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1 Introduction

During the last decade of the twentieth century a new wave of young playwrights emerged on English-speaking theatre stages. A large number of their productions were young, energetic and provocative. It was the time of In-Yer-Face Theatre. According to Aleks Sierz “in-yer-face theatre is any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message”(4). In order to shock and invoke uneasiness in the audience that type of plays employ a variety of different strategies. Extreme violence, rude language, nudity and visually explicit display of sexual acts are used to affect the audience. Yet, these plays did by no means merely cater for the audience's voyeuristic needs and urges. However exaggerated the shocking scenes might have been, there was a sincere critique of contemporary society underneath.

One of the most controversial and polarising representatives of that wave is Martin McDonagh. The son of Irish parents was born and raised in London. In 1996 his first play *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* premiered at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway. By 2012 he had published six more plays and two radio plays. Apart from his work as a dramatist, McDonagh has written and directed the award-winning short film *Six Shooter* and the feature length films *In Bruges* and *Seven Psychopaths*.

McDonagh's works can be categorised as “cool versions of in-yer-face theatre” using Sierz's terminology (5-6). Since McDonagh employs a naturalistic style and traditional structures and, above all, comedy, the audience can be calmed down and even be turned to laughter in the face of unsettling scenes presented on stage. Uneasy laughter can be considered a strategy to cope with wildly disturbing situations, which can be found in McDonagh's works in great number. As a large number of journalists and critics have pointed out, the juxtaposition of extreme violence and comedy clearly echoes Quentin Tarantino's films. Therefore, Vandevælde (293) aptly terms McDonagh's style a “fusion of Tarantinoesque gothic horror and melodramatic soap”. Similarly, blood, gore and spectres have featured on theatre stages ever since Shakespeare's plays entertained audiences and provoked awe and laughter. Vivian Mercier (47-77) argues that macabre and grotesque humour have a long and strong tradition in Irish society and literature throughout the centuries.

As their titles imply the plays *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Skull in Connemara*, *The Lonsome West*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* are set in the Irish West. Filled with dark humour, extreme violence and both macabre and grotesque elements these works can be interpreted as sharp and pointed satires of Irish society and will be the subjects of this thesis.

As Ondrej Pilny (2004: 228) points out, McDonagh's plays may "in fact ironise the very notion of Irish dramatic realism" by evoking certain genre expectations by the use of genre-typical setting and language. Victor Merriman (273), however, identifies the plays under discussion as a "dystopic vision" of Ireland displaying a highly amoral lower class. In addition, Merriman argues that the plays are intended to amuse the upper class by ridiculing and denigrating the destitute rural population. Similarly, Susan Conley (375) perceives the laughter evoked by the Dublin production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* in 2000 as "smug, superior chuckling at those ignorant culchies who haven't got the spunk to get out and make it in the big city." According to her "[t]he whole endeavour smacks of elitism and smugness." Following these assumptions, however, McDonagh's works would neither be satirical nor be playing with audience expectations. Contrarily, by debasing the characters the audience would be amused by their failure to achieve. However, the laughter generated by McDonagh's dark comedies does not derive from malicious joy. On the contrary, the laughter evoked is most uncomfortable. It provides an exit strategy in the face of extreme violence, of the monstrous, macabre and grotesque. As Mercier (48-49) points out "macabre humour [...] is inseparable from terror and serves as a defence mechanism against the fear of death". Fintan O'Toole (381-382) terms *The Leenane Trilogy* a "Gothic soap opera", in which "[the audience has] laughed at the Famine, at murders and suicides, at children drowning in slurry pits, and old men chocking on vomit." At a certain point, however, the laughter stops. Similarly, Laura Eldred (118) argues that McDonagh engages in the contemporary or postmodern gothic. According to her, the monster is, however, no longer part of the "undesired group" in the works under discussion. She contests that McDonagh uses the genre to "to empower and champion those same groups" (118). As Eldred (119) notes, in the tradition of In-Yer-Face Theatre McDonagh succeeds "to force the audience into uncomfortable positions, from which it is encouraged both to recognize sympathies not

recognized before and to come face to face with its own blood thirst.”

However, sympathy and empathy can only be evoked under the condition that the audience identify with the characters presented on the stage. Seemingly, theatre audiences in Dublin, London and New York share few characteristics with destitute village people in the westernmost parts of Connemara. However, the small god-forsaken village inhabited by Irish lunatics and brutes has become global. In the process of globalisation space has become condensed. The Irish experience does no longer greatly differ from a US American or Continental European one. Nowadays the people of the “Western World” are facing similar challenges that are no longer national but global. The West shares a common culture and cultural knowledge as distributed by the mass media. Supra-national companies distribute their commodities on international markets. Problems and solutions can no longer be solved by single communities or states.

Ireland has made a transition from a rural traditionalist country to a globalised neoliberal market economy in an extremely rapid manner. In the course of the economic boom of the 1990s termed the Celtic Tiger Irish society has undergone substantial changes. For the larger part of the 20th century Ireland had remained a conservative, rural and agricultural country with a great focus on tradition and cultural heritage. Yet, after the accession to the EC and a change in economic policies, Ireland experienced a tremendous economic boost shaking the society in its foundations. In the course of that boost Ireland rapidly developed into a full-fledged modern market society.

This thesis will address the question in which manner Martin McDonagh's works represent the effects of globalisation on Irish society, while being artefacts of globalised culture themselves. As Vandeveldt (292) rightly argues, “McDonagh's [Leenane] trilogy does not feature drugs, pop music or trendy lifestyles, but members of a rural community who are victims of loneliness, depression and economic progress.” According to Shaun Richards, “McDonagh [...] sees the west as surviving on the leavings of more prosperous economies” (255). Furthermore, he points out that McDonagh's engagement with the economically underprivileged status of the Irish west puts him in the tradition of the already canonised Irish dramatist John M. Synge.

Each of the five plays under discussion will be examined in terms of

setting, characters, socio-economic conditions, instances of the macabre and the grotesque, influence of mass media and consumerism, and potential intertextualities. The findings will then be juxtaposed with the actual living conditions of the Irish population. In addition, it will be shown that it was in fact Celtic Tiger Ireland that has produced a social class of people deprived of the very prospects promised by the economic boom. Those are the banshees that haunt McDonagh's Irish West. Eventually, the role of McDonagh's works as commodities in the context of globalised drama will be discussed.

2 *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*

In 1996 *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* premiered at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway produced by the Druid Theatre Company. Subsequently, the play was performed in London, New York and worldwide. It has been the subject of many discussions and controversies. Nevertheless, it has been a great success and the starting point of Martin McDonagh's exceptional theatrical career. According to Patrick Lonergan (2006: 296) *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is concerned with the nuclear Irish family at the time this authority "was being eroded". As will be shown, the notion of an intact family is indeed heavily attacked in the play.

2.1 Setting

At the beginning of the play the audience members find themselves looking at a "living-room/kitchen of a rural cottage in the west of Ireland". Outside the window fields are visible. It is raining heavily. A crucifix is hanging on the wall. These stage instructions immediately provide a slightly romanticised, stereotypical image of the rural Irish West that is not fixed to a specific period in time. The Irish drinking toast inscribed on a kitchen towel "May you be half an hour in Heaven afore the Devil knows you're dead" evokes the stereotypical image of the Irish drunk, while foreshadowing the horrors yet to come, as does a poker hanging from the wall. Yet, the fact that a picture of John and Robert Kennedy is present provides evidence that it must at least be the 1960s. All these items remind one of a traditional Irish household in a time before mass media and globalised consumer culture; a period prior to the economic boost of the 1990s, pre-modern Ireland. However, a newer oven, an electric kettle, a radio and a television indicate that it may even be a few decades later, when these commodities had become available to a broad portion of the general public. The appearance of *The Sullivans* on the television provides no clear reference of time either, since the show was broadcast from the 1970s until the 1990s on RTE. Similar to the series, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* oscillates somewhere between pre-modern and Celtic Tiger Ireland, since the play offers little reference to its temporal setting. However, as John McDonagh points out (232-233), the play could be set in 1989, if Ray's statement that his ball had

been confiscated by Maureen ten years ago in 1979 is to be believed. Yet, whether Ray's information is reliable or not, the play clearly is situated in a time of transition between pre-modern and Celtic Tiger Ireland. As Vandeveld (293) contends, “[t]he Ireland of the 1950s and of the 1990s overlap in one and the same picture.”

As regards spatial setting the title implies that the play is set in Leenane, an actual village in the Connemara region, in the western portion of County Galway. According to the region's tourist information website (see Connemara Ireland) Connemara is known and famous for its beautiful coastline, mountains, lakes, creeks and harbours. The tourism industry attempts to attract people from industrialised countries that have a craving for an untouched nature in a pre-modern world. This constructed image of Ireland is void of all the negative effects modernity has inflicted upon nature and Western society. The hills are green and the lakes are clear; nature is untouched. People happily live together in small communities. Life is tranquil and lacks the bustle of highly industrialised and competitive market economies. Everything is the way an almighty creator might have intended it to be. This vision of Ireland is deeply rooted in traditional and reactionary ideology as exemplified in De Valera's St. Patrick's Day address of 1943. He dreams of a pre-modern Irish society that would be “[t]he home [...] of a people living the life that God desires that men should live”. This stereotypical image of the Irish West is, however, deconstructed in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. Although the scenic landscape of the region is acknowledged, life in Leenane does by no means seem attractive to Pato and Maureen:

PATO. [...] Of course it's beautiful here, a fool can see. The mountains and the green, and people speak. But when everybody knows everybody else's business ... I don't know. (Pause.) You can't kick a cow in Leenane without some bastard holding a grudge twenty years.
 MAUREEN. It's true enough.
 (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* 31)

Similarly, when showing photographs of Connemara to a co-worker from Trinidad Maureen's decision to leave Leenane is met with incomprehension.

MAUREEN. [...] And a calendar with a picture of Connemara on I showed her one day, and 'What the hell did you left there for?' she

said back to me.
 (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* 44)

Both Maureen and Pato show ambiguous attitudes towards Leenane. Although they are emotionally attached to the land, they dislike the place due to the lack of employment opportunities and the narrow-mindedness of the people living there. Especially for young people like Ray Leenane seems a boring and miserable place to live in with no prospects:

RAY. 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.' (Pause.) I be bored anyway. I be continually bored. (Pause.) London I'm thinking of going to. Aye. Thinking of it, anyways. To work, y'know. One of these days. Or else Manchester. They have a lot more drugs in Manchester. Supposedly, anyways.
 (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* 76)

Ray thinks of leaving Leenane, as Pato and Maureen have before him. Their endeavours in England were unsuccessful, since they found neither wealth nor happiness there. However, to Ray even a life with drugs in England seems more desirable than staying in Leenane.

According to Merriman these people are ridiculed as stage Irish, a repetition of "colonial stereotypes" (273). However, those characters are more than former hetero-stereotypes imposed on the inhabitants of Leenane. Rather, they are hyperbolic specimens of a large proportion of the Irish population that did not profit from the Celtic Tiger and could indeed be called "Tiger Trash" (see Merriman).

2.2 Characters

Maureen, the main character, is a forty-year-old spinster living with her mother. While her sisters have already been married for some time and established families of their own, Maureen is left to care for the frail seventy-year-old mother. Having returned from a temporal stay in a mental hospital in England twenty years ago, Maureen has been living in her mother's cottage in Connemara. Maureen's attempt to leave Ireland and to work as a cleaning woman in England had resulted in a mental breakdown due to extensive abuse

from her English co-workers. Now her life consists of preparing Complán, turning on the radio, making tea, cleaning, cooking and feeding chicken. Maureen is heavily discontent with her situation of being a caretaker, however, there seems to be no alternative. The only perspective to escape her obligations would be to enter a relationship with a man and prospective husband. However, her mother Mag takes care to prevent that from happening. As a result Maureen has never had any serious amorous contact with a man.

MAG. Young girls should not be out gallivanting with fellas ...!
 MAUREEN. Young girls. I'm forty years old, for feck's sake!
 [...]
 MAUREEN. 'Young girls!' That's the best yet. And how did Annette and Margo ever get married if it wasn't first out gallivanting that they were?
 [...]
 MAUREEN. I'll tell you, eh? 'Young girls out gallivanting.' I've heard it all now. What have I ever done but *kissed* two men in the past forty year?
 (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane 22-23*)

Maureen's (sexual) frustration results in open aggression directed against her mother. She forces her mother to swallow lumpy Complán and repeatedly sears her hand with boiling oil in order to punish her for ruining her life. When Maureen engages in a relationship with Pato, the possibility of escaping her living hell presents itself. However, her mother once again deprives her of the prospect of leaving her and her miserable life in Leenane behind. When Maureen discovers her mother's scheme, the action reaches its climax and she kills her with a poker.

Mag Folan is a seventy-year-old stout and frail woman. Her days consist of drinking Complán and tea, eating porridge and watching TV. However, Mag is dependent on her daughter taking care of her and the house. In addition she's unwilling to move to a care home.

MAG (pause). I'd die before I'd let meself be put in home.
 MAUREEN. Hopefully, aye.
 (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane 61*)

Therefore she is desperate to prevent her daughter Maureen from leaving the house and does not hesitate to achieve that objective by all means available to her. She even suffers the corporal and verbal abuse inflicted on her by her

daughter. However, not until she faces the possibility of Maureen leaving with Pato, Maureen reports the abuse inflicted on her by her daughter:

MAG. She makes me drink [Complan] when I don't like it and forces me.

[...]

MAG. (pointing at Maureen. Loudly) She's the one that scoulded me hand! I'll tell you that, now! Let alone sitting on stray men! Held it down on the range she did! Poured chip-pan fat o'er it! Aye, and told the doctor it was me!

MAUREEN. (pause. Nonplussed to Pato) Be having a mug of tea before you go, Pato, now.

[...]

MAG. Did you not hear what I said?!

MAUREEN. Do you think Pato listens to the smuttering of a senile owl hen?

MAG. Senile, is it? (She holds up her left hand.) Don't I have the evidence?

MAUREEN. Come over here a second, Pato. I want you to smell this sink for me.

(*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* 38-40)

However, Mag's accusations are met with disbelief. As an elderly woman she need not be believed. All her allegations are easily dismissed by reference to her age or by rapid change of the subject. The fact that Mag is tortured by her daughter on a regular basis is being ignored by the other characters. This is due to the fact that events of that type cannot and must not occur in their immediate surroundings.

Mag Folan and her daughter are living in a most peculiar symbiosis. No matter how severe their conflicts are and how disturbed their mother-daughter relationship they resemble each other. Eventually Maureen even takes her mother's place in the rocking chair and Ray points out to her: "The exact fecking image of your mother you are, sitting there pegging orders and forgetting me name! Goodbye!" (83) Instead of ridding herself of Mag, Maureen has undergone a metamorphosis and thus changed into the monster she had sought to destroy.

Pato is a good-looking man, aged about forty. He has returned from England, where he had been working, to attend a family celebration. This event provides the community with the opportunity to meet and socialise. It is on this rare occasion that Pato encounters Maureen and engages in a relationship with her. Yet, Pato is not content with his job opportunities, neither in England nor in

Ireland.

PATO. What can you do?

MAUREEN. Stay?

PATO (pause). 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 and working in rain and it's more or less cattle I am, and the young fellas cursing over cards and drunk and sick, and the oul digs over there, all pee-stained mattresses and nothing to do but watch the clock ... when it's there I am, 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.

(*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* 31)

Apparently, there seems to be no future for the two in Leenane. Thus, Pato suggests in his letter that would later be burned by Mag that he and Maureen emigrate to America. Emigration to America has been a route a large number of Irish people have taken in the course of history. Although the prospects in the United States may not be substantially better, it evokes connotations more positive than England.

MAG (pause). If I had to go begging for handouts anywhere, I'd rather beg for them in America than in England, because in America it does be more sunny anyways. (Pause.) Or is that just something they say, that the weather is more sunny, Maureen? Or is that a lie, now?

(*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* 9)

Yet, since the letter never reaches Maureen, the chance to go to Boston with her lover passes. When Maureen learns that Pato has been engaged with another woman she eventually loses her mind and succumbs to that sort of loneliness her mother Mag always was afraid of.

Ray, Pato's twenty-year-old brother, is not willing to remain in Leenane either. In the play he is running errands for his brother and quickly grows weary of it. He is commenting on police brutality inflicted on him and others. Moreover, Ray most probably engages in alcohol and drug abuse in order to push his boring and miserable life to the back of his mind. For him Leenane provides absolutely no prospects. Any place would be more attractive to him.

2.3 Celtic Tiger Ireland

The characters in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* are emblematic of the lower classes of Irish society in the 1990s. While the Irish economy experienced substantial growth at that time the money was not evenly redistributed to the majority of the citizens. Since the west of Ireland had never been an economically thriving nor a wealthy area, the effects of these developments were intensified in these parts of the country. According to Kirby (64), “[t]here are fears that the economic growth associated with the Celtic Tiger is exacerbating regional inequalities in Ireland.” The major issues generated by the Celtic Tiger that are addressed in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* are the following:

The disintegration of the traditional family. Therefore, Mag's daughters apart from Maureen have left their parents' home and set up families of their own instead of living in a large household encompassing three or even more generations. In addition, there is the lack of appropriate care for the elderly. Due to this Maureen is compelled to assume the role of her mother's caretaker. Since there are no services for personal care at home available and moving into a care home is not an option for Mag, there is no alternative but to conflict and escalation.

Moreover, there is the problem of high unemployment. Neither Pato nor Maureen were able to find employment in the region and are consequently forced to eventually become foreign workers in England. Yet, even abroad they could only conduct low-wage jobs they were not content with. The unavailability of well-paid employment is a direct result of Irish policies in the era of the Celtic Tiger. In order to attract foreign investment, especially from the United States, labour protection legislation was relaxed in accordance with trade unions. Moreover, business and income taxes were lowered, which resulted in a decrease of the budget that could have been spent on welfare measures. As Kirby (63) points out, the wealthy profited from economic growth and subsequent tax cuts disproportionately. Moreover, he contends that “the poorest 20 per cent have seen a significant decrease in disposable income”.

It is therefore not surprising that a large number of the workforce, especially younger people, either moved from economically weak areas to industrial centres or left the country altogether. Emigration has always been a

major issue in Irish history. However, even in times of economic growth such as the 1990s people did migrate in order to find a better life and job opportunities.

Another issue arising from the people's unfavourable situation is alcohol and drug abuse, as exemplified by Ray. As Kirby (67) points out, “[a] report by an EU drugs agency found that Irish teenagers are twice as likely to have sampled heroin than most other young Europeans and four out of every ten Irish 16-year-olds have tried cannabis.” The increasing use of drugs of any kind clearly indicates that life quality of young citizens has decreased. In a world without real prospects the intake of legal and illegal drugs is at least understandable as an escape strategy.

