suggested by the existence of something like a TV world with actors, glamour

¹²³ Bauman 106.

and fame, or by the actual visitor touring around mythical places of 'Green Erin') is busy, the vagabond has no choice but to *pretend* to be busy.

The distinction between tourists and vagabonds shows McDonagh's writing strategy as fitting the contemporary globality. The parodic aspect of McDonagh's plays does not reside in exaggerations of Irish concerns but of a general situation of people without choice and without time, of vagabonds. Rather than creating a sophisticated metaplay with a genre of Irish peasant play, a strategy too refined for the impulsive author, he parodies (consciously or not) the touristic life and the tourists' idea of the authentic life in countryside - the icon of the village.

Missing this important point (that is viewing McDonagh as a parodist) may result in a disgust at his plays, a disgust that once again reveals the global parody of McDonagh, for it is similar to the reproach felt by tourists towards the vagabonds. Bauman points out that vagabonds can only be blamed for their wish to become tourists without having enough means to act according to their will as the tourists do. As the vagabond is the alter ego of the tourist, on the other hand, the tourist hates the vagabond for representing the constant reminder of the other side of the existence as a tourist. The tourists need the vagabonds in order to be able to appreciate their own trips, to be aware of the difference.¹²⁴

The article of Jan-Hendrik Wehmeyer 'Good luck to ya': Fast-food comedy at McDonagh's rather worryingly illustrates Bauman's definition of the feeling of tourists towards vagabonds. Wehmeyer asks for the purpose of the plays and finds that they do not offer any escape from an excessively violent spectacle, because "the distinction between the reality and the play is no longer clearly visible."¹²⁵ Such

¹²⁴ Bauman 14-17.

¹²⁵ Wehmeyer 93.

comment betrays and proves Wehmeyer's uneasiness about the globalized character of McDonagh's plays.

According to Wehmeyer, the violent behaviour of McDonagh's characters does not release any repressed forces or anxieties, thus the "subversion through irony and parody" does not enable "a temporary liberation of commonly known and prevailing truths."¹²⁶ The only thing that is left to the audiences according to Wehmeyer is to "accept [...] the presented characters as different from ourselves, as inferior, as our Other;"¹²⁷ only then it becomes possible to laugh at the hideousness of the characters. Although this laughter is meant to relieve the spectators, it in fact indicates that they have assumed a typical tourist's attitude towards the immobile.[?]

Does this support the argument that the plays are complacent to the mainstream tastes? Wehmeyer suggests, that the audience is drawn to the plays because they provide an easy laugh. That is why to him McDonagh's plays resemble a tasty "high-calorie junk"¹²⁸ and deprive the spectators of touches of humanity. Wehmeyer, like Merriman before him, sees the characters as 'the others' at whom we can laugh. By distancing himself from the very beginning by the suggestion that he is happy that he is not like them (Wehmeyer states at the very beginning that he is happy for his 9-5 job in Dublin), he bravely places himself in the category of tourists and thus, as he says, only the disgust at the characters brings him joy, which makes it superficial.

Thus, however, the intricate depiction of the problematic outcomes of a globalized world is misread, missing the point that it is precisely such stance of the exclusion of those unfortunate by laughing at their immobility that lies at the basis of the vagabonds/McDonagh's characters. ??

¹²⁶ Wehmeyer 92.

¹²⁷ Wehmeyer 93.

With the help of Bauman's categories, the plays may be seen as parodies or satires of the life in global village. Parody can have the purpose of satire, as a method of criticism: "[w]hen a satire is aimed at a widespread folly or vice, the reader [audience] becomes the target, the shock of the recognition of the audience's guilt has the corrective function then."¹²⁹

As stated above, McDonagh's is not a satire on the Irish people but rather on any kind of audiences, for these are invited to assume the role of the (more) fortunate and thus to repeat that excluding gesture which in the first place threw the characters into the position of vagabonds. The assertion of identity is realized through difference and specificity. Thus Bauman's asserted relationship of tourists to vagabonds problematizes every argument that the audience just laughs with relief that they are not like anyone in the plays anymore. Or, in the words of Linda Hutcheon, that "the relation of the center to the ex-centric is never an innocent one."¹³⁰

Such a complicated relationship is mirrored for example in situations where the worth of the world the characters live in is for them derived solely from the attitude the tourists assume to it: "Ireland mustn't be such a bad place if German fellas want to come to Ireland."¹³¹

2b The World of the Plays

¹²⁸ Wehmeyer 94.

¹²⁹ Robert Harris, "The Purpose and Method of Satire," 20 Aug. 1990, 24 Oct. 2004 <www.virtualsalt.com/satire.htm>.

¹³⁰ Hutcheon 72.

¹³¹ Martin McDonagh, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (London: Methuen 1996) 37.

All subsequent quotations are from *The Cripple of Inishmaan* are from this edition.

In this chapter I would like to suggest several reasons for the apparent repulsiveness of the life in McDonagland when viewed as a global village. Life in McDonagland is characterised by the instability and fragmentation of the characters, language, time, space, memory and values. The existence of the particular type of characters in such situation/environment represents a source of laughter. As 'global village' is an oxymoronic term, the plays are on one hand a very critical reflection of the sharp contrast between the whirl of events in the global village and the characters trapped in the thick bog of their local existence. On the other hand, McDonagh is portraying this process by using its own strategies and devices. Therefore, although he does not offer any solution, any new order to the victims of globalization (and villains, as they form its driving, because consuming, force), he draws attention to those strategies.

I propose to demonstrate that it is the potentially tragic clash of the local (citizens and the environment of Leenane and the Aran Islands) and the global (the tourists, the TV programmes or the advertised grocery products) in McDonagland that produces fun and entertainment, and prove it on specific examples.

Generally it can be said that the clash or merging of the local and the global is embodied by the plays themselves: as I have tried to show, they touch upon some very serious matters concerning the contemporary world, yet they may be also considered as rather careless amusement, and in fact must be such if they are to function in global conditions, i.e. be entertaining for all. The play itself must include, in order to be humorous for more than Irish audiences, both local (or the global image of the local) and the global.

This contrasts with Shaun Richards' suggestion that McDonagh's work is a contemporary engagement with the world staged by Synge. As such, he claims, "for

the plays to function [...], depends on the audience's ability to read them in the context of the genre of 'the western play' – their 'original.'"¹³² According to Richards the recognition of *The Playboy* and appreciation of its reworking is essential. However, the way Richards develops the argument of Christopher Morash, that the plays resemble "copies that have forgotten their originals,"¹³³ and sees this as a negative feature, betrays his overemphasised focus on the local issues.

To fully account for McDonagh's humour, other than just the local concerns must be considered. Morash argues that "[b]y creating an image that audiences are invited to see as 'traditional,' and then removing from it the last vestige of 'traditional' values, the plays stage the contradictions of a society that continues to nurse images of itself it no longer believes."¹³⁴ Thus McDonagh's plays are not concerned so much with a specific tradition (which the audience would have to know in order to fully understand its humour) but with traditions in general, with the way they have been transformed into a few slogans and icons.

In my view, this highlights the fact that the fictional world of McDonagh's plays captures the state of transition McLuhan speaks of, where the world has lost its previous values. Such world attracts attention to itself rather than solely to the expected iconic representations, which it tries to challenge. It is also this encounter of a representation-concerned simulation of the past world with the newly rising everyday reality which produces the humour (the clash of *The Playboy* and *The Lieutenant*.)

Thus humour does not arise merely from Ireland-specific allusions, but rather as a product of the global culture of the nineties, only positioned in a frame of the

¹³² Richards 211.

¹³³ Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 269.

¹³⁴ Morash 269.

traditional Irish drama represented above all by the play *The Playboy of the Western World*. It is however not dependent on this context to be understood: as Hutcheon writes, postmodern works of art “refuse to surrender their autonomy as fiction.”¹³⁵ Although the plays work with intertextuality, it is the ironic parody of tradition rather than of Irish tradition, which enables this autonomy; the plays need not be subjected to the recognition of any specific original. ??

Earlier on I have considered the characters’ actions (based on their vagabond nature). As for the world of the characters, it too is defined by the clash of the global and the local. As was stated earlier in this essay, the local – McDonaghland – is a place where ~~the~~ time stands still. Despite the linearity of the plot, history seems to be missing. By this I mean that there is no personal evolution of the characters, they only go through various events in the stories, themselves remaining untouched. The characters find themselves in a given state of affairs which remains isolated, not disturbed physically by the affairs from the outside. ??

The global, on the other hand, represents a mythical world that is out of touch, although constantly pervading the atmosphere of McDonaghland. The myths are the fancy articles from the outside world. That is why the characters spend their time waiting for Australian soap-operas, crimi-series, or the news on the TV, hence their interest in woman’s magazines and their obsession with certain brands of groceries.