2.4 Connemara Kitchen of Horrors

It must be made perfectly clear that *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is not a mimetic representation of the actual Leenane and its inhabitants. It is a highly exaggerated dark comedy that satirises the romantic image of the Irish West. Moreover, it addresses issues inherent in Irish Celtic Tiger society that stem from Ireland's transition into a neoliberal market economy.

In addition, McDonagh does not ridicule the economically weak for the sport of the wealthy, as Merriman contends. His term “tiger trash” clearly suggests that the characters constitute a group that is not favoured by the economy and thus smiled upon. In terms of traditional gothic these individuals would qualify as monsters that need to be destroyed to re-establish order and peace in society. In the *Beauty Queen of Leenane* instances of torture, suppressed sexuality and matricide eventually lead to the horrific situation that Mag returns from the dead and takes on the form of her killer Maureen. From another angle Maureen transforms into the monster she has just destroyed. Either way, there is no solution to the tension generated by the play. The monster is in fact not destroyed. As Laura Eldred (116) notes, McDonagh “[forces] the reading or viewing audience into sympathy with his monsters” despite of their “amoral behaviour and attitudes”.

The audience does not laugh at Maureen's failure to emancipate herself from her mother even though she killed her. The fact that Mag is afraid to lose her daughter and remain behind old and lonely does not stimulate vicious

laughter either. To a certain point the characters' actions are approved by the audience. As mentioned earlier the laughter originates from the enormous monstrosity of their deeds. The laughter is a defensive act and when it dies, the audience has a chance to process what just has happened before their eyes. However, there still remains sympathy for McDonagh's characters. Eventually the audience identifies with Maureen and Mag, caricatures of "tiger trash", post-modern monsters.

2.5 Globalised Leenane

However geographically remote the setting and socio-economically underprivileged the characters are, nevertheless there are a large number of references to consumerism that can be identified in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. The availability of certain commodities has a decisive impact on the characters' everyday life and makes them part of a globalised consumer culture. Most importantly there are a television set and a radio present in the Folan household. Mag spends most of her time watching television or listening to radio broadcasts. As regards television *The Sullivans*, *Sons and Daughters* and *A Country Practice* are mentioned in the play. These are Australian series that were redistributed all over the world. On another occasion Pato comments on *Bugs Bunny*, a US cartoon that he apparently had watched on television earlier. Thus, the television programme mainly features TV productions from other parts of the world. In contrast, ceildh, traditional Irish music is played on the radio. Moreover, Mag's birthday dedication issued by her daughters Annette and Margo is broadcast on the radio. Thus, it can be argued that television serves as a window to the globalised world, while radio provides the listener with the native and the regional.

As Maureen (32) points out, her mother loves a song sung by Delia Murphy, who was given the nickname "The Queen of Connemara". However, the younger generation, Maureen and Pato, cannot stand the "oul creepy song". Irish cultural artefacts do no longer appeal to them.

Moreover, most of the radio programme is unintelligible for the characters in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* since it is broadcast in Irish:

MAG. Not for nonsense did I want it set.
 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.
 MAUREEN. What country are you living in?
 [...]
 MAG. *Ireland.*
 [...]
 MAUREEN. It's Irish you should be speaking in Ireland.
 (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane* 7-8)

In this passage the dilemma of a large portion of the Irish population is exemplified. A national language is essential to construct a shared national identity tied to national history and culture. However, since most Irish lack sufficient language competence in Irish Gaelic, English language cultural artefacts are more easily accepted. This entails an alienation from and a decline of Irish cultural identity. As a result Ireland is especially prone to English and US American cultural imperialism.

It is therefore not surprising that even the Folan kitchen is filled with foreign products. The notorious lumpy Complan Mag is forced to drink is a nutritional product from the UK. Cup-A-Soup demanded by Maureen is sold worldwide. Even the original Irish biscuit company Jacob's was acquired by a transnational company in the 1990s. Thus, even the biscuits referred to in the play have been globalised. Merely Tayto crisps still are an Irish product, which serve as a pretext for the foreplay between Maureen and Pato (Morrison 113-114). Yet, all culinary references point to unhealthy junk food.

2.6 Intertextualities

Moreover, the plot of the play itself can be linked to other artefacts of Anglophone culture. According to Laura Eldred, there is a clear connection between McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and Hitchcock's *Psycho*: “The plots [...] are remarkably similar: both Norman Bates and Maureen Folan murder out of sexual repression. For both murderers, the mothers are the source of that repression [...]. Both children subsequently become the mother that they murdered” (112).

Thus, McDonagh places his first play into the tradition of the horror genre. With the repeated mention of *The Sullivians* and other Australian TV productions the genre of the soap opera is referred to. Since the action of the play takes place in the same kitchen/living room and the mis-en-scène does not change, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* conforms to the basic requirements of a soap opera. Thus, Vandervelde aptly calls McDonagh's style "horror-soap" and describes it as "an exaggerated version of the old genre of tragicomedy" (297).

In addition, there are a number of cross-references to the two other plays of the *Leenane Trilogy* in order to connect them. Ray mentions Father Welsh, the village priest, several times who features in *The Lonesome West*, the third play of the trilogy (15). He points out that Welsh on one occasion physically abused Mairtin Hanlon, a character from *A Skull in Connemara* (75). Moreover, Coleman and Valene Connor, the main characters of *The Lonesome West* are referred to by Pato in a conversation with Maureen (28-29). Tom Hanlon, member of the local police force, and one of the main characters in *A Skull in Connemara* is accused of having assaulted Ray (75). In addition, Maryjohnny Rafferty, more prominently featured in *A Skull in Connemara*, allegedly attended Mag's funeral together with Father Welsh (75). Subsequently, there are references in the other plays of the trilogy to characters of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. Thus, the three plays are highly interwoven.

As has been shown, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* portrays people living in a village in the Irish West that have not profited from the economic boom of the 1990s. Its inhabitants struggle with unemployment, lack of prospects, disillusionment, isolation and alienation. The traditional institution of the family has ceased to provide interpersonal warmth and security. On the contrary, the family has become the nucleus of conflict, violence and murder. Globalisation has provided the characters with foreign TV productions and junk food. However, they have lost their sense of national, regional and local identity in a globalised Ireland. McDonagh's employment of macabre, grotesque and violent elements in the tradition of In-Yer-Face theatre inspires the audience to identify and sympathise with the characters. The audience does not feel contempt but compassion for the losers of the Celtic Tiger era. McDonagh's dark tragicomedy does not offer a solution to the issues of the play. On the contrary, the miserable situation of the characters left in Leenane continues to

be unpromising.

Similarly, the lower classes of Ireland have not witnessed an alleviation but an aggravation of their situation throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. McDonagh's post-modern gothic monsters have prevailed and would reappear on the theatre stage in *A Skull in Connemara*.

3 A Skull in Connemara

The first production of *A Skull in Connemara* was presented at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway in 1997. Shortly after its première the second play of *The Leenane Trilogy* was staged at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Then the production company toured Ireland and the UK presenting the then completed *Leenane Trilogy* with great success. According to Lonergan's analysis, a central theme in *A Skull in Connemara* is the law (296). It is not surprising that the law as pre-Celtic-Tiger “institution of Irish life” is presented in an unfavourable light. Consequently, legal authorities, represented by the guard Tom Hanlon, are shown to be dysfunctional and highly corrupt in the course of the play. Similar to the first play of the trilogy, the characters in *A Skull in Connemara* can be described as “tiger trash”, people that were left behind by Celtic Tiger Ireland.

3.1 Setting in the Gaeltacht

The opening stage instructions set the play in rural Galway. The first scene takes place in a “fairly spartan main room of a cottage” (87). The crucifix hanging from the wall and a number of farming tools immediately evoke associations with realistic peasant plays. Due to the interconnections between *A Skull in Connemara* and the two other plays of the trilogy it is safe to assume that the cottage is located in close vicinity to Leenane in County Galway. In order to refer to previous Irish plays set in that specific geographical area McDonagh uses a special idiom for his characters' speech. Similar to John M. Synge, McDonagh creates a variety of the English language for his plays that aims to convey the quintessentially Irish idiom of the Irish West. As Lisa Fitzpatrick points out (146), the use of Hiberno-English may either evoke positive associations or serve satirical purposes.

The positive stereotypes associated with speakers of Hiberno-English are closely connected to aforementioned romantic images of the Irish West as insinuated by Eamon De Valera in 1934. It is the language of friendly village people living in perfect harmony with nature; the words of the prayers of humble folk whose Catholic faith is unshaken; the words of “athletic youths” and “comely maidens”. Since language is crucially linked to national identity, these

positive associations would also be featured in Irish nationalist plays. Apart from the celebration of Irish culture and heritage Hiberno-English is distinctly different from the standard variety of English as spoken by the elites of the former colonial power.

However, it is safe to assume that McDonagh's Hiberno-English aims to achieve another purpose. As pointed out earlier, the works under discussion succeed in deconstructing the romantic, pastoral image of the Irish West. This is in part achieved by the use of artificial Hiberno-English in the characters' dialogues. The notions evoked by the geographical/linguistic setting of the plays are clearly contrasted with the horrid events taking place. Lisa Fitzpatrick (147-148) argues that Martin McDonagh uses these linguistic elements "not to stage Irish identity or engage the audience in an emotional identification with the characters, but on the contrary, to create the distance that allows the audience to laugh at the horror he presents." This analysis, however, supports Victor Merriman's assessment by reducing the characters to the stereotypical stage-Irish in the tradition of plays ridiculing and debasing the Irish people. However, in the plays under discussion the extensive use of artificial Hiberno-English satirises the notion of the pastoral West that stands in contrast to the horrific actions committed by the characters. It does not, however, alienate the characters from the audience, as suggested by Fitzpatrick.

McDonagh's characters' speech is, however, fashioned after a variety of English that is in fact spoken in the West of Ireland. According to Todd (71) "[Hiberno-English] is a range of English spoken by people whose ancestral mother tongue was Irish. It is strongest in the vicinity of the Gaeltachts [...] where pockets of Gaelic speakers survived until the 1960s." When comparing Todd's linguistic description of Hiberno-English to McDonagh's texts it can be pointed out that there is a great lexical and syntactical correspondence. Yet, the actual pronunciation and speech rhythm are dependent on the linguistic competence and performance of the actors. As Fintan O'Toole points out (ix), as a son of Irish parents McDonagh had the possibility to experience that variety of English during various stays with his relatives in Connemara. It is therefore not surprising that his characters' speech bears a strong resemblance to the actual Hiberno-English spoken in Connemara.

As regards temporal setting of *A Skull in Connemara* the action takes

place at around the same time as the other two plays of the trilogy. When Mairtin tells Mick when the grave digging is scheduled to begin, a clear temporal reference to *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is provided.

MICK. This coming week? That's early. In the year, I mean. Although with them burying poor Mag Folan last month there I suppose has hurried things along a little.
(*A Skull in Connemara* 97)

Moreover, due to the mention of characters featured in the other two plays and a number of cultural references that will be discussed later it is safe to assume that the action takes place in the early 1990s in Celtic Tiger Ireland. Similar to the rest of the trilogy, this play focusses on characters that engage in illegal actions: Criminal Tiger Trash.

3.2 Characters

The main character in *A Skull in Connemara* is Mick Dowd, a man in his fifties. Since the death of his wife Oona, who died under dubious circumstances in a car accident caused by Mick, he has been living alone. In addition, there are allegations that Mick killed his wife on purpose. However, he repeatedly contends that it was a pure drink-driving accident. He pursues a rather unpleasant profession. Every autumn Mick earns his living by exhuming the dead from the local churchyard to make room for fresh corpses. It is not surprising that Mick is not excessively enthusiastic about his occupation. Yet, he feels his work to be necessary and appreciated as following passages illustrate.

MARY. Well, you would be the man, Mick Dowd, I'd expect would argue that, the filthy occupation you take on every autumntime ...

[...]

MICK. Doesn't the County pay for the job to be done if it's such a filthy occupation? Doesn't the priest half the time stand over me an chat to me and bring me cups of tea? Eh?

(*A Skull in Connemara* 91)

THOMAS. Awful morbid work this is, Mick.

MICK. It's work to be done.

[...]

THOMAS. Awful ghoulish though.

MICK. Work to be done it is. Isn't the space needed?
(A Skull in Connemara 119)

Presumably he is unemployed during the rest of the year. It is, however, not clear what eventually happens to the remains of the deceased. Mick Dowd spends his leisure time sitting in his cottage drinking. He is kept company by his neighbour Mary and his co-worker Mairtin. While sitting and drinking together they discuss whether the exhumed corpses should be battered to dust and thrown in the slurry or put in a bag and eased into the nearby lake with a string of prayers said over them (100). As the play progresses, Mick eventually openly resorts to violence against the dead and the living. When he is obliged to open his wife's grave, he finds it empty and Oona's corpse stolen. Subsequently, Mick directs his aggression against the mortal remains of the deceased.

MICK. This is the only lesson skulls be understanding.
He brings the mallet crashing down on the skull nearest to him, shattering it, spraying pieces of it all over the room.

He won't be smiling no more.

MAIRTIN. You've bugged him to skitters!

MICK. I have. Not skitter enough.

Mick starts smashing the skull into even smaller pieces and stamping on the bits that have fallen on the floor. Mairtin stares at him dumbfounded.

(A Skull in Connemara 137)

As Mick heavily suspects Mairtin of his participation in the disappearance of Oona's bones he attempts to kill him with a mallet. This attempt is conducted in the exact same fashion that Mick allegedly murdered his wife. However, due to the incompetence of the local guard, Thomas Hanlon, Mick is not charged with attempted murder, although he already had confessed. In the end Mick sits alone caressing his wife's skull repeating his innocence in her death. Yet, the audience cannot be certain whether the main character they have come to sympathise with is guilty of homicide or not.

Maryjohnny Rafferty is an elderly woman in her seventies. She is a stout, white-haired neighbour of Mick Dowd's. In the opening chapter the audience learns that she does not approve of young people's behaviour. She is heavily offended by them kissing and cursing in public. However, Mick immediately proves Mary's hypocrisy to her.

MARY. Like a pack o' whores.
 MICK. (*pause*) Who's like a pack o' whores?
 MARY. Them schoolies parading up and down.
 MICK. I wouldn't say a pack o' whores, now.
 MARY. Kissing.
 MICK. What harm?
 MARY. Cursing.
 MICK. Mary, you're too old-fashioned, so you are. Who doesn't curse nowadays?
 MARY. I don't.
 MICK. 'You don't.'
 MARY. (*pause*) Eamonn Andrews didn't.
 (*A Skull in Connemara 89*)

She even mentions an incident when she discovered youngsters urinating in the churchyard 27 years ago that she reported to the village priest then. However, as their conversation continues the audience learns of further infamous actions committed by the elderly woman that reveal her apparent hypocrisy. She sells free maps and fake filming props to American tourists looking for *The Quiet Man* filming locations.

MICK. Oh, cadging off the Yanks a pound a throw the maps the Tourist Board asked you to give them for free.
 [...]
 MICK. John Wayne photos, two pound a pop. Maureen O'Hara drank out of this mug – a fiver. Boy, I'll tell you, anh? Them eejit Yanks.
 MARY. If the eejit Yanks want to contribute a couple of bob to an oul lady's retirement, I'll not be standing in their way, sure.
 (*A Skull in Connemara 92*)

Moreover, Mary has been cheating when playing bingo at the church hall “since de Valera was twelve” (92). Nevertheless, she repeatedly voices her dissatisfaction with the moral state of the village and its habitants and tuts at every swearword uttered by Mairtin. Even the village priest, Father Welsh, who should be the highest moral authority, is not to her liking. In addition, she appears to be the only person who witnessed the events surrounding Oona's death and repeatedly confronts Mick with what she saw.

MARY. Poor Oona. Why did you kill her, Mick? Sure, bad scrambled eggs is no just cause to butcher your wife.
 (*A Skull in Connemara 155*)

MARY. An the lies o'er your poor Oona dying then.

[...]

MICK. What did you see? There was nothing to see.

MARY. Oh I suppose there was nothing to see, now.

MICK. If you've got something to say to me, go ahead and say it outright and stop beating around the bush like a petrified fecking lummo. If you had seen anything made you think I'd killed Oona deliberate, why so would you've still come visiting me every night for the past seven year?

Mary finishes off her poteen with a flourish and puts the glass down.

MICK. Oh, just to cadge me fecking booze, was it?

[...]

MICK. Maryjohnny?

Mary turns.

MICK. You've forgotten your fluorescent pens, there.

She picks the pens up.

MARY. Thank you.

(A Skull in Connemara 164-165)

The ending of the play suggests that it is highly probable that Mick in fact killed his wife on purpose and Mary witnessed it. Yet, Mary has decided not to testify on what happened that evening seven years before. She prefers visiting Mick every evening talking and drinking poteen trying to find out what Mick's motive might have been. In addition, she is dependent on Mick, him being the only person close to her. Similarly, Mick also seems to seek her company. Not only is Mary the only person capable of providing evidence of Mick's guilt but she also provides him with a minimum of social interaction. Their alienation from the rest of the community makes them a most peculiar couple giving each other some hold in a social environment hostile towards them.

Mairtin Hanlon is a young man around twenty years old. He sings in the church choir but is not too fond of the songs they perform. It is only Christmas carols he likes to sing, "because they do make you very Christmassy, like." In everyday life Mairtin does not feel very "Christmassy" at all as it were. He is exposed to corporal abuse exerted by his father, the village priest Welsh, his brother Thomas and Mick.

MAIRTIN. My own father is right. And if he took his belt off to you for no reason at all eight times a week, it wouldn't be so quick you'd be saying 'Your own father now'. I'll tell you that.

(A Skull in Connemara 96)

MAIRTIN. A back-fecking-hander the fecker [Father Welsh] gave me, you fecking bastard ya!
(A Skull in Connemara 122)

THOMAS. You're not going the feck home either. I've told Dad to give you a batter himself if you're home before daybreak. So there you are.
 MAIRTIN. You're always ganging up on me, the fecking two of ye.
(A Skull in Connemara 125)

Consequently, Mairtin is exerting his frustration in the form of violence against those weaker than himself. He and his friend Ray Dooley attacked two girls at the disco with a glass bottle, when they refused to dance with them (96-97). Moreover, he placed the school hamster into an oven to cook it alive (112; 140). In addition, he takes great pleasure in hammering the skulls he has exhumed together with Mick. Mairtin had been chosen by Father Welsh to assist Mick with the grave digging. However, Mairtin's work is not very well paid for.

MAIRTIN. Oul Welsh said. Aye. Twenty quid the week. How much do you get the week, Mick?
(A Skull in Connemara 97)

Thus, Mairtin is eager to learn what Mick's payment is. Yet, Mick refuses to tell him. Mairtin seems desperate to make some money. It is therefore not surprising that he gladly accepted Oona's rose locket from his brother Thomas as payment. However, only the fact that he could not sell it for much at a Galway pawn shop makes him confess their deeds and return it to Mick.

THOMAS. Shut up about that digging ...!
 MAIRTIN. I won't shut up about that digging and I'll tell you why I won't shut up about that digging! Because not even a fecking pound would the Galway pawn give me for that rose locket, and you said it'd get me at least ten. [...]
(A Skull in Connemara 159)

Consequently, Mairtin is assaulted with a mallet by his brother but saved by Mick who tried to kill him in exactly the same way a little earlier. When the situation eventually dissolves, the conflicts, however, remain unresolved.

Thomas Hanlon is a man in his thirties serving as the local guard in Leenane. It is his responsibility to reinforce the law in his community. However, he does not succeed to do so by any means. The recent murder of Mag Folan

is not persecuted and consequently remains unpunished. The circumstances of Oona's death are still not entirely clear and also minor offences such as fraud or cruelty towards animals are not being properly prosecuted in the Leenane community. Moreover, reports of violence involving the police force are already to be found in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*:

RAY. Good and heavy and long. A half a dozen coppers you could take out with this poker and barely notice and have not a scratch on it and then clobber them again just for the fun of seeing blood running out of them. *(Pause.)* Will you sell it to me?
(Beauty Queen of Leenane 55)

RAY. I suppose they do only have their jobs to do. *(Pause.)* Although no fan am I of the bastarding police. Me two wee toes they went and broke on me for no reason, me arsehole drunk and disorderly.

MAUREEN. The police broke your toes, did they?

RAY. They did.

MAUREEN. Oh. Tom Hanlon said what it was you kicked a door in just your socks.

RAY. Did he now? And I suppose you believe a policeman's word over mine. Oh aye. Isn't that how the Birmingham Six went down?

(Beauty Queen of Leenane, 74-75)

As these passages illustrate, the guards exert their monopoly on violence excessively. In addition, the reference to the "Birmingham Six" case suggests that the police forge evidence to convict suspects of crimes they have not committed. This is exactly the case in *A Skull in Connemara*, when Thomas Hanlon exhumes Oona's body and carves a crack onto her skull in order to obtain evidence against Mick Dowd. He does so in order finally to solve a case and thus be promoted. Mick, the social outcast, who is believed guilty by the majority of the community anyway, is the perfect victim. Yet, when confronted with an actual criminal act, namely the attempted murder of Mairtin, Thomas fails to arrest Mick, even though the culprit has already signed a confession. In addition, Thomas even tries to kill his brother himself, when Mairtin confesses that he had assisted him in exhuming Oona. It is clear that Thomas is corrupt and highly incompetent. As he fails to exercise his function as a guard, the entire notion of the rule of law is undermined.

3.3 Political Corruption

As Lonergan (296) points out, an Irish audience would perceive the character of Thomas Hanlon as an allusion to actual incompetence and corruption in the Irish legal system. Even if the case of Thomas Hanlon is clearly an exaggeration, the faith in the police and the law as incorruptible institutions of the state is no longer intact in modern Ireland. However, the notion of corruption does not only concern law enforcement but extends to the entire political system. As quoted in Kirby (173), Collins and O'Shea point out that as regards political corruption "previous incidents do not compare to the events that have come to light since the early 1990s". According to Kirby (174), the significant rise of corruption in the Irish political system "[...] is a phenomenon associated with the erosion of a strong ethic of public service inherited from the foundation of the state and coincides with new opportunities opened by economic liberalisation and the resituating of the state." It is by no means surprising that the culture of neoliberalism leads to an increase of corruption on all levels of society. In an environment in which the acquisition and accumulation of wealth is the ultimate maxim a number of individuals in positions of power will pursue this goal without any respect for moral values. However, people lacking that power will be bearing the costs of that immoral behaviour and subsequently be deprived of the wealth generated in that society. This phenomenon can not only be observed in Ireland but in several European countries in the 1990s. In the course of market liberalisation and the subsequent privatisation of public goods and services cases of corruption seem to be frequent practice, while equal and just redistribution of the profits among the general population is a rare phenomenon. As Michael O'Connell suggests (111-131), the money earned during the Irish economic boom was not preponderantly spent on education, the arts, transport and housing or the health system but rather used to finance tax cuts from which a political and economic elite profited the most (see also Kirby 63). Although this class of people had already profited from the Celtic Tiger more than others, a number of them was unwilling to contribute to the public good and engaged in tax-evading practises and transferred their monetary assets to tax havens across the globe. Thus, further public financial resources to combat poverty and unemployment were withdrawn from the country. As Kirby (22) notes, Ireland suffered from the second highest unemployment rate in

the EU throughout the 1990s despite its boom economy. According to Kirby (23), this can be explained by the fact that the Celtic Tiger economy resulted from extensive foreign direct investment that entailed “a more capital-intensive rather than labour-extensive form of industrialisation”. However, the unemployed and working poor rightly felt betrayed by the elites of their country. It is therefore not surprising that the Irish legal and political system suffered a severe loss of confidence. Martin McDonagh's “tiger trash” walking the stage in *A Skull in Connemara* have definitely lost their faith in the state and its civil servants. Apart from the the physical abuse Mairtin and his companion Ray have to suffer from the guards and the fact that crimes committed in and around Leenane remain unsolved there are also more general references to the condition of society to be found in the play.

MAIRTIN. Of course. Aren't the polis the experts at battering gasurs anyway? Don't you get a bonus for it?

[...]

MAIRTIN. Aye, and don't be invading people's rights is what the other crux of the matter is. The guards are there to serve the people, not the other way round, if you'd like to know.

THOMAS. You've been paying attention in Sociology class anyways, Mairtin.

MAIRTIN. I have.

(*A Skull in Connemara*, 123-124)

In addition, the characters clearly have lost any respect whatsoever for the police in general and Thomas Hanlon in particular as the following passage illustrates.

THOMAS. I thought I told father Welsh to bar you from the bingo.

MARY. You did but father Welsh reinstated me to the bingo.

THOMAS. Se he countermanded official police orders, did he? I'll have to be looking into that one. You run along home now, Gran. I want to speak to Mick alone.

MARY. I've only just got here, sure.

THOMAS. I don't care if you've only just got here. That's an official police order, I'm saying.

MARY. Don't you go official police ordering me, Thomas Hanlon, the number of times I wiped the dribbling skitter off the bare babby's backside of ya.

(*A Skull in Connemara*, 151-152)

3.4 Killing Monsters

The community portrayed in *A Skull in Connemara* has abandoned morality and the rule of law. It is not, however, a negative hetero-stereotypical presentation of a small portion of the Irish population. Contrarily, it serves as a dark, highly exaggerated allegory of Irish society as a whole. According to Patrick Lonergan (20), *A Skull in Connemara* logically follows *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, since it features the dark aspects inherent in the community while the first play of the trilogy was concerned with the individual. Once more the audience is confronted with the macabre and grotesque that is not only concerned with McDonagh's fictional Leenane. In addition, similar to the rest of McDonagh's Irish plays, *A Skull in Connemara* is indeed capable of evoking reactions that can tell the audience something about themselves as part of that society. This is due to the fact the meaning of the plays does not derive from the works themselves. On the contrary, meaning is created by the audience or the reader. The author's intentions play a subordinate role in the reception of the play.

The first disturbing information the audience is provided with in the first scene is the fact that the main character, Mick, is working as a gravedigger whose task it is to dispose of corpses to make room for new ones. His profession becomes even more macabre when doubts of the eventual destiny of the dead arise. It remains unclear where the deceased relatives of the village people are put to their final rest. According to Mick Dowd, they could either end up on the bottom of a nearby lake or in a slurry after having been hammered to dust. In the second scene the audience witnesses Mick and Mairtin doing their business in the graveyard. The scene opens with Mick standing waist-deep in a grave, while Mairtin is sitting on a gravestone. There they discuss the fact that Mick is required to exhume his own wife, make fun of the deceased, throw their remains carelessly into a bag and kiss skulls together. Moreover, they swear and quarrel, engage in blasphemy and make fun of the Famine. Thus, they show absolutely no respect for the past that is represented by the graveyard. On the contrary, everything that was important and sacred in pre-modern Irish society is ridiculed and defiled. Subsequently, the conversation shifts towards children, the future of the country. They discuss how many of them are killed by combine harvesters or drown in slurry tanks. Eventually they reach the conclusion that more children die in slurry tanks.

THOMAS. Aye. From the Central Office of Statistics this is. They have good statistics they do. More kids die in slurry tanks than die in combine harvesters. Only seven died in combine harvesters.

MICK. Of course. Because more people have slurry tanks than have combine harvesters.

THOMAS. That's true enough.

MICK. It's only rich people have combine harvesters. And their kids are less thick anyways.

THOMAS. Is right.

MICK. To go climbing in slurry you have to be thick.

THOMAS. You do.

(A Skull in Connemara 131)

After all this profanity and macabre humour the second act reaches its climax when Mick opens his wife's grave. Then the situation becomes spooky and uncanny to a high degree. As Mick finds the grave empty he is struck dumb with horror. His hard-nosed nature immediately vanishes into thin air. At this point the disappearance of Oona's remains could still be attributed to supernatural causes. However, Mairtin and Thomas's calm reaction already foreshadows that there might be more mundane reasons for Oona's disappearance.

MICK. What's the ...? What's the ...?

THOMAS. Is she ...?

MAIRTIN. This is a peculiar business.

Mick throws the shovel away and ducks down into the grave again, this time desperately scraping the dirt away with his bare hands.

MICK. (frantic) Where is she ...? Where is she ...?

THOMAS. (quietly) Is she not ...?

MICK. (shouting, voice almost breaking) She's not there!

His scraping eases. Pause. He stands back up, dirty and bedraggled, looking down into the grave numbly. (Quietly) She's not there.

(A Skull in Connemara, 133)

The audience is given little time to cope with the horror scenes on stage they just witnessed at the end of the second act. The third act opens in Mick's cottage with skulls and bones lying on the table in front of Mairtin holding a mallet and a bottle of poteen in his hands. What follows is Mick and Mairtin hammering the bones and skulls to pieces. Mairtin's motivation seems to be pure vandalism. He defiles the remains of the dead just for the fun of it. Not unlike cruelty towards animals skull hammering poses no moral issues to him.

MAIRTIN. This more fun than hamster-cooking!

MICK. It is. Or if it is I don't know. I've never cooked hamsters.

MAIRTIN. I've only cooked one hamster. It's not all it's cracked up to be.

You stick him in alive and he comes out dead. The feck hardly squeals

... I mean, the fella hardly squeals. If the oven had had a see-through

door it would've been more fun, but it didn't, it had an ordinary door.

My mistake was not planning ahead. I was egged on. But this is more

fun.

[...]

(*A Skull in Connemara*, 139-140)

Mick, on the other hand, is obviously furious at the whole community that has been accusing him of homicide for years. In addition, his anger about the theft of his wife's corpse is violently directed against the bones of the deceased.

MICK. This is the only lesson skulls be understanding.

He brings the mallet crashing down on the skull nearest to him, shattering it, spraying pieces of it all over the room.

He won't be smiling no more.

MAIRTIN. You've bugged him to skitter!

MICK. I have. Not skitter enough.

Mick starts smashing the skull into even smaller pieces and stamping on the bits that have fallen on the floor. Mairtin stares at him dumbfounded.

(*A Skull in Connemara*, 137)

In addition, Mick takes personal revenge on the bones of those who have wronged him when they were still among the living.

MICK. The middle one's Dan, and Dan is mine.

Mick starts smashing the middle skull.

(*A Skull in Connemara*, 138)

These passages show that Mick is indeed capable of extreme violence. As Mairtin reveals himself as having had a part in Oona's disappearance Mick decides to take his revenge to the ultimate level. When he invites Mairtin to drive his car out to the lake in order to dispose of the bones, it is clear that he intends to dispose of Mairtin as well. The third scene concludes with the sounds of a car starting and Mick leaving the room with a mallet in his hand.

The final scene opens with Mick, wearing a bloody shirt, wiping blood of his mallet and brushing bone fragments off the floor. When Mary enters the cottage and sees Mick wearing his blood-stained shirt she disregards the obvious fact that Mick has assaulted someone by asking him whether he was

out painting. As they talk about Oona, the audience learns of a possible motive for Mick murdering her: badly scrambled eggs. The scene becomes even more grotesque as Thomas enters carrying a small bag that, as it turns out, contains Oona's skull. Consequently, Mick writes out a confession using one of Mary's fluorescent bingo pens. However, the confession does not concern the murder of Oona but Mairtin. When the guard Thomas Hanlon tries to strangle Mick for the murder of his brother, Mairtin miraculously returns from the dead and enters the room with a bleeding wound on his forehead. Subsequently, the action on the stage becomes exceedingly absurd. Mairtin confesses that Thomas tried to forge evidence against Mick by exhuming Oona and carving a crack into her forehead. Thus, Thomas attacks his brother Mairtin until Mick restrains him. After the fighting has ceased, Thomas leaves disturbed and defeated. Mairtin still suffering from percussion dizzily staggers out of the door carrying tickets for two free rides on the bumpy slides at Leisureland. After another short argument about what really happened the day Oona died Mary leaves seemingly reconciled with Mick. The play closes with Mick caressing Oona's skull and the lights slowly fading to black.

After this most violent, fast-paced, absurd and disturbing finale of the play the audience is left pondering about what just happened in front of them. It is safe to assume that at that moment all laughter has ceased and the audience has just been taken "by the scruff of the neck and shaken violently," as Sierz (4) phrases it. In the course of the play alleged murder, attempted murder, vandalism, cruelty towards animals, profanity and anarchy have painted an incredibly bleak picture of a morally highly corrupt community. Moreover, a number of references in the play to artefacts of consumer culture suggest that this community could also be part of a globalised Irish society.

3.5 Popular Culture

Mary mentions Eamonn Andrews, an Irish born TV and radio presenter, as a role model who, according to her, would never have done anything immoral such as using curse words (89). For her he represents the golden times of pre-modern Ireland when everybody still was humble and modest. Mick, however, challenges Mary's point-of-view by contending that her opinion of Andrews is

only derived from what she saw of him on television. He argues that he probably showed a different behaviour when not standing in front of a camera. Thereby, Mick questions the validity of the public picture of the popular radio and television host. At the same time positive collective notions of exemplary celebrities standing in the public limelight are called into question. Although it is plausible that people of public attention are not so flawless as they appear in the media, the idea of questioning their moral authority was in part entailed by the modernisation of Irish society. This was due to the fact that previously unquestioned institutions of the state, such as public broadcasting services, had lost their aura of respectability and reliability.

Considering McDonagh's recurring attacks on the constructed image of the Irish West, it is not surprising that there are several references to *The Quiet Man* in *A Skull of Connemara*. The residents of McDonagh's Leenane try to exploit one of Ireland's most successful cultural export goods as extensively as possible. By exploiting and cheating ignorant American tourists Mary earns some extra income (92). This practise illustrates that the people living in McDonagh's Irish West are not subject to the hetero-stereotypical image of the region constructed by cultural artefacts such as *The Quiet Man*. On the contrary, they attempt to obtain their share of the cake generated by the tourist industry. They welcome the opportunity of a little extra money contributing to their poor income.

This money, however, is spent on commodities of a globalised popular culture produced by “the eejit Yanks” exploited in Leenane. Mairtin as one of the consumers of American popular culture reads werewolf comics (108) he then puts in coffins. Moreover, he once possessed a set of *Star Wars* action figures that were stolen from him (145). In addition, Mairtin comments on the death of the famous rock singer Jimi Hendrix (141). Comic book culture, Hollywood films and the music industry provide probably the most successful US American cultural exports distributed all over the globe. Ironically, even *The Quiet Man*, the film that defined the hetero-stereotypical image of Ireland for a long period of time, was an US American production.

The song *All Kinds of Everything* by Dana that Mick and Mairtin are listening to during their skull hammering won Ireland the Eurovision Song Contest in 1970 (143). It is safe to assume that the Irish triumph at the contest

was an important collective memory in pre-Celtic-Tiger Ireland. Thus, the fact that this record is playing while the bones of the deceased, that represent the community's past, are scattered to pieces can be interpreted as another instance of McDonagh's dark and ironic humour that pervades his plays.

Another extensive consumer of US American cultural exports is of course Thomas Hanlon. As a guard he is naturally interested in serial police drama. Although he does not mention the series himself, he recognises them when being compared with them. Mick mentions *Hill Street Blues* and *Quincy* when pointing out that Thomas's job bears little resemblance to the series (120). Mairtin compares his brother's behaviour with the lead characters of *McMillan and Wife* (158) and *Starsky and Hutch* (141). Mary mentions the TV series *Petrocelli* when Thomas is discussing detective work (155) (see Lonergan 2012: 24). Unfortunately, Thomas does not live up to his TV idols. His cases are not full of excitement and suspense and he is not capable of solving the most obvious cases. Instead, Thomas forges evidence and recounts a murder very much reminiscent of Quentin Tarantino's film *Seven* (120).

Apart from films and television series another internationally marketed product distributed via the mass media is mentioned in *A Skull in Connemara*: sports. When Mairtin and Mick are crushing bones, Mairtin is reminded of a sport he probably has seen on television. After some thought he recalls the name of the activity similar to kicking skulls around: croquet (136). In the course of discussing lesbians Mairtin points out that they are great at tennis which is a clear reference to the tennis player Martina Navratilova, who was very successful on the WTA tour during the early 1990s (162).

3.6 Intertextualities

In addition to the more obvious cultural cross-references a number of intertextualities can be identified in McDonagh's *A Skull in Connemara*. The most evident instance is provided by the title of the play. Patrick Lonergan (2012: 26) notes that the title is taken from a speech in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The most plausible parallel between the two works of literature is the notion of Connemara as a place scattered with bones. Yet, in *A Skull in Connemara* these remnants of the past are exhumed, hammered to pieces and thus eliminated forever. Nothing remains of the pre-modern era.

There are also clear echoes of John M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* to be found in *A Skull in Connemara*. As Lonergan (2012: 23) points out, Mairtin returns from the supposedly dead just like Christy's father in Synge's play. In both cases the victims refuse to stay dead and add a dramatic twist to the play.