The attitude the characters assume towards this uneven mix of local timelessness and global mythology varies: whereas the members of the oldest and the middle generation of the Leenane population seem to be trapped in their little home bogs, the teenagers of the town indeed are bored. As Shaun Richards comments, for them there is virtually nothing to do:

¹³⁵ Hutcheon 124.

The young men of Leenane are unemployed and spend their days waiting for the screening of Australian TV soap operas, the only opportunities for employment among the young is selling poitín like Girleen, temporary work in the graveyard like Mairtin Hanlon, or operating as a tour guide until, like Ray Dooley in *Skull*, the job is lost through ‘pegging shite at Americans [...] [a]nd cracking Vietnam jokes.’¹³⁶

Rather than hard, the life in Leenane seems to be chaotic. The people’s misery does not derive from a material lack, but rather from a lack of orientation in values: they seem to “revere the low and insignificant as well as the high and holy.”¹³⁷ A possible impact of the isolated and static local and the sensuous and mythicised global is that it gives rise to various absurdities: the figurines of saints, a dog or a packet of crisps sometimes seem more important than the life of one’s brother. As Werner Huber emphasizes, “the value system of the McDonagh universe appears in constant flux and in a state of destabilization.”¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Richards 208.

¹³⁷ Michal Lachman, “Happy and in Exile?,” *Engaging Modernity*, eds. Michael Boss and Eamon Maher (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2003) 199.

¹³⁷ Huber 568.

¹³⁸ Huber 568.

III. McDonagh and the Global Village: Specific Analysis

I shall now have a closer look at the concrete issues which arise from the combination of the speedy development in the global village with the following characteristics of the life in McDonaghland: immobility of the characters; timelessness of their lives; reverence for the inadequate and total disrespect of the authorities (be it state or religion); and coarse language, phrases, gossip and violence as a means of communication.

III. 1 Space/Immobility

One of the most exploited Bord Failte icons of the West of Ireland is the beauty and wilderness of the nature: in McDonagh's world, characteristically, nature plays a rather negative role. The places mentioned in the plays are usually associated with death or decay. They are the inhospitable "steep, muddy and rocky [...] owl hill,"¹³⁹ a field with one dead cow, the sea and the lake, both portrayed as sites of drowning (deliberate or otherwise). The characters constantly grumble about the rainy and cold weather, for them, nature is not something to be enjoyed: Maureen Folan, for example, uses a car to climb the hill, which is to say that the nature doesn't offer any route for romantic walks. In *The Cripple*, the attractivity of the contemporary hit of Western Irish tourism – a trip to the Island of Inishmore – is reduced to a comment: "On Inishmore? What sights? A fence and a hen?"¹⁴⁰

Similarly, the lake is a place where old shattered bones of the superfluous dead from the local cemetery are thrown, it seems to represent the pagan burial

¹³⁹ *The Beauty Queen* 9.

ground when it swallows those or the remains of those who cannot survive the whirl of events. This is also where Tom Hanlon, the local policeman, drowns, followed subsequently by Father Welsh, the local representative of the church.

The Irishness of Leenane and the Aran islands is constituted only by the names of the single plays and characters, by the presence of a priest, rain and boredom. It is rather portrayed like a place where the actual time stands quite still: “All you have to do is look out your window to see Ireland. And it’s soon bored you’d be. ‘There goes a calf.’”¹⁴¹

The limits of the space - usually resulting in boredom – are not easily transgressed. In accordance with Bauman’s outline of the vagabonds’ narrow possibilities for travelling, the characters’ options for emigration are not very optimistic either. As Lachman describes it: “leaving home does not result in any loss or gain because the immigrants do not possess their own place at home and are not able to appropriate a new one abroad.”¹⁴² The traditional reasons for leaving Ireland like “the need to mature and earn money, [or] the urge to escape the suffocation of the religious society”¹⁴³ are trivialised, and as Lachman puts it, “there is no tension between home and abroad apart from the fact that leaving Ireland may simply be more attractive and staying abroad more entertaining.”¹⁴⁴ Without a strong enough motivation, the characters end up in a state of indecisiveness:

Maureen - That’s Ireland, anyways. There’s always someone leaving.

Pato - It’s always the way.

Maureen - Bad, too.

¹⁴⁰ *The Cripple* 38.

¹⁴¹ *The Beauty Queen* 53.

¹⁴² Lachman 200.

¹⁴³ Lachman 200.

Pato - What can you do?

Maureen - Stay?

Pato - I do ask meself, if there was good work in Leenane, would I stay in Leenane? I mean there never will be good work, but hypothetically, I'm saying. Or even bad work. Any work. And when I'm over there in London ..., it's here I wish I was, of course. Who wouldn't? But when it's here I am...it isn't there I want to be, of course not. But I know it isn't here I want to be either.¹⁴⁵

However, there are reasons not to transgress the space: in England, as is the experience of Maureen and Pato, the characters suffer humiliation and/or slander:

Pato – [...] when I'm over there in London and working in rain [...] it's more or less cattle I am [...]¹⁴⁶

Maureen – Over in Leeds I was, cleaning offices. Bogs. A whole group of us, only them were all English. 'Ya oul backward Paddy fecking...The fecking pig's-backside face on ya.' The first time out of Connemara this was I'd been. 'Get back to that backward fecking bog of yours or whatever hole it was you drug yourself out of.'¹⁴⁷

Similarly, following their relatives and moving to Boston they would become part of the family of the 'eejit Yanks', who come to Ireland in search of the medialized locations, (such as the site of the screening of *The Quiet Man* or other

¹⁴⁴ Lachman 200.

¹⁴⁵ *The Beauty Queen* 21-22.

¹⁴⁶ *The Beauty Queen* 21.

¹⁴⁷ *The Beauty Queen* 31.

nostalgic films) and are ridiculed for it and taken advantage of as well, as the only thing they are good for is that they “contribute a couple of bob to an owl lady’s retirement.”¹⁴⁸

Faced with the lack or the impossibility of choice, the natural tendency among the characters is to assure themselves in their immobility:¹⁴⁹ for instance, the line that “Ireland mustn’t be such a bad place” keeps returning in *The Cripple* in all kinds of variations (if the “Yanks”, “German fellas”, “French fellas”, “coloured fellas”, “sharks”, etc. want to come to Ireland) and suggests, that the characters are aware of the discrepancy between the real place and the place turned into an icon. However, the only option in their immobility, is to continue the search for “the clamour of cinematic reality.”¹⁵⁰

III. 2 Time/Timelessness

As was already shown, time in McDonaghland is an unstable element. An only example of a structure in time is found in *The Beauty Queen*, where the virtual time, the time of the TV programmes, seems to organize the days. This is depicted in the conversation between the teenager Ray and old Mag, watching television together for lack of anything better to do:

Ray: [...] I do like *Sons and Daughters*, I do.

Mag: Do ya?

¹⁴⁸ *A Skull in Connemara* 7.

¹⁴⁹ The only person who actively searches for a change of space is Cripple Billy, who later comes back from the desired Hollywood equally unaccepted as Pato and Maureen were in England.

¹⁵⁰ Lachman 201.

Ray: Everybody's always killing each other and a lot of the girls do have swimsuits. That's the best kind of programme.

Mag: I'm just waiting for the news to come on.

Ray (*pause*) You'll have a long wait.

The programme ends. Ray stretches himself.

That's that, then.

Mag: Is the news not next? Ah no.

Ray: No. For God's sake, *A Country Fecking Practice's* on next. Isn't it Thursday?

Mag: Turn it off, so, if the news isn't on. That's all I do be waiting for.

[...]

Ray Six o'clock the news isn't on 'til.¹⁵¹

As nothing ever happens, time is valueless. Characters can waste it in their repetitive conversations and they don't seem to be masters of it. In the opening of *A Skull*, Mick Dowd – engaged in a conversation about weather – is not sure which month it is at all:

Mick: I didn't even know it was September, and I'll admit it.

Mary: Did you not, now, Mick? What month did you think it was?

Mick: August or something I thought it was.

Mary: August? (*Laughs.*) August is gone.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ *The Beauty Queen* 37.

¹⁵² *A Skull in Connemara* 4.

As well as the present is unclear, the past is equally uncertain. The characters in Leenane have problems with their memories, thus the ubiquitous blunders occur. For one, it is the inability to remember names, thus the surname of Father Welsh-Walsh-Walsh is constantly mispronounced. Ray's name, too, keeps being changed for Pato's by Mag, and by Maureen respectively. Maureen's peculiar memory produces a romantic version of parting with Pato at the train station and promising their future together, whereas in reality, Pato leaves Leenane by a taxi and never gets the chance to even say goodbye. Mick Dowd, at the end of the *A Skull* after swearing that his wife really died in a drink driving accident " *rubs the skull against his cheek, trying to remember.*"¹⁵³ Thus the characters are making versions of their own history.