The third scene of the play is reminiscent of William Shakespeare's graveyard scene in *Hamlet*. In either play two gravediggers are meddling with skulls and are discussing death by drowning. However, while Shakespeare's characters argue about the circumstances under which Ophelia drowned, McDonagh's characters elaborate on drowning in urine and on vomit.

The second play of *The Leenane Trilogy* is in fact darker than the first one. The romantic image of the Irish West is further deconstructed. The entire community is morally and legally corrupt without any law-enforcing institution that could possibly intervene. Murders remain unsolved and assaults intended to inflict grievous bodily harm remain unpunished. All these apparent defects are covered with hypocrisy and double moral standards. Moreover, this corrupt society is pervaded by allusions and references that lead to the conclusion that McDonagh's Leenane is in fact part of modern Irish society. The audience witnesses instances of the macabre and the absurd. When the curtain comes down the observer is left in the dark thinking. If laughter were to fill the theatre it would be of an awkward and uncomfortable nature. *A Skull in Connemara* features crimes that are not properly persecuted by a state authority. Instead of the criminal the persecutor has been destroyed. According to Lonergan's (296) analysis, the second institution of traditional Ireland, the law, has been shattered in *A Skull in Connemara*. In the play concluding the trilogy McDonagh's monsters of Leenane would make their third and final appearance to haunt *The Lonesome West*.

4 *The Lonesome West*

First produced by the Druid Theatre Company *The Lonesome West* premiered at the Galway Townhall Theatre on June 10, 1997, only one week after *A Skull in Connemara*. Approximately one month later both plays opened at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs as a co-production of the Druid Company and the Royal Court. *The Lonesome West* concludes *The Leenane Trilogy* with the central themes of religion and the Church. According to Patrick Lonergan (2012: 29), in the third play “the authority figure being challenged is God himself”. In addition, Lonergan (2012: 29) points out that the thematic focus has broadened from the “authority within the home” via “the authority in the community” to a universal treatment of religion and morality. In the course of the 1990s religion and the institution of the Church suffered a severe loss of authority in Ireland due to the fact that several cases of child abuse within the Church came to light. Moreover, the transition of Ireland towards a modern, pluralistic society weakened the position of the Church considerably. Similarly, the character of Father Welsh representing the Church is a weak, helpless man incapable of maintaining Christian moral standards in a society that has long since become ignorant and indifferent towards the teachings of the Church. This society is represented by the two brothers Coleman and Valene Connor. These characters completely lack any Christian morality and respect towards the authority of the Catholic Church. Similarly, Celtic Tiger Ireland has turned its back on the once mighty and influential institution of the Church. Thus, people living in that society lack the spiritual guidance once provided by Catholicism and are forced to make their moral decisions employing their own conscience and rationality. In the play under consideration, however, the outcome of this decision-making process constitutes the most severe sins imaginable: suicide, patricide, attempted fratricide, blackmail and a potential amorous relation with a Catholic priest. These deeds are committed by characters that can definitely be labelled “Tiger-Trash” (see Merriman).

4.1 Setting in the Catholic West

The spatial and temporal setting of *The Lonesome West*, not surprisingly, bears strong resemblance to the first two plays of the trilogy. The play opens in a kitchen/living-room of an old farmhouse in Leenane, County Galway. There is a fireplace flanked by two armchairs. The audience is presented with a row of plastic figurines and a large crucifix hanging above a double-barrelled shotgun. The play sets in shortly after the events of *A Skull in Connemara*. Thus, the action of *The Lonesome West* is set in the early 1990s as well. In this case it could be argued that the spatial setting of County Galway may be especially relevant in a play concerning the Roman Catholic Church due to the region's history. The westernmost parts of Ireland historically were the ones most opposed to Protestantism and most connected to the Roman Catholic faith. Pluralisation of society starting in commercially and culturally thriving cities arrives last in geographically remote rural regions. This approach would, however, support the thesis that Leenane would in this regard be different from the rest of Ireland. Consequently, Merriman's analysis that McDonagh's plays are mere ridicule of "Tiger-Trash" for the sport of arrogant theatre audiences would be confirmed. Yet, if McDonagh's plays are to be understood as satires of Irish society as a whole, the plays' spatial setting cannot be interpreted on a realistic level. The decline of the Church is part of every modern pluralistic society. The Galway setting merely serves to evoke certain expectations about the characters' religiousness. Moreover, these preconceptions will then be deconstructed to the effect that the audience will be unsettled to an even greater extent.

4.2 The History of Catholicism in Ireland

According to John McGurk (20), the decline of the Irish Catholic Church began in the middle of the 20th century. However, in order to fully understand the power the Catholic Church held prior to that time and its role in forming Irish identity a short review of the history of the Irish Catholic Church shall illustrate its former status in society.

It is safe to assume that religious identity has been the most crucial aspect of Irish identity for a long time. Especially the opposition to Protestant

Great Britain served as a unifying factor for the Irish population. The institution of the Catholic Church possessed considerable power. Its influence extended from local communities up to the highest-ranking political bodies.

According to O'Fiaich, a Christian community had been established in Ireland by the year 432. He argues that Christianity had found its way to the island due to "[t]rade relation with Roman Britain and Gaul" (41). It was then the Irish national saint St. Patrick who allegedly undertook the conversion of pagan Ireland. In addition, O'Fiaich suggests that "Ireland was the only country in western Europe whose conversion produced no martyrs" (43).

O'Fiaich notes that an episcopal system of church government had been introduced. He contends that a large number of monasteries were being established, which soon would develop into the country's intellectual centres (44-45).

Thus, it can be argued that a strict hierarchical order was inherent in the Catholic Church from the earliest beginning. Mirroring the supposedly god-given order of the heavens a similar hierarchy was being established among humans. As O'Corrain points out, a large number of churches and adjacent estates were the property of influential families (17). By means of using their prestige and the common people's faith these early entrepreneurs were increasing their wealth and power. Not only were their religious subjects dependent on their religious leaders spiritually. It was them who would purchase their goods and services. In addition, in some cases those religious authorities would have the privilege to levy taxes (16-17).

O'Corrain (17) notes that "the relationship between the church and the people" was thought of "as a contract". While the clergy provided the believers with spiritual services the people provided payment in various forms in return (17). Subsequently, the common people were economically dependent on the Church. Early Irish Christians were also judicially dependent on their spiritual leaders. Since God's law as formulated in Christian scripture was perceived as being the law of nature it superseded the former pagan legal codes (13).

Thus, people's lives were penetrated by the power of religious authorities to an extremely high degree. There remained hardly any aspect of human society that was not affected by the Church. However, the Church provided the Irish people with education. It has to be pointed out that with the adoption of

Christianity the Latin concept of learning and education was introduced to Irish society. In addition, this concept emphasised the written word. In contrast, Gaelic Irish cultural artefacts were of an oral tradition. As Hughes points out, the contacts between the oral Irish tradition and the written Latin tradition proved to be mutually beneficial (55).

Consequently, a large body of Old Irish texts was thus written down and preserved for future generations. Moreover, the introduction of Latin provided scholars with the opportunity to gain access to books and texts from Continental Europe (60). Therefore, the introduction of Christianity in Ireland enabled Church-trained intellectuals to participate in intellectual exchanges with other Christian, thus Latin-speaking, scholars across Europe. It can be argued that the establishment of Christianity in Ireland made the island part of an early Europe that defined itself via a shared religious denomination.

Although political struggles continued to trouble Ireland and secular powers were shifting, the position of the Irish Church in the country remained uncontested. However, when the English monarch Henry VIII converted to Protestantism and declared himself head of the Anglican Church, Irish Catholicism was confronted with a new challenge, namely Protestantism. The entire European continent was being shaken by religious conflicts. After waves of reformation and counter-reformation and an atrocious Thirty Years' War the major military conflicts between Protestants and Catholics on the mainland of Europe had been overcome. In the British Isles, however, this conflict was prolonged until the end of the 20th century.

It is not surprising that religious struggles played a significant part in the Irish context, since these were essentially struggles between a colonising and a colonised country. While the English were predominantly of the Protestant denomination, the Irish had remained with the Roman Catholic faith. This opposition entailed that the religious identity of the Irish people was emphasised. The English-Irish conflict no longer just revolved around land and power. In addition, most intimate sentiments and emotions like personal faith were linked to the conflict.

Consequently, religious identity was inextricably linked to national identity. Although Protestant Irish identities can be found, the predominant majority of those that perceive themselves as Irish are of Roman Catholic

denomination. The notion of being Catholic is closely linked to a Republican identity, while being Protestant is associated to Unionism. This fact allowed the Irish Catholic Church to become an integral part of Republican Ireland and the Irish state itself.

4.3 Godforsaken Characters

However, as the characters appearing in *The Lonesome West* are no longer part of that pre-modern Catholic Irish society they lack the aforementioned religious identity and deference to the Church. They live in a place long since forsaken by God. "It seems like God has no jurisdiction in this town. No jurisdiction at all" (*The Lonesome West* 175).

Coleman is a middle-aged single man living with his brother. He is extremely short-tempered and irascible. Moreover, he shows most ruthless and amoral behaviour. He does neither forgive nor forget any wrongs that were committed against him. As the audience learns in the third scene of the play Coleman shot his father in the head after his father criticised his hair style.

COLEMAN. I don't take criticising from nobody. 'Me hair's like a drunken child's.' I'd only just combed me hair and there was nothing wrong with it! And I know well shooting your dad in the head is against God, but there's some insults that can never be excused.
(*The Lonesome West* 206)

This passage illustrates that the character's reactions are totally out of any proportion. The total lack of moral standards entails a state of absolute anarchy. In order to keep the only witness, his brother Valene, from reporting the murder Coleman signs over his entire share of the inheritance. Consequently, Coleman becomes economically dependent on his brother's good will. However, this does not prevent him from spiting and angering him. Mostly they argue over trifles like bags of crisps, yet, as it turns out, their quarrel can be traced back to their childhood days.

VALENE. Half me childhood you spent stepping on me head, and for no reason. And d'you remember when you pinned me down and sat across me on me birthday and let the stringy spit dribble out your gob and let down and down it dribble 'til it landed in me eye then?
[...]

COLEMAN. Although plenty of times as a gasur I remember you dropping stones on me head while I was asleep and big stones. VALENE. Only in retaliation them stones ever was.
(*The Lonesome West* 238)

The core of the brothers' disturbed relationship seems to be that they lack the concepts of forgiveness and the remission of sins. Consequently, their insults and problems are continuously exacerbated. For Coleman the culmination of their mutual struggle most certainly was Valene's assault on Alison, a girl Coleman had been in love with.

VALENE. Thank you, Coleman. D'you remember when Alison O'Hoolihan went sucking that pencil in the playground that time, and ye were to go dancing the next day, but somebody nudged that pencil and it got stuck in her tonsils on her [...].
COLEMAN. I do remember.
VALENE. That was me nudged that pencil, and it wasn't an accident at all. Pure jealous I was.
(*The Lonesome West* 247)

This confession hurts Coleman very much, since he suffers from the fact that he does not have a girlfriend or wife. It is therefore not surprising that he converts his sexual frustration into aggression against anything dear to Valene.

Valene, being the younger brother, presumably was at least physically inferior to Coleman when they were children. However, when he blackmails Coleman over the murder of their father, he assumes the dominant role in their relationship. Since Valene disposes of the entire household and the money left by their father, he assumes to be in the better position. He expresses his advantage by purchasing useless figurines in large numbers and a stove that is not meant to be used marking everything with a 'V' that is his property and exercises power over magazines and crisps he bought.

VALENE. I'll start! Aye, by Christ I'll start. (Pause.) This stove his mine, them figurines are mine, this gun, them chairs, that table's mine. What else? This floor, them cupboards, everything in this fecking house is mine, and you don't go touching, boy. Not without me express permission.
(*The Lonesome West* 185)

However, Coleman defies his brother by eating his crisps, drinking his poteen, melting his figurines and shooting his stove. All Valene seems to care about is

his money. However, when Coleman admits to having been responsible for the mutilation and death of Valene's beloved dog, Valene furiously attacks his brother with a knife. Despite Valene's questionable behaviour he seems to be the less amoral and asocial of the two brothers. He is severely suffering from his elder brother, yet, on the other hand, he shows some sympathy towards him.

His attempts to make peace with his brother seem credible indeed, while Coleman rather exploits his confessions to hurt his brother even more.

VALENE. And I'm sorry for sitting you down and making you sign your life away, Coleman. It was the only way at the time I could think of punishing ya. Well, I could've let you go to jail but I didn't want you going to jail and it wasn't out of miserliness that I stopped you going to jail. It was more out of I didn't want all on me own to be left here. I'd've missed ya. (Pause.) From this day on ... from this day on, this house and everything in this house is half yours again, Coleman.

[...]

(*The Lonesome West* 243)

Coleman, on the other hand, shows no remorse for the deeds he has committed against his brother.

VALENE. (numbly) You've broken all me figurines, Coleman.

COLEMAN. I have. Did you see me?

VALENE. And you've blown me stove to buggery.

COLEMAN. This is a great gun for blowing holes in things.

(*The Lonesome West* 254-255)

At the end of the play it remains unclear whether all hope of reconciling Valene and Coleman has been shattered or not. Father Welsh's final attempt to change the two brothers' attitudes towards each other might not have been in vain.

Father Welsh is the thirty-five-year-old priest of Leenane. Apart from attending funerals his role in the community can be described as an utter failure. He is incapable of restoring any Christian moral values in Leenane and thus succumbs to self-doubt, resignation and consequently alcoholism. Yet, according to Coleman he still does a good job given the poor standing of Catholic priests in Ireland.

WELSH. I'm a terrible priest, so I am. I can never be defending God when people go saying things agin him, and, sure, isn't that the main

qualification for being a priest?

COLEMAN. Ah there be a lot worse priests than you, Father, I'm sure. The only thing with you is you're a bit too weedy and you're a terror for the drink and you have doubts about Catholicism. Apart from that you're a fine priest. Number one you don't go abusing poor gasurs, so, sure, does't that give you a headstart over half the priests in Ireland?
(*The Lonesome West* 177)

In addition, he suffers from a severe crisis of faith. He is surrounded by a community of murderers and people attending funerals for the sake of getting food and drink. The state of the community cannot be attributed to his own shortcomings in the first place. Welsh merely fails to restore any moral standards. When he learns that the recent deaths in Leenane actually are cases of murder and that the whole village is involved in a cover-up, he suffers a final breakdown and puts his hands into a bowl with Valene's molten Catholic saints figurines in an act of self-flagellation. After Tomas Hanlon's suicide Welsh then decides to make a final and desperate attempt to change Leenane for the better. He bets his soul on Valene and Coleman's reconciliation and risks to lose it. He drowns himself in the nearby lake thus damning his immortal soul. Earlier in the play he even commented on the absurdity of Christian teachings regarding suicide.

WELSH. [...] Rotting in hell now, Tom Hanlon is. According to the Catholic Church anyways he is, the same as every suicide. No remorse. No mercy on him.

[...]

WELSH. Well if he killed himself, aye, he'll be in hell too. (Pause.) It's great it is. You can kill a dozen fellas, you can kill two dozen fellas. So long as you're sorry after you can still get into heaven. But if it's yourself you go murdering, no. Straight to hell.
(*The Lonesome West*, 201-202)

However, the ending of the play suggests that there still might be a little hope for Welsh's soul when Valene refrains from burning Welsh's letter. Thus, the open ending leaves the audience room for thought and speculation whether Welsh's soul will burn in hell or is saved by Coleman and Valene.

Girlen Kelleher, a pretty seventeen-year-old girl, personifies the beautiful Irish maiden in *The Lonesome West*. She is desired by the men of

Leenane, though she is in love with the only man she cannot have, the priest Welsh. She spends most of her time with Welsh and even saves her money earned by selling poteen to buy him a heart pendant on a chain. Girleen, whose actual name is Mary, is the only one really affected by Welsh's death. She is heart-broken and furious due to the fact that Welsh bet his soul on Valene and Coleman rather than asking her to save it. It can be argued that Girleen is the only person in McDonagh's Leenane that shows virtues like decency, compassion and true love without any need for Catholic teachings to do so. Thus, Girleen can be regarded as a ray of hope in the town of Leenane. She represents a young generation that is capable of morality without relying on the religious doctrines of a Church that has lost its authority in society. Although Girleen shows a peculiar attitude towards the killing of Coleman's father, she definitely possesses her own set of morals nevertheless.

GIRLEEN. Sure I'm no fecking stool-pigeon and Coleman's dad was always a grumpy oul feck. He did kick me cat Eamonn there once.
 WELSH. A fella deserves to die, so, for kicking a cat?
 GIRLEEN. (shrugs) It depends on the fella. And the cat. But there'd be a lot less cats kicked in Ireland, I'll tell ya, if the fella could rest-assured he'd be shot in the head after.
 WELSH. You have no morals at all, it seems, Girleen.
 GIRLEEN. I have plenty of morals only I don't keep whining on about them like some fellas.
 (*The Lonesome West* 212)

It is Girleen's own conscience and humanity that enable her to stay a decent person without the need for extrinsic influences.

4.4 The Catholic Church in Irish Politics

Although the Irish Catholic Church was attempting to retain its influence on national politics, it was doing so with dwindling success as society turned its back on the institution. During the era of the Irish Free State the Catholic Church seized the opportunity to influence state legislation. As Paseta (100) points out, although “[t]he Catholic Church was not made the state church in independent Ireland, [...] the country's social legislation was unquestionably informed by confessional considerations.” Consequently, strict legislation concerning “censorship, divorce, and birth control” was established, Paseta

argues (100). Eventually, “the importation and sale of contraceptives was made illegal, and divorce was banned under the 1937 constitution” (100). Only in 1978 was contraception by prescription made legal. In 1985 another “bill made contraceptives available to anyone over 18” (Pasetta 138). Eventually, “a 1993 bill [...] removed all remaining restrictions on the sale and supply of condoms. As regards abortion, it still remains banned in the Republic of Ireland, since its proscription in the 1937 constitution, although women are now allowed to have the operation conducted abroad (Pasetta 139).” The change in legislation concerning divorce illustrates the change of moral values in Irish society. While a “1986 referendum which aimed to lift the ban was defeated decisively, [...] [a] further referendum held in 1995 repealed the constitutional ban” (Pasetta 139-140). As Michael O’Connell points out, the attitudes of the Irish people towards sexual behaviour shifted decisively during the 1990s, especially among the 18-30 age group. The trends illustrated by O’Connell suggest that the Irish population have been orienting themselves towards a modern, open and pluralistic society, while renouncing reactionary Catholic attitudes (177-178). An issue directly addressed in *The Lonesome West* are legal and moral shortcomings of Church officials in Ireland. The fact that the late father of the Connor brothers attracted attention by repeatedly screaming at nuns might suggest that he had been subject to corporal or psychological abuse.

WELSH. (pause) Tom Hanlon I see he's back. I was speaking to him at the funeral. Did Tom know yer dad?

COLEMAN. Slightly he knew Dad. He arrested him five or six times for screaming at nuns.

WELSH. I remember hearing tell of that. That was an odd crime.

COLEMAN. Not that odd.

(*The Lonesome West*, 173)

As a matter of fact several Church scandals surfaced and were openly and publicly discussed in the 1990s. According to Pasetta, “[o]ne of the most notorious was the case of Éamonn Casey, the popular Bishop of Galway. The bishop resigned in mysterious circumstances in 1992, and revelations about his affair with an American woman and the child he fathered in 1973 hit the headlines soon afterwards. Further revelations about paedophile priests [...] added to the sense of disillusionment” (140-141). An important step to address

cases of abuse was taken in 2000 when The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was established. The findings of that commission show that child abuse in Catholic institutions was of enormous dimensions (see The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse website). Consequently, the standing of the Catholic Church in Irish society has been deteriorating. Subsequent to investigations into criminal acts committed by its officials the Catholic Church has eventually, by end of the last decade of the twentieth century, assumed its role in a secular, modern Irish society that does not interfere with education, child care or state legislation in an unsupervised manner. However, since moral guidance is no longer exclusively provided by religion, the responsibility for social behaviour is consequently assigned to the individual.

4.5 Vicious Monsters Roaming Leenane

In *The Lonesome West* most characters lack any sense of propriety towards their social environment. Consequently, McDonagh's Leenane is filled with violence, terror, disillusionment and despair. In this dark and grim world even the under-twelve-year-old girls football team become a horde of vicious little monsters.

WELSH. Ten red cards in four games, Coleman. That's a world's record in girls' football. That'd be a record in boys' football. One of the lasses from St Angela's she's still in hospital after meeting us.
(*The Lonesome West* 179)

GIRLEEN. If you let me know where you get to I'll write with how the under-twelves get on tomorrow. It may be in the *Tribune* anyways. Under 'Girl decapitated in football match'.
(*The Lonesome West* 220)

As the audience learns later on, the Leenane football team was disqualified after their match against St Josephine's whose goal keeper still is in intensive care. Leenane's girl football team can certainly be interpreted as representative of the entire community. The team are ignoring Father Welsh's counsel and are committing atrocities against football teams all bearing the names of Catholic saints. Thus, in McDonagh's Leenane the most innocent human beings like twelve-year-old girls are converted into brutal beasts turning against God and his saints. However, the rest of the community also appear to be ruthless

monsters. In *The Lonesome West* the audience gets some additional insight into the murders that previously occurred in the trilogy and the way the people of Leenane are dealing with them.

COLEMAN. Too hard on yourself is all you are, and it's only pure gossip that Mick and Maureen murdered anybody, and nothing but gossip. Mick's missus was a pure drink-driving accident is unfortunate but could've happened to anybody ...

WELSH. With the scythe hanging out of her forehead, now, Coleman?

COLEMAN. A pure drink-driving, and Maureen's mam only fell down a big hill and Maureen's mam was never steady on her feet.

WELSH. And was even less steady with the brains pouring out of her, a poker swipe.

(*The Lonesome West*, 177-178)

Thus, the murders featured in the first two parts of the *Leenane Trilogy* are revisited in all their ghastly details. The demise of Connor senior is recounted in similarly macabre fashion.

VALENE. A pure accident me arse! You're the only fecker in Leenane believes that shooting was an accident. Didn't Dad make a jibe about Coleman's hairstyle, and didn't Coleman dash out, pull him back by the hair and blow the poor skulleen out his head, the same as he'd been promising to do since the age of eight and Da trod on his Scalextrix, broke into two ...

(*The Lonesome West* 205)

Moreover, besides the occasional manslaughter, the truth about the death of Valene's dog, formerly blamed on hamster-cook Mairtin, triggers the play's climax. Not only did Coleman kill the dog by cutting off his ears. In addition, he actually kept the animal's severed ears in a paper bag.

COLEMAN. To the brookeen, I dragged him, me scissors in hand, and him whimpering his fat gob off 'til the deed was done and he dropped down dead with not a fecking peep out of that whiny fecking dog.

(*The Lonesome West* 249)

This macabre deed was committed out of pure malice without any remotely understandable reason. Yet, the dark tone of *The Lonesome West* is not only due to the exaggerated violence but also the to deep melancholy it portrays. The suicides of Tom Hanlon and Father Welsh evoke a most dreary picture of Leenane. McDonagh manages to give a haunting description of Welsh's

desperation and despair in the face of the corrupt community of Leenane. Father Welsh's account of a suicidal person's the state of mind is haunting. The title of the play clearly describes Tom Hanlon's and Father Welsh's condition. Both are feeling lonesome and lost in the community of Leenane. They have failed in their professions and there is nothing left for them that can hold them in this world.

WELSH. (pause) A lonesome oul lake that is for a fella to go killing himself in. I makes me sad just to think of it. To think of poor Tom sitting alone there, alone with his thoughts, the cold lake in front of him, and him weighing up what's best, [...]

WELSH. [...] And Thomas weighing all that up on the one hand, then weighing up a death in cold water on the other, and choosing the water [...]

(*The Lonesome West* 200)

It is plausible to assume that the audience can identify the characters' inability to cope with the challenges posed by Celtic Tiger Ireland. Moreover, their alienation and disorientation can be considered inherent in modern globalised societies. With the lack of spiritual backing the single affirmation of life available to the characters is professional success. Yet, as they fail to achieve their goals, they cannot expect any support from their community or their religion. Subsequently, their world disintegrates and they are driven into suicide.

The notion that a modern post-religious globalised market society has a negative influence on quality of life is aptly illustrated by Peadar Kirby. He points out that “[p]erhaps the most disturbing evidence of alienation is the growth in suicide among young men so that by 1999 it has become the most common cause of death among those aged 15 to 24” (67). Kirby rightfully argues that “these trends cannot be limited to the impact of the Celtic Tiger, neither can the strains of a fast-changing society, and their impact on individuals, be discounted” (67). Regarding the context provided by actual issues prominent in Irish society during the 1990s, it is plausible to assume that *The Lonesome West* is in fact a dark satire on Celtic Tiger Ireland. The assertions made by Merriman and Conley cannot be maintained in the face of the large number of references to Celtic Tiger Ireland, that can be identified in the play.

4.6 Substitute Religion

The most disturbing reference to the Celtic Tiger market economy is the manic consumerism exercised by Valene. He purchases a large quantity of Catholic saint figurines to arrange them on a shelf. These figurines are of no apparent use. The only plausible explanation for these purchases is that the acquisition of the figurines serves Valene as a form of substitute religion. In any case Valene is extremely fond of, or even obsessed with, them.

WELSH. You can't go shooting 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.
(*The Lonesome West* 204-205)

In consumer culture, consumers define themselves through commodities they purchase and this seems to be exactly the case with Valene. By obtaining and collecting and marking his figurines they become an integral part of Valene. In similar fashion the purchase of an oven that is not intended to be ever used is an indication of Valene's obsession with consumerism. By spending the money inherited from his father on commodities Valene not only demonstrates his control over the brothers' monetary assets but also satisfies his craving to consume. When Coleman destroys the figurines and the oven, he does so to attack an important part of Valene's self-esteem. As he succeeds, the injury inflicted on Valene's psyche immediately leads to an act of open aggression. However, Coleman seems to be obsessed by his property in the exact same pathological manner. As Valene suggests, Coleman had been promising to kill his father ever since he stepped on his Scalectrix slot car racing course (*The Lonesome West* 205). This attachment to material goods can be read as a critique of the materialism and consumerism rampant in Celtic Tiger Ireland. Father Welsh's comment on Girleen's intention to spend the money she has earned by selling poteen illustrates his contempt for consumer culture.

WELSH. A few bob for what? To go skittering it away the clubs in
Carraroe, and drunk schoolboys pawing at ya?
GIRLEEN. Not at all, Father. I do save it to buy a few nice things out me
mam's Freeman's catalogue. They do have an array of ...
WELSH. To go buying shite, aye. Well I wish I did have as tough

problems in my life as you do in yours, Girleen. It does sound like life's a constant torment to ya.
(*The Lonesome West* 214)

The play makes reference to the important cultural practice of football. A large number of football fans strongly identify themselves with their favourite team. Consequently, affiliation with a football team constitutes an important subject position in the formation of an individual's identity. This identification may even be intensified when applied to a national football team due to additional national/ist sentiments. Moreover, in modern market economies the mass media and the merchandising industry have been promoting football fanaticism in order to generate revenue. In *The Lonesome West* Irish football fanaticism is illustrated when the entire community is discussing the under-twelve-year-olds' performance. They are downplaying the atrocities committed by the players of their team, while showing severe aggression towards their opponents. The unifying aspect of shared football fanaticism is aptly illustrated by Coleman and Valene:

COLEMAN. She was fecking feigning? Getting us expelled from all competitions for no reason at all? I hope she relapses into her coma and dies.

VALENE. The same as that, I hope she lapses into her coma and dies.
(Pause.) Look at us, we're in agreement.
(*The Lonesome West* 228)

In addition, the defeat of the national football team is assessed as an extremely serious and emotional event.

WELSH. You crying? I've never in all the years heard of you going crying, Girleen. Not at funerals, not at weddings. You didn't even cry when Holland knocked us out of the fecking World Cup.
(*The Lonesome West* 210)

In contrast to football more serious matters are presented in a more casual manner. Thus, an orphan boy mutilated in the Yugoslav civil war earns little sympathy from Coleman.

VALENE. There's a lad here in Bosnia and not only has he no arms but his mammy's just died. (Mumbles as he reads, then) Ah they're only after fecking money, the same as ever.

COLEMAN. And no fear of you sending that poor no-armed boy any money, ah no.
 VALENE. They've probably only got him to put his arms behind his back, just to cod ya.
 (*The Lonesome West* 229)

The reference to the events in Ex-Yugoslavia firmly puts the play in the 1990s, the time of Celtic Tiger Ireland. Information about the outside world is provided by women's magazines. By reading *Take a Break* and *Bella* the Connor brothers obtain a limited insight into world events. The fact that these magazines are their only source of news might illustrate another issue of globalised society. While there is a virtually unlimited supply of information available to the public, the mass media only offer a pre-filtered possibly biased version of reality. The fact that a more comprehensive coverage cannot be obtained leaves the individual with information provided by second-rate journalism and consequently with a distorted and possibly manipulated picture of reality.

4.7 Intertextualities

Patrick Lonergan points out that the title of *The Lonesome West* can be interpreted as a reference to Sam Shepard's *True West* and J. M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (2012: 29-30). According to Lonergan *True West* resembles *The Lonesome West* regarding theme and structure (2012: 29). In both plays two brothers are forced to live together. Lonergan argues that in either play the brothers' "conflict is intensified by the intervention of a well-meaning outsider" while "a likeable but powerless woman" witnesses the events (2012: 30). As Lonergan suggests, both Shepard and McDonagh "explore[] – and perhaps seek[] to undermine – a national myth: the idea of the American frontier [...] and the centrality of Catholicism to Irish life [...]" (2012: 30). In an earlier article Lonergan also notes that *The Lonesome West* "is reminiscent in some respects of Beckett's *Endgame*" (2005: 67). J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* clearly criticises the concept of the Irish West similar to McDonagh's plays. In addition, the play resembles *The Lonesome West* as it deals with the issue of patricide. As Lonergan argues, "Synge and McDonagh's most admirable characters feel so isolated, despite being surrounded by

countless other people” (2012: 31). As regards *The Lonesome West*, Laura Eldred identifies “extensive parallels with *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962), starring Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, a classic horror film similarly concerned with sibling rivalry that also exploits the murder of a cherished pet (in that case a parakeet)” (115). Considering the number of similarities and cross-references to other literary works, it is safe to assume that McDonagh has extensive knowledge of literature and film (see Lonergan 2005: 67).

This quality enabled Martin McDonagh to draw a dreary, haunting picture of a fictional Leenane that is inhabited by modern gothic monsters. In *The Lonesome West* his characters are alienated from, and forsaken by, God. Due to the lack of spiritual support in a post-religious society the majority of the community succumbs to barbarism. Those unable to cope with these surroundings eventually resort to suicide. With the disintegration of the Church the last authority that might hold the community of Leenane together is destroyed.

As has been shown *The Leenane Trilogy* is a dark and depressing satire of modern Celtic Tiger Ireland, in which the authorities of the family, the law and the Catholic Church have been eroded. As Kuhling and Keohane argue, “[t]he melancholy spirit of globalisation in Ireland is a consequence of Ireland's collision culture: an experience of structural transformation characterised by the simultaneity of accelerated modernisation and the persistence of the vestiges of older social forms, while higher values and metaphysical ideals are destabilised and uncertain” (127).

Thus, the characters portrayed are extremely exaggerated stage-Irish that are the modernisation losers of Celtic Tiger Ireland. A part of the audience will certainly feel contempt for these characters. Some, however, might find that some aspects of McDonagh's monsters of Leenane are reminiscent of the destitute lower class created by Celtic Tiger Ireland.

After the success of the *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* in early 1996 McDonagh's focus would shift a little south, onto the Aran Islands. In *The Cripple of Inishman*, the first play of the unfinished *Aran Island Trilogy*, a new set of characters would populate McDonagh's world of the macabre and grotesque.

5 *The Cripple of Inishmaan*

In December 1996 *The Cripple of Inishmaan* was first produced at the Royal National Theatre in London. As the title implies the play is set on Inishmaan. The island is populated by characters who are crippled in both body and soul. The first play of *The Aran Island Trilogy* discusses stereotypes about Ireland as created by popular culture and film. *The Cripple of Inishmaan* questions seemingly mimetic representations of Ireland and its people. By making reference to the filming of Robert Flaherty's pseudo-documentary *Man of Aran* the play comments on the construction of the Irish West and the concept of Irishness. As Patrick Lonergan points out, “[o]ne of the major features of the Aran plays is that McDonagh sets out to challenge Ireland's presentation of itself to world – and one of the essential aspects of that presentation is to represent the Aran Islands as primitive in order to root an authentic Irish identity there” (2012: 58). In addition, the play discusses the influence of American cultural artefacts and commodities on Irish society in the case of the character Bartley. The play also comments on the relation between the author of a play and the actuality underneath his work. As Lonergan phrases it, “the artist will never tell the truth, but may ultimately *reveal* a truth” (2012: 72).

5.1 The Aran Islands

The Aran Islands play a distinct role in Irish literary history. During the Irish literary revival movement of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries the Aran Islands were perceived as quintessentially Irish (see Lonergan 2012: 57-59). In the opinion of poets and scholars like William Butler Yeats, the spiritual national heritage of Ireland had been preserved in those westernmost parts of the country. John M. Synge spent his summer holidays on the Aran Islands where he had the encounters and experiences that he incorporated into *The Aran Islands*. It is therefore not surprising that Robert Flaherty chose the Aran Islands for his film. His objective was to evoke the image of a pre-modern world in which man struggles against untamed nature for his mere existence. Being aware of these references and preconceptions Martin McDonagh set his second cycle of plays on those islands in order to challenge the stereotype of the noble

islanders living a hard but righteous life.

The play under discussion is set in 1934, the year of the filming of *Man of Aran*. However, despite the fact that the action of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* clearly pre-dates Celtic Tiger Ireland it discusses issues highly topical in the 1990s. Thus, the influx of US American commodities and culture as an early sign of globalisation and the construction of a stereotypical image of the Irish West are elements relevant to audiences of the 1990s. In addition, the wish to leave the economically and culturally deprived island for a better life somewhere else is presented in the play. Thus, the play oscillates between the 1930s and the 1990s. As Pilny (2006: 166) points out, McDonagh provides the audience with “historically improbable references” such as “Johnnypateenmike making beetroot paella, Auntie Kate speaking of driving cars and the local shop selling fancy confectionary”. Thus the claim that *The Cripple of Inishmaan* might be a mimetic representation of the people living on the actual island in the 1930s is further invalidated.

5.2 Characters on Inishmaan

Cripple Billy, the main character, is a seventeen-year-old boy living with his foster aunts. He was born with deformed arms and legs and thus is ridiculed by most of the villagers on Inishmaan. The island of Inishmaan has nothing to offer Billy except boredom and abuse. Since there is no mention of any occupation Billy is practising, he spends his time staring at cows and reading books. Due to his physical condition it is very unlikely that he will ever get married and leave his foster aunts' home.

EILEEN. Poor Billy'll never be getting kissed. Unless it was be a blind girl.

KATE. A blind or a backward girl.

[...]

KATE. No one'll ever marry him. We'll be stuck with him 'til the day we die.

EILEEN. We will. (Pause.) I don't mind being stuck with him.

KATE. I don't mind being stuck with him. Billy's a good gosawer, despiting the cows.

(*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 3-4)

Although Billy is obviously loved by his foster aunts, he expects more from life

and thus has a strong desire to leave the island. When the local gossip monger Johnypateenmike tells of the filming of *Man of Aran* taking place on the neighbouring island of Inishmore, Billy sees his opportunity to escape his prison. By manipulating Babbybobby, a fisherman, into believing that Billy will soon die of TBC, Billy manages to be allowed passage to Inishmore.

Accompanied by Bartley and Helen, Billy arrives at the set to find that the filming has already been completed. However, somehow Billy manages to persuade the film crew to take him with them to America. There he is meant to audition for the role of an Irish cripple lamenting the beauty of his native country. When the theatre audience are presented with this stage-Irish scene, it is not immediately clear whether Billy's dying speech is actually authentic or part of his audition. Scene Seven is filled with stereotypical concepts of Ireland. Hearing "the wail of banshees", remembering "a home barren but proud and generous", an Irishman with "a body noble and unbowed" and "a decent spirit not broken by a century's hunger and a lifetime's oppression" dies thinking of heaven, "a beautiful place, more beautiful than Ireland even". In the following scene Billy returns from the dead revealing the deception of the audience. Yet, the only characters actually happy about Billy's return are his foster aunts Kate and Eileen. Bartley's only interest appears to be whether Billy has brought American sweets for him. Bobby greets Billy with a violent beating using a lead pipe for deceiving him with his forged letter. Back home on Inishmaan Billy puts the positive image of America into perspective.

BILLY. (pause) That's all Bartley wants to hear is how great America is.

EILEEN. Is it not so?