Besides the inability to remember there is also the incapability to forget particular things. In *The Cripple*, Mammy can't cope with the death of her husband fifty years ago when all this time she has been trying to drink herself to death. In *the Beauty Queen*, Ray is still angry with Maureen: "Didn't she keep the tennis ball that came off me and Mairtin Hanlon's swingball set [...] and wouldn't give it back [...] and that was ten years ago and I still haven't forgotten it?"¹⁵⁴ In the same way, Maryjohnny in *A Skull* cannot forget how she caught three 'youngsters' "weeing in the churchyard" twenty-seven years ago, the only time for her to "let bygones be bygones" as Mick advises her, is as she declares "[w]hen I see them burned in Hell..., and not before!"¹⁵⁵ The characters thus remain tied to the past, usually for irrelevant reasons, still unable to release it and continue their existence and experience in the present and future.

The wrong orientation in the past, be it the ignorance of it or being fixed in it also makes it hard to recognize the real events. The characters (and the audiences)

¹⁵³ *A Skull in Connemara* 66.

¹⁵⁴ *The Beauty Queen* 38.

are repeatedly 'codded' or cheated, by the still new versions of events. This feature is most significant in the *Cripple*, where the audience, and the characters, is never told the truth, they only observe the multiple versions of the story of the drowning of Billy's parents, as well as the varying information concerning the true state of his health. The audience is also subdued to yet another trick when they observe Billy dying in a clichéd way in his bare hotel room in Hollywood, far from his close friends.

The uncertainty as to what the truth is and what is fiction that stems from the multiple versions is crowned by a mocking revolt against fiction presented as truth by the U.S. filmmaker Robert Flaherty who comes to Inishmore to film a documentary. His version of the Irish reality is hilariously mocked by the Inishmaan audiences of the film who are portrayed as absolutely unmerciful receivers of a celebration of their character. The reactions, among others are: pegging eggs at the screen in Helen's case, for "they still haven't caught this fecking shark! How hard is it?"¹⁵⁶ Or: "What's to fecking see anyways but more wet fellas with awful jumpers on them?"¹⁵⁷ The shark itself seems to be a fiction, rather than a typical source of nourishment: "This is the first shark I've ever seen off Ireland."¹⁵⁸ Or: "[a]h it wasn't even a shark at all, Mrs. It was a tall fella in a gray donkey jacket."¹⁵⁹

Sometimes the past even becomes forged in order to manipulate it, thus the reality and fiction become confused which reveals the conflicting forces of the past and the present, the reality and the fiction in McDonaghland. Mick in *A Skull* plays with the past as well as Tom does. Mick invents a story about tinkers "munching

¹⁵⁵ *A Skull in Connemara* 5.

¹⁵⁶ *The Cripple* 57.

¹⁵⁷ *The Cripple* 60.

¹⁵⁸ *The Cripple* 55.

¹⁵⁹ *The Cripple* 61.

willies” from the dead corpses during famine.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Tom tries to manipulate the past accident of Mick Dowd’s wife by fabricating evidence in order to get promoted.

However wicked it may appear, Tom thus thinks of his future career (unlike the others, except for Cripple Billy, for whom future seems to be an issue, but although like Tom, he did not succeed in making it outside Ireland he at least “had to give it a go”¹⁶¹) as so far he is kept in his job only as he’s “so good at helping kids across the road.”¹⁶² He and most of the others do not hold past as a sacred, solemn and powerful topic. The time for the characters remains in the present moment when it is being manipulated according to their needs.

III. 3 The Lowly and the Holy

In McDonaghland, the only manifestation of a possible ethical norm is Father Welsh’s relating the evil created by the Connor brothers to the universal violence - “And there’s plenty enough hate in the world as it is, Valene Connor, without you adding to it over a dead dog.”¹⁶³ or “Ah Valene, if it’s your brother you can’t get on with, how can we ever hope for peace in the world...?”¹⁶⁴ Such preaching becomes counterproductive as it both relates to an authority too distant from the immediate concerns of the villagers and produces unintended humorous effect.

As other iconic attribute of Ireland, Catholicism is ridiculed. In the discussion of Valene and Coleman in a solemn moment of the play, when they meditate about Father Welsh’s suicide, they imagine him talking in hell with Tom Hanlon and “the

¹⁶⁰ *A Skull in Connemara* 26-27.

¹⁶¹ *The Cripple* 66.

¹⁶² *A Skull in Connemara* 61.

¹⁶³ *The Lonesome West* 5.

fella off Alias Smith and Jones.”¹⁶⁵ At that moment, Coleman Connor gives his own version of Catholic morality:

It's always the best ones go to hell. Me, probably straight to heaven I'll go, even though I blew the head off poor dad. So long as I go confessing to it anyways. That's the good thing about being Catholic. You can shoot your dad in the head and it doesn't even matter at all.¹⁶⁶

Father

So absurd and pragmatic is the relation of the protagonists to authorities. The moral authority himself, Father Welsh, is frustrated by his inability to effect any spiritual change of his parishioners. He himself is a confused personality who preaches against swearing when in a moment he confesses that he is “drunk as Jaysus.”¹⁶⁷ The only successful part of the parish work of the ‘holy father’ is, besides organizing the Bingo contests, the coaching of ‘the under-twelves football’, a team that holds “a world’s record in girl’s football” with “ten red cards in four games.”¹⁶⁸ Instead of reverence and respect, the local religious authorities become a subject of mockery through reference to the medialized trials with the pedophile priests, or a simple “groping on [...] arse”¹⁶⁹ echoed in all McDonagh’s plays.

Besides substituting and shaking the religious authority, various TV series represent also a secular global order that replaces the local policeman Tom Hanlon, who drowns himself in the lake when his fabricated proof gets revealed. Tom becomes a victim of his admiration of the popular detectives that he would very

¹⁶⁴ *The Lonesome West* 25.

¹⁶⁵ *The Lonesome West* 53.

¹⁶⁶ *The Lonesome West* 54.

¹⁶⁷ *The Lonesome West* 45.

¹⁶⁸ *The Lonesome West* 9.

¹⁶⁹ *The Cripple* 14.

much like to immitate. His arrival with the asthma inhaler and a cigarette, as Ondřej Pilný writes, alludes directly to the habit of the policeman in David Lynch's cult criminal thriller *Blue Velvet*.¹⁷⁰ Also his younger brother Mairtin calls him (and thus compares and mocks him at the same time) by the names of the popular series *McMillan and Wife* or complains that he "[t]hinks he's *Starsky and Hutch*."¹⁷¹ Elsewhere, Mick, the gravedigger, mocks Tom's attitude to the detective profession:

Mick - "The way you do talk about it, just like *Hill Street Blues* your job is. Bodies flying about everywhere.

Tom - I would *like* there to be bodies flying about everywhere, but there never is.

Mick – Go ahead up north so. [...]

Tom – Ah there's no detective work in that oul bullshit. Detective work I'm talking about. You know, like *Quincey*."¹⁷²

Serious lines of dialogue are usually cut down by a mention of a commercial product. Such is the case when the favourite brands of groceries appear in the scene of Maureen and Pato's coming together where words of tenderness are mixed with mentions of Kimberley biscuits, and then the Taytos crisps on the blouse of Dolores Healey or Hooley:

Pato - I was just brushing them [Taytos] off for her.

Maureen - Taytos me arsehole, Pato Dooley.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Pilný, "Martin McDonagh: Parody? Satire? Complacency?" 230.

¹⁷¹ *A Skull in Connemara* 46.

¹⁷² *A Skull in Connemara* 29.

¹⁷³ *The Beauty Queen* 24.

In *The Lonesome West*, the power of the imported products such as a new stove, plastic figurines or again Tayto crisps forces brothers Connor to point a gun at each other:

Welsh – All your figurines are melted, Valene. [...]

Valene – I'll blow the head off him! [...]

Welsh – You can't shoot your brother o'er inanimate objects, Valene! Give me that gun, now.

Valene – Inanimate objects? Me figurines of the saints? And you call yourself a priest? No wonder you're the laughing stock of the Catholic Church in Ireland. And that takes some fecking doing, boy.¹⁷⁴

The opposition of the lowly and the holy is manifested in all kinds of motives where it is confused and the evaluation usually inadequate – TV detectives are admired instead of mere local policemen, instead of priests, plastic figurines of saints are valued – this points both to the clash of the local and the global, the intrusion of the media into the isolated reality and as a source of humour.