BILLY. It's just the same as Ireland really. Full of fat women with beards.
(*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 64)

However, contrary to his audition speech his home island of Inishmaan does not really appeal to Billy either. The actual reason for his return to the island after his failure in America appears to be his affection for Helen.

BILLY. (pause) It's funny, but when I was in America I tried to think of all the things I'd miss about home if I had to stay in America. Would I miss the scenery, I thought? The stone walls, and the lanes, and the green, and the sea? No, I wouldn't miss them. Would I miss the food? The peas, the prairies, the peas, the prairies and the peas? No, I

wouldn't miss it. Would I miss the people?

[...]

BILLY. [...] Well, I'd miss me aunties, or a *bit* I'd miss me aunties. I wouldn't miss Babbybobby with his lead stick or Johnnypateen with his daft news. Or all the lads used to laugh at me at school, or all the lasses used to cry if I even spoke to them. Thinking over it, if drowned, there isn't especially anybody I'd really miss. Anybody other than you, that is, Helen.

(*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 77-78)

These two passages illustrate that both the American and the Irish stereotypical images have been deconstructed in the play due to Cripple Billy's experience. Thus, Billy has returned to where he started, Inishmaan, a place of loneliness and misery. The only comforts left for Billy are Johnnypateen's story about his parents' noble sacrifice and Helen's promise to go out with him. However, these rays of lights are quickly darkened at the end of the play, when it is suggested that Billy actually has tuberculosis and the stage fades to black.

Kate and Eileen, both in their mid-sixties, are Billy's foster aunts. They run a small country shop on the island. Their merchandise predominantly consists of peas, eggs and sweets. They adopted Cripple Billy after he lost his parents and have been looking after him for the last sixteen years. Kate and Eileen's version of Billy's parents' death seems to be the most plausible, although it is merely a story and cannot be verified (see Lonergan 2012: 71). Despite the fact that they show great affection for him, Kate and Eileen are anxious that they will have to care for Billy for the rest of their lives. They even keep calling their foster child *Cripple* Billy. Thus, their relation to him seems slightly ambiguous.

EILEEN. (pause) We'll see Cripple Billy again one day, won't we Kate?

KATE. I fear we've more chance of seeing Jim Finnegan's daughter in a nunnery before we see Cripple Billy again. (Pause.) I am not sure I *want* to see Cripple Billy again.

EILEEN. I'm not sure *I* want to see Cripple Billy again. (Pause.) I want to see Cripple Billy again.

KATE. *I* want to see Cripple Billy again.

(*The Cripple of Inishmaan*, 45)

In addition, they are rather peculiar elderly ladies. Kate is known for her habit of talking to stones when under distress and does so while Billy is gone. Eileen on the other hand loves to eat and hide Yallow-mallows instead of selling them to

her costumers.

Helen is a young pretty girl aged seventeen. Due to her good looks her name might be an allusion to Helen of Troy. However, contrary to the image of the fair Irish maiden she does not behave in a very decent manner. Helen swears, abuses her brother Bartley and engages in cruelty towards animals for money. Moreover, she displays rather promiscuous behaviour. On the one hand, pretty Helen is molested by the local priest, but, on the other hand, she tries to capitalise on her looks.

BILLY. Sure, why would you think they'd let you be in the filming at all, Helen?

HELEN. Sure, look at as pretty as I am. If I'm pretty enough to get clergymen groping me arse, it won't be too hard to wrap film fellas round me fingers.

BARTLEY. Sure, getting clergymen groping your arse doesn't take much skill. It isn't being pretty they go for. It's more being on your own and small.

(The Cripple of Inishmaan 13-14)

Helen seems to be looking for a relationship with a man on Inishmaan but does not succeed. She is working as a delivery girl for the local egg vendor, whose goods she breaks at every opportunity. As the play suggests she also had an affair with her employer, the egg-man.

BOBBY. You'll ruin the egg-man's bedsheet anyways.

HELEN. Ah, the egg-man's bedsheet is used to being eggy.

BARTLEY. How do you know the egg-man's bedsheets are used to being eggy, Helen?

(The Cripple of Inishmaan 57)

Moreover, Helen unsuccessfully tries to obtain a kiss from the handsome fisherman Babbybobby, who is not in the least interested in her.

HELEN. Up your arse you, Babbybobby Bennet, you fecking kiss-reneger. Would *you* like to step out with me?

BOBBY. I wouldn't like to.

HELEN. Shut your hole so.

(The Cripple of Inishmaan 56)

It is therefore plausible to assume that it is her sexual frustration that conditions her violence and aggression against her surroundings. Consequently, Helen is

not content with her life on Inishmaan and intends to leave the island. However, as Helen fails to use her charms on the right persons of the filming crew on Inishmore due to her naivety she has to remain on the Aran Islands.

HELEN. [...] I still haven't given you a good kick for you taking your place in Hollywood that was rightfully mine. Didn't I have to kiss four of the film directors on Inishmore to book me place you took without a single kiss.

BILLY. But there was only *one* film director on Inishmore that time, Helen. The man Flaherty. And I didn't see you near him at all.

HELEN. Who was I kissing so?

BILLY. I think it was mostly stable-boys who could do an American accent.

(*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 76-77)

Towards the end of the play Helen begins to show amiable traits. Not only does she agree to give Billy a chance but she also buys her brother Bartley his much desired telescope. Similar to McDonagh's other young female characters Helen is like the eggs she loves to smash: tough on the outside but soft on the inside.

Bartley, Helen's younger brother, is about sixteen years old. As Pilny (2006: 157) points out, the character's name is a direct reference to J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. Bartley is obsessed with everything American. Thus, he enjoys telling of his American aunt Mary, who once sent him a photograph of Yallow-mallows and even seven actual Mintios. The photograph of the US American product raises Bartley's desire to obtain the sweets that are seemingly not available to him on Inishmaan. Nevertheless, he lingers in the shop unwilling to realise that he cannot have what he craves for. Bartley's sweets represent the abundance of goods the US American market economy has made available to consumers. The photograph that raises Bartley's interest and desire can be interpreted as a form of advertisement. Consequently, Bartley's sweet problem can be understood as an allusion to American consumerism that is affecting a globalised Irish society. Bartley's fascination with the US is so extreme that when discussing the death of Billy's parents he immediately suggests that they were on their way trying to reach the American mainland, an utterly unrealistic assumption regarding the fact that they were using a small fishing boat. Bartley appears to be a simple-minded boy. This can be attributed to the fact that he fell down a hole at the age of seven. However, in

contrast to the other characters, Bartley is a harmless person and does not commit any cruel acts neither physically nor psychologically. It is interesting to point out that Bartley desires to have a telescope. The function of the telescope is to enable Bartley to see beyond his limited horizon. It signifies his desire to escape the confinements of Inishmaan and his own mind. The telescope might provide him with visions of a larger and wider world.

Babbybobby is a handsome, muscular fisherman in his early thirties. He agrees to bring Helen and Bartley to Inishmore to see the filming of *Man of Aran*. However, when Billy asks him the same favour, he initially declines.

BILLY. Would you take me a passenger too, so?

BOBBY. (pause) No.

BILLY. Why, now?

BOBBY. I've no room.

BILLY. I've plenty of room.

BOBBY. A cripple fella's bad luck in a boat, and everybody knows.

BILLY. Since when, now?

BOBBY. Since Poteen-Larry took a cripple fella in his boat and it sank.

(*The Cripple of Inishmaan*, 24)

According to Lonergan “given that the person who owned the boat was called 'Poteen Larry', it is safe to assume that his death was caused by his own drunkenness rather than his passenger's disability” (2012: 67). However, Billy manages to persuade Babbybobby to take him with them by presenting him with a forged letter that he had already prepared, obviously anticipating Babbybobby's initial refusal. When Billy's deceit or “coddling” is discovered, Babbybobby's readiness for violence that has already been foreshadowed in his fight with Johnnypateenmike becomes apparent. Despite Billy's attempt to explain his actions Babbybobby brings the play to a violent climax by beating Billy with a lead pipe. The fact that none of the characters present intervene suggests that they agree that Billy has deserved the treatment he receives from Babbybobby. It could be argued that the beating of Billy is as much deserved as is the metaphorical beating of *Man of Aran* by *The Cripple of Inishmore*. Similar to Billy, *Man of Aran* tries to deceive its audience by telling an entirely fictitious story while suggesting that it portrays reality.

Mammy is an elderly woman in her early nineties and as Pilny (2006: 157) suggests, shows similarities to a character from Synge's *Riders to the*

Sea. Mammy is cared for by her son Johnnypateenmike, although this care-taking is of a rather peculiar nature. Against the advice of the local physician her son attempts to shorten her life by providing her with large doses of alcohol. She has been living alone with her son and has become an alcoholic after her husband was killed by a shark. This is a clear reference to *Riders to the Sea* and the shark hunting scene of *Man of Aran*.

JOHNNY. Leave me mammy alone now, you, with your mangling. If she's been trying to drink herself dead for sixty-five years with no luck, I wouldn't start worrying about her now. Sixty-five years. Feck, she can't do anything right.

DOCTOR. Why do you want to drink yourself dead, Mrs O'Dougal?

MAMMY. I do miss me husband Donal. Ate be a shark.

JOHNNY. 1871 he was ate be a shark.

(*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 32)

However, since shark hunting has long since ceased to be practised on the island, Mammy sympathises with the shark on the screen. She does not bear any grudge against the animal.

MAMMY. They should give the shark a belt, then leave the poor gosawer alone.

JOHNNY. Why are you in love with sharks all of a sudden? Wasn't it a shark ate daddy?

MAMMY. It was a shark ate daddy, but Jaysus says you should forgive and forget.

(*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 58)

As Lonergan (2012: 64) points out, the people of Inishmaan “seem to disapprove of the killing of the fish”, while in *Man of Aran* “the hunt of the shark is presented as a necessity”. In addition, Helen, who witnessed the filming, points out that the shark was not real but an actor in a suit. Yet, Mammy fails to fully comprehend the concept of a scripted film. For her *Man of Aran* remains a faithful representation of the happenings on Inishmore. She is therefore unable to distinguish between reality and fiction.

MAMMY. (wheeling herself away) Did they catch the shark in the end, so, Helen?

HELEN. Ah it wasn't even a shark at all, Mrs. It was a tall fella in a grey donkey jacket.

MAMMY. How do you know, Helen?

HELEN. Didn't I give the fella a couple of kisses to promise to put me in

his next film, and didn't I stamp on the bollocks of him when his promise turned out untrue?
 MAMMY. All that fuss o'er a fella in a grey donkey jacket. I don't know
 (*The Cripple of Inishmaan*, 61)

Johnnypattenmike is in his mid-sixties and the island's gossip. In contrast to his mother he is completely aware of the concepts of truth, fiction and untruth. Johnnypateenmike provides the islanders with news in exchange for goods. The more exciting his stories are the better are his rewards. Lonergan (2012: 71-72) notes that “[Johnnypateenmike], like Flaherty, tells stories for economic gain and, although he is despised [...] for his manipulations of reality, those stories are revealed as necessary [...]” According to Murray (83), “[the] community is starved of news and dependent accordingly on stories passed around by word of mouth in a debased form of oral tradition. To enliven the conversation of neighbours Johnny has created a role of himself analogous to the minstrel or *file* of old.” Thus, Johnnypateenmike's news do not only serve as entertainment but also have a distinct function in the community of Inishmaan. Although his news are unreliable, some items prove to have an effect and a function. Thus, his story of Billy suffering from tuberculosis helps Kate and Eileen to overcome the pain of Billy leaving them without notice. His account of the demise of Billy's parents does provide Billy with a positive picture of them. The news of the filming on Inishmore enables Billy to attempt to emigrate to America. The news of an imminent feud between Jack Ellery and Patty Brennan conceals the fact that they have fallen in love without intending to let the community know.

The doctor, a man in his early forties, on the other hand, tries to provide the islanders with an objective version of reality. He is the only character in the play “committed to the truth” (Lonergan 2012:70). As a man of science and a physician he tries to reveal actual facts. However, his “assertion of the truth seems one of the cruellest acts in the play”, as Lonergan argues (2012: 70). Consequently, knowing and searching for the truth is not presented as an worthwhile enterprise in *The Cripple of Inishmaan*. This can be interpreted as defence for Flaherty's *Man of Aran*. Although the world depicted in his pseudo-documentary is invented and fictitious, it provides entertainment and solace. Thus, the film puts the bustling world of industrialisation and the hardships of

The Great Depression in the US in perspective contrasting it with the hardships of a pre-modern world set on the Aran Islands.

5.3 Irish Stereotypes

Irish auto- and hetero-stereotypes constructed during the Celtic Tiger era are alluded to in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* several times. The phrase “Ireland mustn't be such a bad place if ..” is repeatedly used by the characters when they talk of foreigners choosing to come to Ireland. Despite the fact they experience a life of destitution and intend to leave the island, they find comfort in people immigrating to Ireland. For larger part of the twentieth century, until the 1990s, the hetero-stereotypical image of Ireland was a pre-modern pastoral one as presented in *Man of Aran* or *The Quiet Man* as discussed earlier.

Similarly, the auto-stereotype of a white, Christian, rural country was predominant in post-independence Ireland. As an important point on the political agenda Irish national identity was defined by emphasising the country's Celtic past and its strong alignment to the Roman Catholic Church. This allowed to define Irish identity opposing it to the hetero-stereotypical image of the English who were viewed as Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

However, the Irish auto-stereotype has been supplemented with another more modern view of Ireland in the Celtic Tiger era. As Kuhling and Keohane (76) point out “global consumer capitalism” has created “a cosmopolitan Irish identity.” This notion of an urban, cosmopolitan Irish identity is clearly visible in Irish film productions from the Celtic Tiger era. Although there are a large number of Irish film productions that present the downsides of the Celtic Tiger, some films celebrate the new-found confidence of social climbers. The latter cultural artefacts present young, successful, good-looking adults enjoying their lives in globalised Ireland and are readily incorporated into the Celtic Tiger auto-stereotype. Since their material needs are fully satisfied they are struggling with other less essential problems. However, by examining recent Irish advertisement campaigns Kuhling and Keohane arrive at the conclusion that those two seemingly contradictory images of Ireland have developed into “an idea of Irishness that is much more fluid, hybrid and produced in dialogue. (83)” Thus, the concept of Irishness is of a dialectical nature. While it tries to

negotiate between the pre-modern and the modern concept of Irishness, it remains an auto-stereotypical presentation of the country. Consequently, it cannot claim any authenticity. In *The Cripple of Inishmaan* the question of quintessential Irishness cannot be finally answered either. The audience is presented with a number of contradictory images of Ireland: Flaherty's vision of Inishmore that re-enacts the nineteenth century in 1934, on the one hand, and McDonagh's *Inishmaan* that is oscillating between the year 1934 and 1997, on the other hand. By combining these different snapshots, however, McDonagh provides the audience with the possibility to contrast an image of the Aran Islands with their own concept of Irishness. In addition, as Roberts (111) points out, “[McDonagh] use[s] the US film industry to represent the corrupting and dangerous influence of American media on Ireland”, thus placing Ireland in the position of a country that undergoes cultural colonisation.

Catherine Rees (2010: 221) notes that “[r]ecent cultural criticism in modern Irish studies frequently describes the nation as experiencing moments of revolution, of crisis of identity within a global context and of instabilities surrounding the deconstruction and problematisation of national distinctiveness.” The concept of Irishness exported to the rest of the world during the Celtic Tiger era was predominantly defined by large companies trying to sell their products with the label “Irish”. In this context Kuhling and Keohane (76) mention advertisement campaigns conducted by Guinness, Ballygowan and Jameson. The objective of these campaigns was to create a distinctive Irish label that could be distinguished, especially from the “US American”.

In the pre-modern Ireland of the twentieth century the economic situation of a large majority of the population can be described as rather poor compared to the rest of the Western world. Under these circumstances there was a strong desire to leave the country in pursuit of a better life. The obvious choice was the United States where many Irish had emigrated before. Emigrants to the US were not required to learn another language and already had relatives as a place to go. Consequently, the US became the Promised Land for many destitute Irish. This positive hetero-stereotype entailed that US commodities and cultural artefacts were assigned an immensely good reputation by a large number of the Irish. Opponents of the influx of American goods and culture have labelled this development Californication. Nevertheless, American commodities

were extremely popular especially among the younger generation, as illustrated by Bartley in *The Cripple of Inishmaan*.

BILLY. (pause) That's all Bartley wants to hear is how great America is.
 EILEEN. Is it not so?
 BILLY. It's just the same as Ireland really. Full of fat women with beards.
 (*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 64)

In the 1990s, when large US companies established branches in Ireland the links between the two countries were intensified. However, Ireland did not become the fifty-first state of America but developed a new self-confidence. Economic growth and newly acquired wealth generated a small but wealthy upper middle-class that was proud to be Irish. This lifestyle and self-esteem was then marketed by Irish companies and the Irish government.

Due to the fact that the Celtic Tiger economy was demanding cheap and flexible labour the Irish government promoted immigration of Eastern European migrant workers. As Watt points out, “[s]ince the mid-1990s, net migration into Ireland has been increasing and has overtaken emigration levels for only the second time since 1921” (qtd. in Kuhling and Keohane 52).

Consequently “a new discourse on Irish identity has emerged” that presents Ireland as open, globalised and multiethnic society (see Kuhling and Keohane 52). The influx of returning Irish emigrants and immigrants from Eastern Europe and African countries certainly had a decisive impact on the formation of a post-nationalist Irish identity. However, the vision of a multicultural, pluralistic, economically thriving society was by no means achieved.

As Kuhling and Keohane (58) argue, “[t]he claim that Ireland is cosmopolitan is clearly contradicted by the radical alteration of definitions of citizenship that have been in place since the 2004 Citizenship Referendum.” Irish governments have produced a new lower class of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers by passing very restrictive aliens laws and by pursuing misleading, neoliberal migrant labour and employment policies. These people, however, are not included into new definitions of Irish identity as promoted by advertisements. On the contrary, they form another Other against which “classic” Irish identity can define itself. Although Martin McDonagh does not explicitly refer to those people in Irish society in his plays, they are part of the socially and economically underprivileged group his Irish plays are concerned

with. However, even within that group they constitute a subgroup against which the white Irish can define themselves. It is the even more underprivileged and weak that are marginalised and constructed as the Other. As regards marginalised groups, *The Lonesome West* mentions “darkies” and *The Cripple of Inishmaan* makes reference to “a coloured fella” coming to Dublin (25) and the “Cripple”, of course. As Kuhling and Keohane (67) point out, “[o]ne of the explanations for why Ireland has retained an overwhelmingly assimilationist view of multiculturalism can be identified with the perceived need to construct a homogenous view of the 'true Irish' people and culture as a form of resistance to colonial oppression.” Thus, it is impossible for Irish society to integrate these new identities into a multicultural concept of Irishness, since it has not yet consolidated its (post-)colonial traumata.