III. 4. Communication – Gossip, News and Violence

The immobility and timelessness portrayed in the previous sections are also manifested by the circular and repetitive dialogues within the plays. The characters often repeat the lines of their partners in conversation as well as the whole

¹⁷⁴ *The Lonesome West* 28.

conversations are echoed throughout the world of the plays. For example, the conversation about weather from the initial scene of the *Beauty Queen*:

Mag - Wet, Maureen?

Maureen - Of course wet.

Mag - Oh-h.¹⁷⁵

is echoed at the start of *A Skull in Connemara*:

Mary - Mick.

Mick - Maryjohnny.

Mary - Cold.

Mick - I suppose it's cold.

Mary - Cold, aye. It's turning.¹⁷⁶

The habit of repeating the partner's lines is strengthened by an accumulation of adjectives within the repetition:

Mag- It's a big oul hill.

Ray- It *is* a big oul hill.

Mag- Steep.

Ray- Steep is right and if not steep then muddy.

Mag- Muddy and rocky.

Ray- Muddy and rocky is right."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ *The Beauty Queen* 1.

¹⁷⁶ *A Skull in Connemara* 3.

¹⁷⁷ *The Beauty Queen* 9.

The dialogue between the teenager Ray and the old Mag from scene two in the *Beauty Queen* is echoed in the final scene of the same play. The repetition of the similar pattern and only the slight varying of Mag's lines by Maureen emphasize Maureen's final metamorphosis into her mother:

Mag - Do me a mug of tea while you're here, Pato. Em, Ray.

Ray - *Ray* me fecking name is! Pato's me fecking brother!

[...]

Mag - Goodbye to you, Ray.

Ray - Goodbye to you, Mrs.

Mag - And pull the door.

Ray - I was going to pull the door anyways...¹⁷⁸ The play concludes with an almost identical dialogue, only this time Ray's partner is Maureen:

Ray - [...] Goodbye to you, so Mrs...

Maureen - Will you turn the radio up a biteen too, before you go, there, Pato, now? *Ray*, I mean...

Ray - (*exasperated*) Feck...

Ray - *turns the radio up.*

The exact fecking image of your mother, you are, sitting there pegging orders and forgetting me name! Goodbye!

Maureen - And pull the door after you...

Ray - (*shouting angrily*) I was going to pull the fecking door after me!!¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ *The Beauty Queen* 11 – 12.

¹⁷⁹ *The Beauty Queen* 59-60.

The habit of repetition is by no means romanticized by McDonagh as a melodious or rhythmic poetic language, neither does he aim at echoing the features of the Irish language in English. In fact, these repetitions both prevent the characters from saying what they really want to say and attract attention to this deficiency by being openly satirized by the characters as in the graveyard scene in *A Skull*:

Mick - What's to be nervous for?

Mairtin - Aye, what's to be nervous for?

Thomas - Nothing at all, now.

Mick - Nothing at all is right.

Thomas - Aye, now. Only I thought you might have some things on your mind might be making you nervous...

Mick - What kind of things on me mind?

Mairtin - Aye, what kind of things on his mind?

Thomas - I don't know now. I have no idea at all. Just things on your mind, like.

Mick - I have no things on me mind.

Thomas - Good-oh. I was just saying, like.

Mick - What are you saying I have on me mind?

Thomas - No things at all, sure. None at all. Just conversing we are.

Mick - Conversing me arse. Do you have something to say to me?"¹⁸⁰

Such slow tempo of unraveling of conversations is not enjoyed by the characters, as becomes clear from the previous example. The only possible way of

¹⁸⁰ *A Skull in Connemara* 34.

ending the circular structure is an eruption of vulgarity or, as it happens to Cripple Billy's 'Auntie' Eileen, of enervation in general:

Kate - Is Billy not yet home?

Eileen - Not yet is Billy home.

[...]

Kate - I do worry awful about Billy when he's late in returning, d'you know?

Eileen - Already once you've said that sentence.¹⁸¹

Another striking characteristic of communication in McDonaghland is the relative briefness of the characters' lines, especially apparent when compared to the tendency of traditional Irish drama which in general is based on a density of speech. The lack of lengthy monologues may be perceived as a result of McDonagh's declared appetite for cinema.

The limited amount of time that the characters are able to concentrate at one subject could be perceived as a certain illustration of one of McLuhan's theses about the influence of television or electronic media on the life in the global village: the search for involvement which forces one to switch channels may be metaphorically extended to a switching of stimuli in general, conversation included.

As Pavel Trenskey points out, "[r]epetition, the awareness of the fact that nothing ever changes causes the feeling of the meaningless existence. [...] Such circular structure became the norm of the theatre of the absurd that arose from a similar feeling 50 years ago."¹⁸² The distrust of the language characteristic for the theatre of the absurd which uses "conventionalised speech and clichés [...] which it

¹⁸¹ *The Cripple* 1 – 2.

distorts, parodies and breaks down,”¹⁸³ may be compared to McDonagh’s use of banter which derives from repetition and theme shifting typical of the global village and which consequently creates a barrier between the characters. A barrier which we may perceive as a direct intrusion of the global into the local.

The contact between the characters is very often provided by gossip. As was shown before, the conversations tend to end up in vulgarities while gossip often revolves around cruelty involved in local misdemeanors and grudges and in the global events. The gossip, no matter how cruel, is so much a part of communication in McDonaghland, that it pervades even the most tender scene, when in *The Beauty Queen* Maureen and Pato become lovers. In the middle of that scene Maureen asks Pato:

- Is it true that Coleman cut the ears off Valene’s dog and keeps them in his room in a bag?
- He showed me them ears one day.¹⁸⁴

Such cruelty against animals is a recursive theme. It includes boiling a hamster mentioned in *A Skull*, blinding of cows and murdering cats in *The Lieutenant*, or a grudge culminating in slaughter of a goose and a cat in *The Cripple*.

¹⁸² Pavel Trenský, “Nihilistova přitažlivost: Průřez tvorbou Martina McDonagha”, *SaD* 2004, XV, č. 4: 45. [translation mine.]

¹⁸³ Jan Čulík, “The Theatre of the Absurd, The West and the East,” 2000, 12 *June* 2005 <www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/Absurd.htm>. [translation mine.]

In his essay, Čulík writes that the absurd authors all share a view that man is inhabiting a universe with which he is out of key. Its meaning is indecipherable and his place within it is without purpose. He is bewildered, troubled and obscurely threatened. Also seems to have been a reaction to the disappearance of the religious dimension of the contemporary life. Hopes to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, by shocking him out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical and complacent. These are the points of contact, otherwise, the theatre of the absurd uses an innovative form, is plotless.

Why not cite Esslin?

As for the global events, these only get to the characters in form of sensational news. As Kurdi argues: “The pieces of news about the larger world they have access to through their magazines interest them only in so far as they strike the familiar sensational tone.”¹⁸⁵ As the following example shows, it is not the events of Bosnia that attract the characters’ attention but rather the ‘impressive’ mutilations which they examine as if they were a film trick:

Valene – (*reading a magazine*) There’s lad here in Bosnia and not only has he no arms but his mammy’s just died....Ah, they’re only after fecking money, the same as ever. [...] They’ve probably only got him to put his arms behind his back, just to cod ya.¹⁸⁶

The merging of the regional and the world news is highlighted in *The Cripple*, where gossip is personified by the figure of Johnypateenmike, who blends the importance of the news of the conflicts of the neighbours’ geese and cats with remarks like “there’s a fella here, riz to power in Germany, has an awful funny moustache on.”¹⁸⁷ Similarly, in *The Lonesome West*, when Father Welsh rebukes the suicide of his parishioner, the unfortunate neighbour gets associated with an anonymous subject of a magazine article:

Welsh - There were plenty worse off fecks than you in the world, Tom Hanlon.

Valene – The girl born with no lips in Norway.

¹⁸⁴ *The Beauty Queen* 20.

¹⁸⁵ Kurdi 54.

¹⁸⁶ *The Lonesome West* 45.

¹⁸⁷ *The Cripple* 37.

Welsh – I didn't hear about her.

Valene – There was a girl in Norway, and she was born with no lips at all.¹⁸⁸

The sources of gossip then are both local and global, the newspaper and television as well as messengers carrying letters in the traditional way.

The gossip-like character of conversations also shrinks the depth of their content. Serious discussions on the topic of lesbianism,¹⁸⁹ famine,¹⁹⁰ colonisation, speaking Irish in Ireland and listening to and watching Gaelic programmes,¹⁹¹ may be seen as a parody on the serious tone of debates or discussions that the characters could have seen on TV or read in newspaper articles. Serious contemporary social issues are not central to the plays as is characteristic for the in-yer-face theatre. On the contrary, they are rendered in the same tone as gossip and openly politically incorrect statements turn these issues into jokes (using pejoratives like calling Billy a

¹⁸⁸ *The Lonesome West* 25.

¹⁸⁹ "Mairtin - 'Lesbos'. Y'know, like Mona McGhee in me school with the beard. (*Pause*) Five times I've asked that bitch out and still she won't go.

Mick – There's nothing the matter with lesbians, Mairtin. They're not doing harm to anybody.

Mairtin – They're not I suppose. And they're great at tennis."

A Skull in Connemara 63.

¹⁹⁰ Mick's answer to Mairtin's question in *A Skull* concerning the destiny of 'willies' from the dead bodies is:

Mick – Don't they snip them off in the coffin and sell them to tinkers as dog food.

[...]

And during the famine, didn't the tinkers stop feeding them to their dogs at all and start sampling the merchandise themselves?

[...]

You would see them riding along with them, munching ahead.

A Skull in Connemara 25-26.

¹⁹¹

Maureen – *swipes angrily at the radio again, turning it off. Pause*

Mag – Nothing on it, anyways. An owl fella singing nonsense.

[...]

Maureen (*pause*) – It isn't nonsense anyways. Isn't it Irish?

Mag – It sounds like nonsense to me. Why can't they just speak English like everybody?

Maureen – Why should they speak English?

Mag – To know what they're saying.

The Beauty Queen 4.

'cripple' without any restraint or different race reduced to "them darkies. On them carpets. Them levitating darkies" in the *Lonesome West*.¹⁹²

Communication also circulates images of violence and often violence itself may be regarded as a means of the characters' mutual contact. Sometimes violence serves as a pastime such as shooting at cows or experimenting with a hamster. More often violence enters communication by way of gossip (as in the example of the ears cut off Valene's dog, etc.)

In other cases violence accompanies communication as in the case of Slippery Helen who arguments by 'pegging' eggs at people's heads, or in the case of brothers where violence is the constituting element of all their contact. According to McLuhan, "the communication of the global village is enacted by gestures"¹⁹³ which in McDonagland are often gestures of violence.

¹⁹² *The Lonesome West* 14.

¹⁹³ McLuhan, War and Peace in the Global Village 91.

IV. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* - Morality in the Global Village

McDonagh's use of violence in his play *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* differs from the role that it played in his previous plays. As was stated above, violence was used as a means of communication. Unable to express and experience what is watched in the favourite TV programmes as well as incapable of communication as such, the characters manifest their relations towards each other through violent gestures and deeds. What is then the other type of violence?

The first difference is that *The Lieutenant* takes violence for its main topic. Whereas the other plays are about life which is (among other things) violent, this play is directly about terrorism and violence. In *The Lieutenant* McDonagh has concentrated on one specific form of social violence – on the terrorist use of it.

The political impulse for writing the play is explicitly stated by McDonagh and as theatre critic Charles Spencer writes what “spurred him to write [the play] was the IRA atrocity in Warrington, in which two boys were killed.” He also quotes McDonagh as saying: “I thought, hang on, this is being done in my name and I just feel like exploding in rage.”¹⁹⁴

The main character of *The Lieutenant*, Padraic, is a member of the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army), a Republican paramilitary group, his own extremity being suggested by a remark that the IRA “wouldn't let [him] in because he was *too* mad.”¹⁹⁵ As for the plot line, the violence unfolds from other – sentimental or trivial – stereotypes: on the one hand a fight of good against evil

¹⁹⁴ Charles Spencer, “Devastating Masterpiece of Black Comedy,” *Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 2002.

¹⁹⁵ *The Lieutenant* 7.

(Padraic tortures the “evil” drug dealer) and on the other hand from a sort of a revenge plot.

Maximum attention, however, is paid to the violence itself, rather than to any psychological or otherwise complicated plotline. Yet, this over-abundance of violence (for example, in scene eight, four terrorists are slaughtered and subsequently chopped into pieces onstage in the final scene) that attracts attention of most critics¹⁹⁶ could be viewed as a mere formal attempt to push the limits of what can be shown on the stage further. The provoking violence together with the fact that the play is a comedy may seem to reduce both the play and its theme (Irish terrorism) to a mere farce, which does not open any space for serious debate.

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In her article *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly: the Politics of Morality in Martin McDonagh's The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Catherine Rees notices the frequent reproach that McDonagh “provides English audiences with stereotypical images of the Irish, existing purely to be laughed at.”¹⁹⁷ In other words, the argument of McDonagh’s critics is that audiences are “merely laughing at the farcical elements and *forgetting* to think about the political message that Irish playwrights are traditionally supposed to deliver.”¹⁹⁸

For Rees however, the excessive use of brutality in a comedy turns the play into “a clear and absolute political satire” with no reason for a “defining politics,” or a dictate of “a resolute didactic purpose.”¹⁹⁹ And indeed, McDonagh himself has abandoned his pose of the ‘enfant terrible’ and the interviews he gave about *The*

¹⁹⁶ Patrick Carnegy, *Spectator* 19 May 2001. Carnegy argues that “we had all become party to the milking of unspeakable wickedness for mirth and entertainment.

Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 12 May 2001. Billington states that McDonagh is “pushing theatre to its limits.”

Robert Gore-Langton, *The Express* 18 May 2001. The commentator of condemns the play as “the slickest, sickest, most appallingly bad taste comedy in years.”

¹⁹⁷ Catherine Rees, “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: the Politics of Morality in Martin McDonagh’s *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 2005/81: 28.

¹⁹⁸ Rees 28.

Lieutenant tend to present the idea behind his later premiered work of art as engaged and serious, explicitly: “[t]he play came from a position of what you might call pacifist rage. I mean, it’s a violent play that is wholeheartedly anti-violence.”²⁰⁰

In order to understand this anti-violent and satirical concern, it is necessary to explore the sources of the comic effects in the play. As was already mentioned, the play uses stereotypes, according to Mary Luckhurst it even “merges into a single cod stereotype of Oirishness.”²⁰¹ By portraying terrorism by means of such stereotypes, terrorism itself is revealed as just another pathetic stereotype of what it is to be a national hero.

As Rees argues, McDonagh is “savagely attacking the *sentimentality* of the terrorist movement as a noble response for the ‘love of one’s land.’”²⁰² By this McDonagh refuses to conform to the traditional picture of terrorism. The absurdly excessive use of violence in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* attracts attention to its uselessness and thus continues to satirise an important element in contemporary nationalist Irish mythology where the figures admired as national heroes are people like Pearse or Emmet.²⁰³ In that way “the play continues McDonagh’s struggle against the romanticising picture of his homeland.”²⁰⁴

The source of the comic can be found in a disproportion between the violence and the trivial reasons that lead to it. Typically, McDonagh uses the improbable reactions for comedy and in the case of *The Lieutenant* as a grotesque manifestation of the absurd bestiality of the terrorist Padraic, who cares more about his tomcat who

¹⁹⁹ Rees 29.

²⁰⁰ Hagan. Although this statement cannot be depended on so much as the same interview is concluded by McDonagh’s remark: “[i]t’s like that great Sex Pistols song, where he sings, ‘I wanna destroy passers by.’ It doesn’t really get any better, or simpler, than that.”

²⁰¹ Mary Luckhurst, “Martin McDonagh’s *Lieutenant of Inishmore*: Selling (-Out) to the English,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* XIV, No.4 Nov. 2004: 34-41.

²⁰² Rees 30. [italics mine.]

²⁰³ The romanticism of violence was as I pointed out earlier satirised already by Synge in *The Playboy*.

is “poorly” than for the human beings he decided to torture, including not only the drug dealers but his own father as well.

The main example of the absurdity and triviality of reasons for violence is the very plot of the revenge that is a revenge for a cat. Such black humour dwells in the iconicity of the stated reasons for the violent acts, for example, the likening of battering a cat to the Bloody Sunday massacre, or the equation of Ray Dooley’s escapade of kicking the cell door in just his socks with the injustice of the Birmingham Six case.²⁰⁵ Rees views these as a challenge to “the sentimentality and also absurdity of the Irish terrorist movement.”²⁰⁶

As Rees writes, this humour is established at the very beginning when Padraic picks up a phone call during the process of torturing the drug dealer and remarks to him “I will be with you in a minute now, James.”²⁰⁷ This totally inadequate use of an everyday phrase in a black-grotesque style of a Tarantino film may be understood as Padraic not really knowing what he is saying; he merely repeats what is usually said in a sudden phone call situation and, similarly, Padraic might be suspected not to really know what he is doing when he tortures his victims: he merely does what is done to the bad guys because that’s how they do it in some popular thriller or a detective series.