5.4 Crippled Minds and Souls

In *The Cripple of Inishmaan* the Other, the Cripple, is the centre of the uncanny, the macabre and the grotesque. The most obvious instance of the grotesque is Billy's appearance. His deformed body is limping and shuffling across the stage. As the stage instructions and the characters Kate and Eileen describe him, beside his leg one of his arms is also deformed and even his face and eyes are ugly (*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 3-5). Due to his horrid appearance the cripple is marginalised and derided by the physically unimpaired inhabitants of the village. In addition, the story of Billy's parents' death provides room for the uncanny and macabre. The notion that parents would drown their own child in the sea due to an illness that is expensive to treat is both disturbing and uncanny. The uncertainty around these events allows the audience to speculate and formulate its own version of this monstrous deed. Scene Seven, which is set in a squalid Hollywood hotel room, portrays the cripple dying from tuberculosis. “His pained wheezes get worse and worse, until they suddenly stop with an anguished gasp, his eyes close, his head lolls to one side, and he lays there motionless. Fade to black” (*The Cripple of Inishmaan* 54). The audience presumes the cripple dead until he unexpectedly reappears in a church hall from the shadows. The revenant cripple is then shortly after violently beaten up with a lead pipe for deceiving the good-looking fisherman. Thus, the monster is violently attacked

by its counterpart, the strong, young and healthy, the personification of the in-group. In addition, the old man Johnnypattenmike is attacked by the same fisherman for spying on him. Moreover, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* features cruelty towards animals as is the case in the *Leenane Trilogy* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. Beside the catching and killing of sharks that is portrayed as a necessity Helen mutilates animals on commission. Thus, physical and psychological violence that arises from frustration is directed against the weak and defenceless, the ones that are not part of the in-group: cripples, the elderly, and animals. The pecking order constructed in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* represents the hierarchy inherent in society. By confronting the audience with such instances of the macabre, grotesque and uncanny uneasiness is evoked. Martin McDonagh's dark satire might then promote a reassessment of attitudes and prejudices about contemporary society.

5.5 Intertextualities

The references to a large variety of cultural and literary artefacts contribute to the effect of the satire, since they clearly locate the play in Irish society. Apart from the obvious references to Flaherty's *Man of Aran* there are additional intertextualities concerning theatre and film to be found in the play. As Lonergan (2012: 60) points out, the theme of “[a] Hollywood crew descending upon a sleepy village in a remote rural location”, has been addressed by a large number of cultural and literary productions. After the initial enthusiasm “[t]he villagers begin to suspect that they are not being celebrated but exploited [...]” Lonergan argues that this has been seen in a number of Irish plays, ranging “from Dennis Johnston's *Strom Song* in 1934 to Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* in 1996 and 1999”. Moreover, this theme has been seen in episodes of *The Simpsons*, David Mamet's film *State and Main* and even in McDonagh's first feature film *In Bruges* (see Lonergan 2012: 60). Lonergan (2012: 63) shows that *Man of Aran* with its shark-hunting scene then again “looks back to Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) just as it anticipates Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) and even Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975)”. As regards canonical Irish playwrights, most scholars find links between Synge's work and *The Cripple of Inishmaan* in terms of characters and setting.

Yet, it has to be pointed out that McDonagh did not merely collect ideas from film and literary history and arbitrarily mixed them together. On the contrary, by carefully arranging these elements he succeeded in creating a play that satirises contemporary Irish society employing the very foundations of its construction. While Murray (93) asserts that classic Irish theatre only “provides the context for [McDonagh] to show off”, it is more plausible to assume that the re-utilisation of these elements enabled McDonagh to reassess conceptions about Irishness and Irish society in the Celtic Tiger context of the 1990s.

As has been shown *The Cripple of Inishmaan* discusses the role of marginalised groups within society. Contrary to Murray's argument (93), the question of identity is not foreign to McDonagh's work, since *The Cripple of Inishmaan* clearly attempts to reassess the notion of Irishness in Celtic Tiger Ireland. *The Cripple of Inishmaan* does not provide any final answer to the question of Irishness, yet, the play provides the audience with the opportunity to participate in the ongoing discourse of Irish identity. Moreover, the supposedly authentic representation of Ireland in film and the media is heavily questioned. Thus, the play itself suggests that it should not be interpreted as realistic representation but as a politically incorrect, slightly cynical, darkly humorous satire. McDonagh's next satirical attack on Irish society would be set on the filming location of *Man of Aran*, on Inishmore.

6 *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*

The Lieutenant of Inishmore is the latest and most controversial instalment of Martin McDonagh's Irish plays. The task of getting the play actually produced proved more challenging than expected. As Patrick Lonergan (2012: 89) notes, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* had been rejected by the National Theatre, the Royal Court and by Druid. McDonagh suggested that his play was "too dangerous to be done", while the two British theatres argued that they would not produce his play due to "quality control" (qtd. in Lonergan 2005: 68). However, Lonergan (2005: 69-70) points out that it is very unlikely that *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* was declined due to political reasons or lack of quality but contends that McDonagh's notoriety and controversial public reception urged those theatres not to produce another of his plays at the time. As Mary Luckhurst (116) notes, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* had been completed "in 1996 by the time *The Cripple of Inishmaan* opened at the National Theatre". Lonergan (2012: 88) argues that "as *Cripple* became more popular, McDonagh found his reputation rapidly deteriorating in London. This seems to have been due (in part) to his audiences' inability to reconcile their enjoyment of the cartoonish Ireland seen in *Cripple* with the media presentation of McDonagh himself." Mary Luckhurst (116-117) notes that "[the play] circulated for four years (during which time the playwright rejected the offer of a New York première)" before it was eventually produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2001. Lonergan (2005: 70) suggests that the RSC's decision to produce the play in 2001 can be attributed to the fact that McDonagh's notoriety had been diminishing and that the company attempted to gain from McDonagh's celebrity.

According to Luckhurst's assessment (119), "the play depicts an orgy of random violence, and individuals fuelled by a mixture of puritanism, sentimentality, and mindless fanaticism, whose political aims have long been subsumed by a desire to terrorize for its own sake." Moreover, she argues that "[i]t is the sheer stupidity of McDonagh's characters that English audiences revel in". Thus, Luckhurst agrees with Merriman that McDonagh merely displays stage-Irish characters for the sport of English audiences. By contrast, Catherine Rees (2010: 229) takes a more sophisticated position in arguing that

“McDonagh's comedy about terrorism, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, is a critical study of national identity crisis.” Moreover, Rees (2010: 230) contends that “not only are the terrorists presented as ineffectual, they are also comic creations, grotesque and extreme representations of real terrorists.” It will thus be argued that *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* satirises and undermines Irish Republican terrorism, that has completely lost its foundations in globalised Celtic Tiger Ireland.

6.1 The Island of Inishmore

The play is set in the year 1993. The first scene opens in a cottage on Inishmore, Aran Islands, County Galway. The decision to chose Inishmore as the geographical setting for the play supposedly has two major reasons. As part of the unfinished Aran Island Trilogy it connects with *The Cripple of Inishmaan* thematically as regards Irish identity and geographically as it is set on the neighbouring island. The reason given by McDonagh himself seems rather unconvincing. McDonagh suggested that “[f]or plot purposes [he] needed 'a place in Ireland that would take a long time to get to from Belfast'” (qtd. in Lonergan 2005: 67). Lonergan (2005: 67) then argues that “McDonagh's choice of Inishmore for the setting of his play was arbitrary.” Since the Aran Islands plays do not aim to deconstruct “The Irish West” to the same extent that the *Leenane Trilogy* does, but discuss Irish identity in a more general context, Lonergan's argument seems indeed plausible. Moreover, it is quite clear that the different settings of three Aran Islands perfectly suit an intended trilogy. However, the preconceived idyll of Inishmore provides a perfect counterpart for the mayhem that is going to be unleashed in the course of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*.

6.2 Characters on Inishmore

Padraic is a twenty-year-old man from Inishmore, who engages in terrorist activities in Northern Ireland. He is fighting for the Republican cause by torturing petty drug dealers who sell marijuana to students and planting bombs in chip shops. Scene Two, when Padraic makes his first appearance in the play, is

extremely reminiscent of the warehouse scene from *Reservoir Dogs* directed by Quentin Tarantino, whose work has clearly influenced the portrayal of lunacy and violence in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. When Padraic learns that his beloved cat Wee Thomas, “[his] best friend in the world” (15) has fallen ill, he immediately aborts his operations in the North to return to Inishmore in order to look after his cat. Arriving on Inishmore Padraic meets his old acquaintance Mairead, who had already been eager to join him in his rebel fight at the age of eleven, five years earlier. However, when Padraic refuses her invitation to join her in a dance at the church hall, Mairead decides not to inform him about the plot that has been laid against him. Padraic points out that his splinter group have no use for girls unless they are pretty and suggests that Mairead better find a nice man and become a good housewife. In the course of this conversation the character of Padraic insinuates that Irish terrorism is an inherently heterosexual, male enterprise. At the suggestion that he might prefer boys in a sexual context Padraic quickly refutes that by pointing out that “[t]here’s no boy-preferrers involved in Irish terrorism” (33). When Padraic arrives at his father’s home and is told that his cat is dead he decides to shoot both his father Donny, in whose care the cat had been, and the boy Davey, who allegedly knocked Wee Thomas over with his bike.

PADRAIC. I will plod on, I know, but no sense to it will there be with Thomas gone. No longer will his smiling eyes be there in the back of me head, egging me on, saying, 'This is for me and for Ireland, Padraic. Remember that, ' as I'd lob a bomb at a pub, or be shooting a builder. Me whole world's gone, and he'll never be coming back to me. (Pause.) What I want ye to remember, as the bullets come out through yere foreheads, is that this is all a fella can be expecting for being so bad to an innocent Irish cat. Goodbye to ye, now.
(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 44)

Padraic clearly has double standards concerning “innocent Irish cats”. Although he shot a cat in cold blood just moments earlier, he intends to execute Davey and Donny for exactly the same deed. However, just before Padraic pulls the trigger his terrorist colleagues Joey, Christy and Brendan enter the cottage. They have set up a trap finally to get rid of Padraic who had jeopardised their operations by forming a splinter group from their splinter group and messing with one of their funders. As the following passage illustrates, the INLA in *The*

Lieutenant of Inishmore is dependent on external funding. The nature of the sources from which the necessary financial means originate seems secondary, since the ends justify the means.

CHRISTY. Skank Toby was the last straw, Padraic. Messing around teasing your marijuana gobshites is fine. But when you drag one of the big-time boys into the equation, a fella without whom there'd be no financing for your ferry crossings and your chip-shop manoeuvres, and not only to cut the nose off him, all well and good, a bit of micro-surgery may do the trick later, but then feed it to his cocker spaniel, a dog never did no harm, and choked himself to death to it ...
(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 45)

Once again McDonagh's characters imply that cruelty towards animals is more condemnable than violence directed against human beings. Similarly, Padraic seems to accept his immanent execution until Davey points out that his cat is "buried in shite, [its] head knocked out [its] arse" (48). Miraculously Padraic is then saved by Mairead, who blinds the gunmen using her air rifle. In the subsequent shoot out Brendan and Joey are killed. Christy is less lucky, since he tried to apologise to Padraic for killing his cat. Padraic has other plans for him than just ending his life quickly.

PADRAIC. (to Mairead) Bring a knife, a cheese grate, a razor, and iron and anything to gag the screaming, Mairead.
MAIREAD. Check, Lieutenant.
Mairead puts her gun on the table and darts about, grabbing the objects just listed. Christy begins screaming hideously as Padraic tortures him, blood splattering.
(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 54)

After his rescue Padraic accepts his new lover Mairead in his new splinter group from the INLA, "Wee Thomas's Army". In Padraic's opinion she apparently is qualified after her involvement in the preceding massacre. However, when Mairead discovers that her beloved cat Sir Roger had been shot by Padraic their engagement ends abruptly. Singing the song "The Dying Rebel" she shoots Padraic in the head and leaves Davey and Donny to dissect his body.

Mairead is a sixteen-year-old girl from Inishmore. As Lonergan (2012: 80-81) suggests, "McDonagh is trying to reject the idealising of women in Irish literature – particularly in Irish literature with a nationalist or republican bias."

Lonergan notes (2012: 81) that “Mairead's attraction for Padraic seems to arise because he can help her to become a member of a Republican military group [...]”. She has become notorious on the island for blinding cows with her air rifle. However, her justification for maiming cows as a form of political protest seems rather far-fetched.

MAIREAD. Don't keep bringing them cows' eyes up! Them cows' eyes was a political protest!

DAVEY. Against cows? Sure, what have cows done?

MAIREAD. Against the fecking meat trade, and you know well!

DAVEY. I can't see how shooting cows in the eyes is going to do any damage to the meat trade, now.

MAIREAD. Of course you can't, because you're a thick. Don't you know that if you take the profit out of the meat trade it'll collapse in on itself entirely, and there's no profit at all in taking ten blind cows to market, I'll tell ya. There's a loss. For who would want to buy a blind cow?

(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 18-19)

By blinding the Northern Irish terrorists Mairead eventually assumes an active and dominant role. As Freud suggests in his essay “The Uncanny” the fear of losing one's eyes can be associated with the fear of castration. Following this thought it can be said that Mairead achieves active, potent, male characteristics by rendering her opponents blind and thus effeminate and helpless. After Padraic's demise Mairead inherits the title of Lieutenant and becomes herself the Lieutenant of Inishmore (see Lonergan 2012: 75).

Davey, Mairead's brother, is a seventeen-year-old, slightly overweight, long-haired boy living on Inishmore. In contrast to his sister, Davey plays a predominantly passive role in the play. As Lonergan (2012: 79) suggests, “Davey's femininity is emphasised throughout the play: he rides his mother's pink bicycle and his hair is called a 'girl's mop' (4).” Davey is drawn into the conflict after he discovers a cat's body on the road and brings it into Donny's house, both of them mistaking the cat for Wee Thomas. Davey is even forced by Donny to admit to have killed the cat, although he obviously has not. After trying to cover up their blunder by painting another cat with shoe polish the two are subject to the despotic rule exerted by their relatives, Padraic and Mairead. Even after Padraic has been executed by Mairead for killing her cat Davey and Donny remain subject to her control and still have to answer to her for their deeds.

MAIREAD. And it's an investigation tomorrow I'll be launching, when I've had a chance to think, about how Sir Roger came to end up in this house in the first place, and half black with it.
(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 67)

Donny, Padraic's father, is a man from Inishmore in his mid-forties. As Donny points out, Wee Thomas had been Padraic's only friend since he was five (6). Moreover, he describes his son as being “mad enough for seven people” (7). Padraic put the cat into his care “when he started moving about the country bombing places and couldn't look after him as decent as he thought needed” (7-8). Obviously Donny fears his mad son to the extent that he attempts to hide the cat incident from him as well as he can. His relationship with Padraic seems severely disturbed, as the following passage illustrates, although their relation of being father and son is still pointed out in terms of principle.

PADRAIC. Christy, now? You wouldn't be killing a fella in front of his dad, would ya?
BRENDAN. You're behind your dad.
PADRAIC. It's the *principle* I'm saying, ya thick, Brendan.
BRENDAN. Oh, the principle.
PADRAIC. Dad, you wouldn't want to see me killed in front of you, would ya? Wouldn't it be a trauma?
DONNY. I couldn't give a feck! Weren't you about to shoot me in the fecking head, sure?
PADRAIC. Ah, I was only tinkering with ya, Dad. Do you think I'd've done it?
DONNY. Aye
(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 46-47)

After Mairead has killed Padraic she asks Donny and Davey to chop up his body as well. Donny declines to dissect the body of his own son. However, his refusal does not seem to come out of emotional reservations. He rather seems to be reluctant to make the effort associated with the job. In addition, the passage illustrates Mairead's dominant position as the new Lieutenant of Inishmore.

MAIREAD. [...] Be chopping up that feck too, now, the two of ye.
DONNY. Sure, you can't be asking me to go chopping up me own son, now!
DAVEY. Well, *I'm* not doing all the work! I'll tell you that!
MAIREAD. One of ye's chop up Padraic, the other be chopping the fella

there with the cross in his gob. And don't be countermanding me orders, cos it's a fecking lieutenant ye're talking to now.
 DAVEY. (to Donny) That sounds fairer, splitting the workload.
 DONNY. I suppose.
 (*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 66)

In the final scene Wee Thomas unexpectedly reappears thus finally rendering the terror they have been exposed to even more pointless. As Davey and Donny point out, Wee Thomas's disappearance had enormous consequences: four dead fellas, two dead cats, Davey's hairstyle ruined, Mairead broken-hearted and all of Donny's shoe polish gone (68). Although they initially agree on killing Wee Thomas for the trouble he has caused, they manage to break the vicious circle of violence and pour him some Frosties. Their achievement to step back can also be interpreted in the context of the end of Irish terrorism in the late 1990s, which will later be discussed in detail.

The INLA terrorists Brendan and Joey are in their twenties and Christy, their leader, is about forty years old. As it turns out in the course of the play it was them who killed the cat to lure Padraic to Inishmore to assassinate him. Joey seems to be the only one uncomfortable with the cat battering and voices his concerns. Subsequently, they engage in a pseudo-philosophical discussion about ends justifying means. In the course of Scene Five the three terrorists evoke a number of historical myths surrounding Irish terrorism they associate with Irish cats. As Rees (2006: 135) notes, "McDonagh is clearly challenging the validity of [the] past as a basis for terrorism."