To describe the violence and bloodbath performed in the play, any of the nine scenes may provide appalling examples: Padraic, who is introduced as a man who “would kill you for sweating near him,”²⁰⁸ tortures the drug dealer by hanging him “upside down from the ceiling”²⁰⁹ and pulling his toenails off. In the next scene the

²⁰⁴ Tremský 47.

²⁰⁵ *The Lieutenant* 28.

²⁰⁶ Rees 31.

²⁰⁷ *The Lieutenant* 14.

²⁰⁸ *The Lieutenant* 7.

²⁰⁹ *The Lieutenant* 10.

sixteen-year-old Mairead is introduced, who protests against meat trade by blinding cows with a popgun. In scene four, Donny and Davey are trying to paint a ginger tomcat into black with shoe polish. When the trick is discovered by Padraic, he shoots the cat: “[i]t explodes in a ball of blood and bones,”²¹⁰ what more, Padraic shoves Davey’s face into the bloody cat. In scene eight, Mairead uses her talent and shoots the eyes off of the three terrorists who had come to execute Padraic. While falling in love with each other, they shoot all three to death and those are subsequently chopped by Davey and Donny. When Mairead recognizes her own lost cat in the dead corpse of the shoe polished cat she shoots Padraic in the head and with a threat to the two she takes her dead darling cat away, the new lieutenant of Inishmore.

The combination of excessive cruelty depicted on stage which makes us laugh at the same time, can thus be seen as basically moral, for it undermines the authority of the Irish terrorists and it also reveals all forms of violence as basically pointless and based upon petty problems, all this summed up in the final dialogue of the play: “So all this terror has been for absolutely nothing? [...] All because that fecker [the tomcat] was after his hole? Four dead fellas, two dead cats ... me hairstyle ruined!”²¹¹

It is possible to understand the violence also from the perspective of the global village. If the character of Padraic is viewed in the light of the vagabond – tourist division introduced earlier, he can be considered as that who does not enjoy nor profit from the globalized world – a vagabond, for whom the only way to travel abroad is to join the terrorist organisation:

²¹⁰ *The Lieutenant* 40.

²¹¹ *The Lieutenant* 68.

Davey – The IRA do get a good bit of travelling done, aye.

Donney – They do. They go to Belgium sometimes.²¹²

From this perspective his violence may be understood not only as a means to introduce into his life that which he sees on the ‘telly’ (murders and tough guys) but as a much deeper attempt not to mime the tourists but introduce the very qualities which define them, namely living in time rather than in the constraints of space.

By involving himself in the nonsensical project of revenge, Padraic does indeed become busy, his time suddenly becomes structured not by a TV programme but by some sense or task he has to fulfil. Whereas Billy in the beginning of *The Cripple* only stares at cows and has nothing else to do, Padraic suddenly has the possibility to say the miraculous sentence of the busy “I will be with you in a minute now, James.” In this respect, the violence of Padraic may be seen as a protective gesture, as a protection against the vagabond’s situation of exclusion, against the all-pervading media presentation of lifestyle of the tourists through media. Regardless of the fact, that Padraic and other terrorists in the play do enjoy the violence they commit (as much as they enjoy gossip, media entertainment) the fact that McDonagh does not provide the audiences with a reason for such violence in the psychology or history of the characters, allows for the reasons to be looked for elsewhere. Padraic is not a tourist, he does not enjoy the benefits that hyper-reality of the globalized world offers to the lucky ones – he does not eat Chinese food in Paris and French food in New York – rather, he is forced to struggle with the changes that his surrounding undergoes. Being confronted with the tourists’ life through media, he too seeks – though most likely unconsciously – a way to live not in space-constraints but in time-constraints. Terrorist violence which provides him with a kind of a mission – thus

allows to introduce time into his life – is that which is most at hand. In the optics of the global village, Padraic’s violence can be read as an aggressive outburst through which he is trying to command the changing situation he finds himself in.

The character and the violence in the play may thus be seen as embodying or exemplifying (consciously or not) certain aspects typical for the global village: it is both a gesture of protection and is based on circulating – mainly TV – images (or icons) of violence or cruelty. Thus although itself becoming a shallow icon-like product popular in all kinds of cultures, the play may provide us with a deeper understanding of the violence it depicts. It criticizes violence by making it comic, by making it silly through sheer excess, the drive for more of it everywhere – even on stage. Thus although it may seem that the play’s “originality seems to rest only in probing how much blood and torture will be tolerated on stage,”²¹³ it is the general triviality of all reasons leading to violence and killing that condemns it.

²¹² *The Lieutenant* 68.

²¹³ Pilný, “Martin McDonagh: Parody? Satire? Complacency?” 230.

V. Conclusion

In my thesis I tried to introduce Martin McDonagh's Leenane Trilogy, the two plays of the Aran Islands Trilogy and the world that they portray. Despite their typically Irish setting the plays subvert an Irish tradition of dramatic realism. Reasons for this may be multiple, among other things it may be McDonagh's background of a TV addict who spent most of his life in London, though in an Irish neighbourhood in a family of Irish immigrants. The presence of the in-yer-face sensibility on the London stages as well as his hybrid position between London and the West of Ireland home of his parents allows him to create a new, subversive vision of the Irish realism.

McDonagh subverts the tradition of rural Irish plays in several ways. One of them is his use of the language of his characters, which has the rhythm and melody of the poetic plays staged by the early Abbey theatre but on the other hand it contains countless vulgarisms and 'contemporary street talk'. The mixture of genres in language (which is neither real nor a poetic stage language) also underlines the use of elements of multiple genres in the plays themselves. McDonagh's plays can be considered as classical farces or black comedies but they also play with the cinematographic style and allude to many of the author's dramatic precursors. Similarly, McDonagh's characters violate the idealised stereotype peasants: they are not depicted as wise and kind but simply as rough and foolish.

In his plays, McDonagh operates with dramatic genres, combined with the traditions of television and film, he does not work with the reality itself. As such we can perceive these traditions as being treated as a source of icons, predetermined symbols. Already the choice of the locality where McDonagh has decided to set his plays is the mythicised and idealised West of Ireland and the Aran Islands, famous

for being one of the last bastions of untainted Celticity. This reputation, though, has turned this region into a favourite destination of tourists, which suits McDonagh's interest in iconic places and suggests that it is not the authentic which is McDonagh's concern. What then is his concern, or rather the concern of his plays? Besides other motifs (such as to provoke, shock and entertain) it has been the theme of this thesis to show that McDonagh's concern is with life among such icons, life in a world with overabundance of various images, life in what I described by McLuhan's term the Global Village. I would like to suggest that rather than to admire Ireland or any other region for its authenticity it is necessary to realise that even the most legendary and mythicised places on Earth have been connected with the rest of the world and thus have become a global village, always in touch with and influenced or inspired by the trends in the media-connected world.

The global village of McDonagh's plays has been described by Aleks Sierz as McDonaghland. The world depicted in his plays is thus no actual place of the real world, it is rather a depiction of a certain state of the world. In order to explore this I focused on the merging of the local and the global and its results in the overall structure of the plays. To explore the characters, their lives and position in the world, I used Bauman's concept of the vagabonds which he uses to describe the position of the unfortunate within the globalized world, to see the characters as primarily constrained by space (as opposed to the time constraints of what Bauman calls the tourists), which the characters in McDonaghland have in common with the vagabonds, among many other aspects.

It is the pervasive influence of media which for the vagabonds represents the only way to transgress the space limitations and access the global hyper-reality, the drive to imitate the tourists' life style, and a certain failure of communication, which

is most easily replaced by violence. In the characters' lives the clash between the local and the global is most clearly depicted in a certain confusion of values manifested in their admiration of certain products of the global trade such as entertainment, tough guys from the detective series or Tayto crisps and other advertised goods. The local however is by no means innocent: Irish countryside too has its international reputation or a global icon of which the characters are fully aware. In this respect, one of the most striking features of the characters is that although they can see through and mock the iconic rendering of their homeland, they fail to see that the icons of the life of 'tourists' are not less fake than is the global portrait of their lives.

The combination of violence and humour is probably the most emblematic feature of McDonagh's plays. The comedy arises from various vices that the characters are endowed with, from their disorientation in the world and from their communication which is depicted as often dysfunctional and funny. At the same time the frustration stemming from these failures produces gestures of violence as the only possible means of expression. In that way, the audiences are forced to laugh in actually very uncomfortable moments of realising that the comedy is caused by the exaggerated but still truthful depiction of the globalized world.

Thus McDonagh's plays can be seen as belonging among the "cooler versions" of the in-yer-face theatre that "mediate the disturbing power of extreme emotions by using a number of distancing devices. [...] After all, a common reaction to terror is either to ignore it or to laugh at it."²¹⁴ McDonagh's plays work with the latter option by depicting violence as highly comic; the more it tempts us to laugh, the more uncomfortable it is.

²¹⁴ Sierz 5-6.

McDonagh's last play set in the West of Ireland - *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* can be taken as a development in McDonagh's career from using violence to taking violence as an explicit theme. The play can be seen as criticising violence by trivialising the reasons for it to such extent that it mocks all the ideologies trying to justify the use of violence in order to achieve a virtuous aim.

I therefore consider McDonaghland as an exaggerated picture of the life in the globalized world where traditions engender icons and icons form new traditions where the global and the local merge, creating a number of absurdities which are comic and violent at the same time.

VI. Shrnutí diplomové práce

Ve své diplomové práci jsem se rozhodla prozkoumat svět her irského dramatika Martina McDonagha v několika kontextech, především však v kontextu globální vesnice. Tento úspěšný autor se narodil roku 1970 v Londýně, avšak proslavil se pěticí her, jejichž děj se odehrává na západě Irska. Těchto pět her mělo premiéru mezi roky 1996-2002 a zatím je následovala ještě jedna premiéra, uvedení hry *Pillowman*, u nás uváděné v překladu jako *Pan Polštář*, která se však neodehrává v Irsku, ale v jedné středoevropské totalitní zemi. McDonaghovi hry jsou rozděleny do dvou trilogií. První, takzvanou *Leenanskou trilogii* tvoří hry *Kráska z Leenane* (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*), *Lebka v Conemaře* (*A Skull in Connemara*) a *Osiřelý západ* (*The Lonesome West*). Z druhé, *Aranské trilogie* byly zatím uvedeny pouze dva její díly, *Mrzák inishmaanský* (*The Cripple of Inishmaan*) a *Poručík z Inishmoru* (*The Lieutenant of Inishmore*), které má následovat závěrečná část *Smrtky z Inisheeru* (*The Banshees of Inisheru*).

V této práci jsem určila tři perspektivy, jimiž se můžeme dívat na tvorbu Martina McDonagha. Můžeme ho vidět v kontextu britského in-yer-face divadla, jak ho ve své knize popisuje britský divadelní kritik Aleks Sierz. Dále, lokalita, ve které se hry odehrávají a také původ McDonaghových rodičů, kteří přišli do Londýna právě ze západu Irska, nabízí pohled na McDonagha v kontextu irského realismu. Třetí možností je pohled na McDonaghovy hry jako na obraz dění v „globální vesnici.“ Tomuto pohledu věnuji ve své práci nejvíce pozornosti, protože dává nejvíce možností vyniknout McDonaghově práci se současnou, postmoderní „realitou.“ Jako teoretický podklad pro porozumění této „realitě“ mi posloužila kniha Lindy Hutcheon *The Poetics of Postmodernism – History, Theory, Fiction*,“ dále

kniha Zygmunta Baumana *Globalizace – Důsledky pro člověka* a samozřejmě kniha Marshalla McLuhana *The War and Peace in the Global Village*.

Základním pramenem pro zkoumání McDonagha v kontextu britského dramatu je kniha Alekse Sierze *In-Yer-Face Theatre – British Drama Today*, která byla publikována v roce 2000. Sierz v ní popisuje fenomén „útočných, agresivních či emočně temných“²¹⁵ her, které jsou charakteristické pro období poloviny devadesátých let 20. století, někdy také nazývány termínem „coolness dramatika,“ „neojakobínská dramatika“ či „neobrutalismus.“ Charakteristickým rysem těchto her je, že využívají taktiku šoku a drsného, syrového a přímočarého jazyka; prostředí divadelního sálu navíc nutí diváky sdílet toto surové dění v bezprostředním a okamžitém kontaktu. Na rozdíl od většiny současníků však McDonagh ignoruje typická městská témata jako jsou drogy, homosexualita, etnické minority či gender a zasazuje své postavy do současného irského zapadákov, kde se však, jak píše Vladimír Mikulka „jeho postavy [...] opíjejí, lžou, vraždí a sprostějí tradičně a postaru.“²¹⁶

Jelikož McDonagh umístil děj svých her na irský západ, řadí se také do irského dramatického kánonu. V jeho hrách je navíc možné vystopovat ozvěny jeho irských předchůdců, především J.M. Syngea a jeho *Hrdinu západu* (1907), který také zobrazuje uzavřenou komunitu na západě Irska, kde hrdinou celé vesnice se stává údajný otcovrah. Především však McDonagh pracuje s žánrem irského dramatického realismu, který idealizoval venkovský život a lid.

Tento žánr McDonagh satirizuje a podrývá několika způsoby. Prvním ukazatelem, že nejde o tradiční venkovské drama, je jazyk, který je vykonstruován

²¹⁵ Sierz 30.

²¹⁶ Mikulka 34.

jako „směs současné pouliční mluvy a venkovské irské angličtiny.“²¹⁷ Tato ‚hybridita‘ jazyka (stejně jako jistá ‚hybridita‘ McDonaghova původu a dnešního kulturního povědomí obecně), poukazuje na skutečnost, že ve svých hrách McDonagh vytváří nový prostor, novou oblast, kterou Sierz nazval McDonaghland. Místo aby zůstal v hranicích tradičního irského realizmu, McDonagh se vydává k ‚možnému světu‘, vytváří tak, slovy Jeana Baudrillarda ‚simulaci‘ skutečnosti, a to nejen irského, ale jakéhokoli národa, který se zaobírá vlastní identitou tváří v tvář globalizaci. McDonaghovi texty tak odhalují globální aspekt každé vesnice.

Pojem ‚globální vesnice‘ zavedl kanadský učenec a teoretik médií Marshall McLuhan, který se zabýval stavem společnosti po druhé světové válce. Tvrdil, že média vytváří nový nervový systém lidstva a překračují hranice času i prostoru. Komunikace se tak stává simultánní a propojuje i ta nejodlehlejší místa. McDonaghovy postavy tak nežijí někde na okraji západního světa, jsou spojeny se světem a účastní se výměny ikon idealizovaného Irska za produkty globalizované (televizní seriály či různé produkty, etc.), které si zase oni příliš idealizují a přikládají jim nadměrnou důležitost. McLuhan však také tvrdí, že „každá nová technologie je podmiňuje válku“²¹⁸ a přináší bolest z ohrožené identity, kterou si lidé násilně brání. Dalším typ násilí, které média vytváří, je způsoben ‚novou prostupující energií, která prostupuje naším nervovým systémem“²¹⁹ a vyvolává touhu po hlubokém zaujetí.

V druhém oddíle práce se zabývám obecnými projevy globální vesnice ve McDonaghových hrách. Pokládám zde otázku, zda se řadí mezi ostatní produkty dostupné a úspěšné na globálním trhu a dají se proto kritizovat, či zatracovat podobnými výtkami, kterých se globalizovaným produktům dostává. Zejména jsou to výtky povrchnosti, jíž jsou zobrazovány postavy a jejich svět, dále pak množství

²¹⁷ Huber 557.

²¹⁸ McLuhan 98.

vzorů, které McDonagh ve svých hrách využívá. Další námitkou může být McDonaghova podbízivost současnému vkusu, zejména častým znázorňováním násilí, navíc komickými prostředky.

McDonaghovy hry nelze jasně popsat jako jeden jediný žánr, stejně jako jazyk her, tak i jejich žánr je hybridní, popisován často jako venkovské melodrama, či simulace tohoto žánru, melodramatická ‚soap opera‘, černá fraška, černá komedie, tragikomedie či temná groteska. Detailnější popis žánrů, jejichž prvky v McDonaghových hrách převládají, nám umožňuje lépe pochopit autorovu parodickou taktiku a vyhnout se tak kritice McDonagha za přílišné zobrazování a tematizování násilí. Jak uvádí Eric Bentley, melodrama si dobrovolně „libuje v absurditě vzniklé přeháněním.“²²⁰ Také překračuje „skutečnost ve prospěch ‚krajních významů‘“²²¹ oproti věrohodnému portrétu, který podává realizmus, a tak pro svou simulační povahu může dobře sloužit k vyjádření současného stavu globální vesnice. Stejně tak popis žánru frašky, kde pod povrchem neleží nic jiného než „čistá agrese, která není mravně ospravedlnitelná“ a jež nabízí prosté potěšení, které umožňuje „uhodit někoho po tváři a nebyt uhozen zpět,“²²² poukazuje na strategii populárních televizních programů či filmů.

Stejně tak jako žánry, postavy McDonaghových her odráží osudy lidí v globalizovaném světě. Jako podklad pro popis postav jsem zvolila kapitolu Baumanovi knihy *Globalizace- Důsledky pro člověka*, nazvanou *Turisté a tuláci*. Jeho popis ‚tuláků‘ jako nešťastníků, kteří žijí v prostorovém omezení a na rozdíl od ‚turistů‘ mají k dispozici spoustu času, který neumí a nemohou naplnit. Jedinou možností, jak opustit prostor, ve kterém jsou uzavřeni, je pro tuláky mediální hyper-

²¹⁹ McLuhan 76-77.

²²⁰ Bentley 203.

²²¹ Murphy 177.

²²² Bentley 203.

realita. Na rozdíl od turistů, jejichž život sledují na obrazovce, však do této globální hyper-reality nejsou schopni vstoupit. Toto ještě více ztrpčuje jejich frustraci a často vede k násilným gestům, která nahrazují běžnou komunikaci.

Ve vztahu tuláků k turistům a naopak, lze vidět střet, který nastává, když globální prvky vstupují do konkrétní lokality a naopak, když se tato lokalita mění v ikonu. Cílem této práce je také ukázat, jak obecné představy o životě v Irsku dokazují chápání Irska prostřednictvím ikon, které cirkulují na globálním trhu. Nemusíme tudíž nutně znát poměry v Irsku, ani žánr irského dramatického realismu proto, abychom pochopili McDonaghovu satiru či parodii těchto komercializovaných představ idealizujících jakýkoli národ či jakoukoli oblast na světě. Stejně tak humor McDonaghových her není odkázán na znalost určitého okruhu her, ale spíše na znalost poměrů současného světa a dezorientaci postav v tomto světě, která nikterak nevylučuje, že takto dezorientováni nemohou být právě diváci, kteří na postavy hledí z pozice turistů. Jejich pád do opačné kategorie však není vyloučen, naopak, v postavách tuláků se stále zračí druhá strana života turistů.

V další části diplomové práce se zaměřuji na analýzu specifických projevů globální vesnice ve hrách. Svět McDonaghových her je zobrazen jako chaotický a je provázen projevy, které v mnohém neodpovídají stavu globální vesnice v optimistickém pojetí McLuhanově, ale spíše Baumanovu regionu tuláků. V McDonaghlandu se sráží nehybnost s rychlým vývojem, bezčasí života postav s neustálým shonem ‚turistů,‘ horlivost k neadekvátním autoritám a symbolům a naprostá ignorace autority státu či náboženství. Komunikace, která má být v éře globální vesnice snadná, zdá se být v McDonaghlandu nemožná, omezená na hrubosti, fráze, pomluvy a násilí.

Prostor McDonaghlandu není popsán jako romantická irská krajina, lokality zmíněné ve hrách jsou popsány jako nehostinná místa spojená se smrtí a rozkladem: kopec je příliš vysoký, prudký a bahnitý, na poli leží mrtvá kráva, na hřbitově se vykopávají staré hroby, jejich obsah se drtí a končí v jezeře, spolu s dvěma postavami, které tam dobrovolně skončují s životem. Představa exilu však není o nic lákavější; jak se dozvídáme v *Krásce*, postavy nemají silnou motivaci pro odchod z domoviny:

Pato – Často se sám sebe ptám, kdyby v Leenane byla dobrá práce, zůstal bych v Leenane? [...] A když jsem tam v Londýně..., přeju si být tady, samozřejmě. Kdo by si to nepřál? Ale když jsem tady...nechci být *tam*, to ne. Ale vím, že tady být taky nechci.²²³

Spíše než aby se marně pokoušely opustit nehostinné prostředí, které na ně jako na tuláky číhá všude, kam přijdou, propadají postavy honbě za „leskem kinematografické reality.“²²⁴

Čas v McDonaghlandu je velmi nestálým prvkem. Postavy jím mohou do sytosti plýtvat v nesmyslných, opakujících se konverzacích a navíc jim uniká; v *Krásce* se zase některé postavy řídí vysílacím časem zpráv či oblíbených seriálů. Dezorientace v čase také způsobuje, že paměť postav je také nespolehlivá: postavy nemohou zapomenout křivdy, většinou velice malicherné, které se udály, minulost tím bývá pak často zamlžená, a zároveň bývá těžké vzpomenout si, který měsíc zrovna je. Budoucnost není tématem v McDonaghlandu, jedinými postavami, kteří se rozhodnou pro svou budoucnost něco udělat, jsou Tom Hanlon, který však po

²²³ *The Beauty Queen* 21-22.

²²⁴ Lachman 200.

zmařeném pokusu o kariérní postup vstupuje do jezera a Mrzák Billy, který opouští Inishmaan, ale s neúspěchem se brzy vrací zpět.

Jedinou případnou morální autoritou v McDonaghlandu je Otec Welsh, jeho jméno si však nikdo nepamatuje, a který se stává spolu s katolickou církví, jejímž je zástupcem, terčem mnohého zesměšňování. Místo něj uctívá Valene Connor plastové sošky svatých. Světská autorita, představovaná policistou Tomem, je obdobně diskreditovaná, zvláště poté, co se v *Lebce* pokusí zfalšovat důkazy, aby si obstaral podobný ‚případ‘ jaké denně na televizní obrazovce řeší jeho oblíbení detektivové: „Rád bych, aby všude kolem létala těla, ale to se nikdy neděje.“²²⁵ Chaos v hodnotách také umožňuje vrhnout se na vlastního bratra kvůli balíčku oblíbených chipsů.

Nehybnost, bezčasí a zmatek v hodnotách také formují komunikaci postav. Rozhovory se často zrcadlí a opakují a často sklouzávají k prázdné konverzaci, která dokáže postavy občas rozčlílit a která je navíc v *Lebce* satirizovaná:

Tom – [...] Jen sem myslel, že máš na mysli něco, co tě znervózňuje...

Mick – Co mám mít na mysli?

Mairtin – No, co má mít na mysli?

Tom – Já nevím. Nemám tušení. Jen tak, něco na mysli jako.

Mick – Já nemám nic na mysli.

Tom – Dobrý. To sem jen tak říkal jako.

Mick – A co si říkal že mám na mysli?

Tom – No určitě nic. Vůbec nic. Jenom tak konverzujem‘.

Mick – S konverzováním di do prdele. Máš něco co mi chceš říct?²²⁶

²²⁵ *A Skull in Connemara* 29.

²²⁶ *A Skull in Connemara* 34.

Dalším rysem komunikace je relativní stručnost jednotlivých promluv, která odráží krátké filmové repliky a také neschopnost postav soustředit se na delší promluvy. Cyklická struktura rozhovorů poukazuje na tradici absurdního dramatu, které zpochybňovalo důvěryhodnost jazyka a libovalo si v nejrůznějších frázích a klišé. Komunikace se dále také odvíjí formou klepů a pomluv, ve kterých se mísí lokální historky s historkami z nejrůznějších koutů světa. V tomto senzacechtivém tónu se také odehrávají hovory o závažných tématech jako je hladomor, britský útlak či otázka rasová či sexuální orientace, atd. Podobným způsobem se také nakládá s násilím, které je často předmětem klepů, ale také v něj ústí valná část vzájemné komunikace postav.

Hra *Plukovník z Inishmoru* se odlišuje od ostatních McDonaghových her právě tím, že násilí se v ní spolu s terorizmem stává výrazným tématem, zatímco v ostatních hrách je jen jedním ze způsobů komunikace. Tuto hru tedy můžeme chápat jako vývoj v McDonaghově kariéře. Zobrazuje násilí tak výraznými a přehnanými prostředky a poukazuje na absurdní a malicherné důvody, které k němu často vedou, že tím násilí dokonale zesměšňuje a tím i jistý rys irské národní povahy, která uctívá své bojovné mučedníky za svobodu Irska, jako byli Padraic Pearse či Robert Emmet. V mém pohledu optikou globální vesnice je násilí hlavního hrdiny, teroristy Padraica projevem agrese, kterou se brání svému postavení ve světě globální vesnice; je zároveň gestem obranným a zároveň je podmíněno ikonicitou násilí, jak ji vytvořila média. Originalita hry nespočívá v množství krutosti a mrtvol, které se objevují na scéně, ale v udání natolik směšných a triviálních důvodů, které tak násilí odsuzují.

Proto považuji McDonaghland za zveličený obraz života v globalizovaném světě, ve kterém se tradice proměňují v ikony a ikony tvoří nové tradice, kde lokální splývá s globálním a vytváří tak množství absurdit, které jsou brutální a komické zároveň.

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