JOEY. [...] That sounds like something the fecking British'd do. Round up some poor Irish cats and give them a blast in the back as the poor the devils were trying to get away, like on Bloody Sunday.
 [...]
 CHRISTY. Good. For won't the cats of Ireland be happier too when they won't have the English coming over bothering them no more?
 JOEY. They will.
 CHRISTY. Do you know how many cats Oliver Cromwell killed in his time?
 BENDAN. Lots of cats.
 CHRISTY. Lots of cats. And burned them alive. We have a way to go before we're in that bastard's league. We'll have not another word on the cat matter.
 [...]
 (*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 28-30)

By placing the discussion of killing innocent people in the context of cat killing the argument becomes, on the one hand, highly ridiculous while, on the other hand, the amusement rapidly turns to irritation. This passage is very likely to trigger the uncomfortable laughter among the audience that has already been discussed in the context of McDonagh's plays as In-Yer-Face theatre. Following Catherine Rees' analysis (2006: 134) “[w]e cannot ignore the terror in McDonagh's play because we are laughing at it, but on a deeper level the audience is also implicated in the violence because we are vicariously enjoying it. This is exactly the position McDonagh wishes to put us in.” Later in the play the confrontation between the three Northern Irish terrorists and Padraic and Mairead leads to the actually extremely violent climax of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. As Mary Doyle (92) comments on a New York production of the play, “[w]hen the lights went up on the final scene of *The Lieutenant* that evening, revealing a stage doused in red [...] the audience responded with the loudest laughter of the evening.” In the course of the play that Mary Luckhurst (119) describes as “an orgy of random violence” all three INLA terrorists are shot or tortured to death by mad Padraic before he suffers the exact same fate. Luckhurst (126) criticises that “McDonagh's political statements about *The Lieutenant* are few and shallow”. Moreover, she is concerned that he is presenting stage-Irish characters for the amusement of anti-Irish audiences (124-125). However, she fails to take into account that *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* attacks the extreme absurdity of Irish terrorism that is exaggerated to a point where its stupidity is revealed. Already in the second scene of the play this fact is aptly illustrated in a conversation between Padraic and James.

James is a Northern Irish man around thirty who sells marijuana to students. Padraic is torturing him in a Tarantinoesque manner due to the fact that he sells his drugs indiscriminate of his customers' denomination.

JAMES. (crying) But I've done nothing at all to deserve nipples off, Padraic!

PADRAIC. Oh, let's not be getting into the whys and wherefores, James. You do push your filthy drugs on the schoolchildren of Ireland.. and if you concentrated exclusive on the Protestants I'd say all well and good, but you don't, you take all comers.

JAMES. Marijuana to the students of the Tech I sell, and at fair rates ...!

PADRAIC. Keeping our youngsters in a drugged-up and idle haze, when it's out on the streets pegging bottles at coppers they should be.

(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 12)

However, after hanging him upside down from a ceiling bloody, bruised and bare-chested, taking two of his toenails out and threatening to cut off his nipples, Padraic allows him to leave. In addition, he advises his victim to go to the hospital in order to get his wounds dressed and provides him with some change for the bus. Padraic's worries about his victim's well-being show the dichotomy inherent in religiously motivated terrorism. While claiming to act on behalf of the faith, this kind of terrorism certainly violates almost every commandment listed in the relevant scriptures.

6.3 The Northern Irish Troubles

The Northern Irish conflict can be traced back to the Plantation of Ulster in the early seventeenth century. The English Crown assigned plots of land to English and Scottish settlers and encouraged them to come to Ulster. Thereby a landowning Protestant upper class was created that was supposed to ensure that Catholic Gaelic Irish insurgencies were less probable to occur. Subsequent Anti-Catholic and pro-Protestant discrimination and military campaigns have shaped the collective memory of both the Catholic and Protestant population to a large extent. It is therefore not surprising that key events of Irish history, that have long since served as foundation myths of Republican resistance and terrorism, are explicitly mentioned in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. The INLA member Christy (30) makes reference to military campaigns conducted by Oliver Cromwell in the 1640s that were characterised by a larger number of atrocities. Moreover, after Cromwell's expeditions to Ireland Protestant supremacy was strengthened further while the Catholic population was pushed to the margins of society (see Canny 119-128). Another crucial event in Irish history is referred to by the character Joey (28) and became to be known as Bloody Sunday. As Marc Mulholland points out (79), "Bloody Sunday, on 30 January 1972, was the debacle that led to the almost complete collapse of Catholic opposition to political violence." Padraic's account of unsuccessfully bombing chip shops and the poor quality of bombs that "[e]ither [...] go off before you're ready or [...] don't go off at all" (14) can be interpreted as a

reference to the Shankill Road bombing of 1993 conducted by the IRA, in the course of which loyalists meeting above a chip shop were attacked. Mulholland suggests that this incident, which cost the lives of ten people, led to a renewed escalation of violence in Northern Ireland in the early 1990s (see Mulholland 129-130). The dialogue between Davey and Donny about the IRA travelling clearly alludes to IRA terrorist activities outside Ireland and the UK. Thus, McDonagh might also refer to the assassination of a British Soldier in Belgium in 1988 and the killing of four innocent Australian tourists in the Netherlands in 1990. Another interesting allusion to Irish history is the name of Mairead's cat. It is named after Sir Roger Casement, an Irish writer and revolutionary, who was executed for treason against the British Crown in 1916. As quoted in Catherine Rees' article "The Politics of Morality: *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*" (2006: 131), Charles Spencer points out that the event that inspired McDonagh to write *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* "was the IRA atrocity in Warrington, in which two boys were killed".

The starting point of the Northern Irish Troubles in the second half of the twentieth century was the civil rights movement of the late 1960s. The initial aim of the activists was "to bring an end to discrimination in employment and housing allocation, and to compel the government of Northern Ireland to bring about fundamental changes in areas of voting, policing and the justice system" (Herron and Lynch 13-14). After several decades of bloodshed and progress on civil rights issues, the conflict had been resolved for the most part by the end of the last decade of the twentieth century leading to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. It can be argued that globalisation and entailing changes in Irish society fostered the reconciliation of Republican and Unionist forces in Northern Ireland. It is safe to assume that a thriving economy and the modernisation of society during the 1990s contributed to the Northern Irish peace process to a considerable extent. According to the self-image of Celtic Tiger Ireland the Irish were living in a globalised, secularised, prosperous, pluralistic and multi-ethnic society. As a result the foundations of nationalist sectarian tendencies had become irrelevant. In addition, the fact that the population profited from the economic boom, although to varying degrees, entailed that people became less prone to radical political propaganda.

An issue that unfortunately still remains unsolved is the prosecution of

criminal acts committed during the time of the Troubles. As central figures of the IRA and militant loyalists have become leading key actors in Northern Irish politics, thorough investigations of their past may endanger the ongoing peace process substantially. Recently Northern Irish law enforcement authorities have demanded recordings held at a Boston University archive to be handed over. These recordings contain confessions of militants involved in Northern Irish terrorist attacks and killings. Yet, publishing the identities of those involved might indeed reopen old wounds and lead to acts of retaliation on both sides. The dilemma between the search for truth and justice and the longing for quiet and peace is evident (see McDonald).

However, as the process of European integration progresses the foundations of nationalism will hopefully be rendered invalid eventually. The economic and political cooperation of European countries helps to combat nationalist tendencies that lead to the worst conflicts of recent European history. Within the European Union separatist tendencies seem therefore highly problematic for the European integration process.

Another factor contributing to the peace process as listed by Kirby (45) was the strong involvement of the Clinton administration. Through the promotion of a peaceful Ireland favourable conditions for investing US companies were created. Thus, peace in Northern Ireland allowed for economic growth and vice versa.

Under these circumstances the continuation of sectarian and politically motivated terror appears utterly unwarrantable and absurd. This absurdity is the driving force in McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*.

6.4 A Ridiculously Funny Massacre

Right from the beginning of the play the stage is soaked in blood. In the opening scene the audience is presented with a black cat lying with half of its head missing on a table. Already the very first dialogue between Davey and Donny is an instance of McDonagh's macabre, black humour.

DAVEY. Do you think he's dead, Donny?
Pause. Donny picks up the limp dead cat. Bits of brain plop out. Donny looks across at Davey and put the cat back down again.

DONNY. Aye.

DAVEY. He might be in a coma. Would we ring the vet?

DONNY. It's more than a vet this poor feck needs.

(The Lieutenant of Inishmore 3)

The passage sets the mood for a story full of blood and violence. "McDonagh's story of a mad gunman returned home to seek vengeance for the death of his beloved cat employs violence as comedy" (Doyle 92). In the following scene the comic element arises from Padraic's behaviour towards his torture victim.

Padraic provides James with advice as to how to treat the wounds he is in the process of inflicting on him.

PADRAIC. [...] But with the pain concentrated on the one [foot], if you can get hold of a crutch or a decent stick, I'm not sure if the General Hospital does hand them out but they might do, I don't know. You could phone them up and ask, or go in and see them would be the best thing, and make sure them toes won't be going septic at the same time. I didn't disinfect this razor at all, I never do, I see no need, but they'd be the best people to ask, sure they're the experts.

[...]

(The Lieutenant of Inishmore 11)

The fact that Padraic's friendly suggestions run completely contrary to his actions creates a comic effect. Throughout the play he refers to acts of terrorism and homicide in rather casual terms. When it comes to harming cats Padraic becomes more serious about the worth of a life. However, his hypocrisy with regard to cats is revealed when he ends the existence of substitute cat Sir Roger.

DONNY. I suppose he's changed since you last saw him, Padraic. Oh, cats do change quick.

PADRAIC. Changed quick, is it, Dad?

He shoots the sleeping cat, point blank. It explodes in a ball of blood and bones. Davey begins screaming hysterically. Donny puts his hands to his head. Padraic shoves Davey's face into the bloody cat to stop him screaming.

He's changed quick enough now! And ye two'll be changing the same way in a minute. Where's Wee Thomas? For the fiftieth time, this is!

(The Lieutenant of Inishmore, 40)

The play features a number of twists and turns. Shortly before Davey and Donny are about to be killed by Padraic, Christy, Joey and Brandon enter the

stage rendering the hunter, Padraic, the hunted. It is not long before the power structure is reversed again and the INLA men fall prey to Padraic and Mairead. This extremely fast-paced action is definitely reminiscent of fast-cut action films, as is the action itself. After the fashion of Quentin Tarantino or John Woo, McDonagh puts a shoot out onto stage featuring Akimbo-Colts and a duo reminding the audience of Bonny and Clyde or Pumpkin and Honey Bunny from *Pulp Fiction*.

At the surface level *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* might seem like cheap pulp fiction featuring extreme violence and gallons of blood; a New York production used five gallons a night (Doyle 92). However, the twisted value system underlying the characters' actions has reference points in Irish reality of the 1990s. When Padraic starts torturing Christy in a horrid manner using relatively absurd tools for the job, the monstrosity of the deed is exaggerated to an extent that it provokes defensive laughter. Yet, the audience quickly realises that such acts are also committed in reality. In addition, the play tells the audience something about themselves on a more subtle level. "[T]he subtlety of the play comes precisely from the audience's own simultaneous pleasure and disgust at the carnage and the playwright's ability to draw us out onto the ledge and leave us there shocked not only at what we have witnessed but also at our own giggling response to that present destruction" (Doyle 108). The dismemberment of the human bodies, four in total, marks the macabre highlight of the play. Kneeling in blood Davey and Donny are forced do the dirty work.

PADRAIC. How is the work going, ye's two?

DONNY. We're almost there, Padraic. Almost there.

PADRAIC. You're not almost there at all, sure. The fingerprints you haven't burnt off and the teeth you haven't bludgeoned out. And One-eyed Christy you haven't even started on. 'Ye're almost there.' You won't be almost there for a week, sure.

(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 61)

The final twist comes when the real Wee Thomas returns home. Without the initial motive of vengeance, the driving factor behind the story, the futility of all the violence and killing is highlighted and emphasised. All characters left standing are able to realise that. Davey and Donney summarise the fact quite elegantly:

DAVEY. So all this terror has been for absolutely nothing?

DONNY. It has.

(*The Lieutenant of Inishman* 68)

Similarly, also “Mairead comes to realise that much of that [the national] cause is founded on empty values” (Lonergan 2012: 82).

DAVEY. Is it still off to the INLA you're going, Mairead?

DONNY. (waving a hand at the carnage) Sure, there's no fecker left in the INLA now!

MAIREAD. No, David. I think I'll be staying around here for a biteen. I thought shooting fellas would be fun, but it's not. It's dull

(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 66)

Eventually the play closes with a rather cynical “home sweet home” uttered by Davey and Donny. It is a globalised home still shaken by occasional blows of sectarian terrorism that McDonagh presents with a good deal of gallows humour.

6.5 Rebel Commodities

In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* two groups of characters can be identified. On the one hand, there are the rather regular citizens, Donny, Davey and James, and the Republican nationalist terrorists, Padraic, Mairead, Christy, Joey and Brendan, on the other hand. Especially the latter group have a distinct identity position as terrorists or freedom fighters, depending on one's point-of-view. In contrast to the first group they employ a number of certain accessories to signal their terrorist identity.

Padraic wears two holsters strapped over his chest (10). This piece of clothing does not only provide room for his two handguns. In addition, it signifies his preparedness to use firearms to achieve his goals. The fact that Padraic uses two guns simultaneously leads to the assumption that he does not use them for self-defence but rather for assault in the manner of underworld criminals as portrayed in US film productions. Moreover, Padraic uses a cell phone that makes him appear as a busy professional in his occupation.

Christy, the other leading terrorist of the INLA, wears a dark suit and an eye patch (21). This attire is reminiscent of members of the Mafia as portrayed in US gangster films. His eye patch, covering an injury inflicted by a crossbow

bolt, suggests that he operates in dangerous situations. Although there is no explicit reference in the play, it is plausible to assume that Christy's associates Joey and Brendan dress in a fashion similar to their leaders.

As regards Mairead, she is wearing cropped hair, which can be regarded as rather unusual for a girl her age. She wears army trousers, a white T-shirt and sunglasses carrying an air rifle (17). Originally this outfit would be associated with a young militant male person. By wearing these clothes nevertheless, Mairead signals that she does not want to and cannot be associated with traditional female gender roles. Yet, her attitude gradually changes. She wears lipstick and make-up, when she meets Padraic for the first time on the road. At the time she is prepared to leave with Padraic for Northern Ireland she already wears a pretty dress (56). Changing her attitudes and subject positions entailed changing her outward appearance, her dress code.

Davey, on the other hand, wears his hair long and rides a woman's bicycle. Thus, he does not explicitly display any masculinity through his hairstyle or his means of transportation. As it seems, Davey is not concerned with his sexual identity and consequently has no need to enforce it by means of his outward appearance. Ironically it is in fact outward appearances that cause the troubles and conflicts in the play. A black stray cat is confused with Wee Thomas and Sir Roger disguised in shoe polish does not fool Padraic.

Yet another important factor in defining Davey's and Mairead's identity is their taste in music.

MAIREAD. (singing) 'The last I met was a dying rebel ...'

DAVEY. Ar, don't be singing your fool fecking rebel songs again, now, Mairead!

MAIREAD. (singing) 'Kneeling low I heard him say, God bless my home in dear Cork City, God bless the cause for which I die.'

DAVEY. (singing over her last line – Motorhead) 'The ace of spades! The ace of spades!'

(*The Lieutenant of Inishmore* 20)

While Davey expresses his alternative life style by singing a song by the British heavy metal band Motörhead, Mairead presents her identity by singing rebel songs like *The Dying Rebel* and *The Patriot Game*. In contrast to his sister, Davey is part of a globalised youth culture that is no longer interested in the issues and struggles of pre-modern Ireland. His problems and life style are

universal and typical of young men living in a globalised Western market society. Mairead, however, identifies herself with sectarian violence that has its roots and foundations in an ideology pre-dating the Celtic Tiger era.

Both the fashion and music industry capitalise on the fact that their commodities are employed to express identity and lifestyle. In addition to the actual value of their products non-materialistic values are attached to them. It is therefore not surprising that multinational companies are able to sell their products at high prices to particular groups of buyers. In modern Western societies especially young people signal their alignment to their subculture not only via the type of clothing they wear. Particular brand or label of clothing plays a decisive role in signalling a specific political or cultural identity.

It is not surprising that in the case of the violent characters in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* the dress code of US action and slasher movies is used to characterise them as brutal republican paramilitary individuals.

6.6 The Lieutenant and Slasher Movies

Laura Eldred (2006: 202) argues that *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* shares a large number of characteristics with slasher films such as *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th* and *Scream*. She identifies Mairead as the final girl, “who is stronger, smarter, more practical, and somehow a bit more masculine than the other females in the film” (2006: 202). Similar to Mairead, “the final girl will endure an extended fight with the killer, and she generally emerges victorious, often dispatching her erstwhile murderer with his own weapons” (2006: 202).

As regards the slasher villain, Padraic perfectly matches the requirements listed by Eldred. “[H]e is sexually underdeveloped and frustrated, with a very conservative moral outlook” (2006: 203). “For him, as for most slasher villains, torture and sadism take the place of sex” (2006: 204). As the conflict between Mairead and Padraic escalates, McDonagh employs another feature found in the slasher movie genre. Mairead shoots Padraic with his own weapons imitating his very distinct killing style (see Eldred 2006: 205).

McDonagh provides very explicit stage instructions for this scene:

She shoots Padraic in the head with both guns. Padraic falls back on the table behind him, dead, his cat still clutched in his arms, his mouth wide

open. Mairead looks at the guns in her hands a while, as she quietly continues with the song.

[...]

She places the barrels of both guns in Padraic's mouth, leaves them there and gently takes her cat back off Davey.

(The Lieutenant of Inishmore 65-66)

Eldred (2006: 203) rightly notes that “McDonagh's use of these slasher films' characters in the service of destabilizing traditional gender roles fits clearly within his overall project of destabilizing all the traditional foundations of Irish society.”

In particular *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* undermines the value system underlying sectarian terrorism. The notion of the heroic masculine freedom fighter defending a helpless, feminine, allegorical Ireland is utterly deconstructed. The traditional hetero-stereotype of the violent Irish savage is consciously displayed in an extremely provocative manner. However, by the employment of slasher film characters and plot structures, and dark humour the narrative behind republican violence is rendered absurd, redundant and anachronistic.

In addition, it can be argued that McDonagh produced a play that simply satisfied the essential demands of his audiences. The recipe for his last Irish play could be summarised as follows: take some social criticism and a fair amount of blood, blend it with macabre and black humour and sprinkle it with a lot of psychological and physical violence. As it turned out these ingredients contributed to McDonagh's artistic and financial success on British, Irish and international stages.

7 Martin McDonagh's Globalised Drama

The previous chapters have focused on the question to what extent Celtic Tiger Ireland is represented in Martin McDonagh's Irish plays. Yet another important aspect of McDonagh's oeuvre is, however, how the production process and the marketing of his plays illustrate the conditions in which they were conceived. Martin McDonagh has polarised among scholars and critics not only through his plays but also through his appearances and comments in the public sphere. Moreover, McDonagh's plays have been produced all over the world and have consequently provoked a variety of very different responses.

This chapter will address the questions of whether McDonagh qualifies as an Irish playwright proper, how the self-marketing of the playwright affected the reception of his plays and in what manner the plays were produced and received outside the British Isles.

7.1 McDonagh's Irishness

Martin McDonagh was born on 26 March 1970 in London. His parents had emigrated from rural Ireland to London to find better job opportunities. During summer holidays in the West of Ireland he made his first experiences of the region where his ancestors had lived. In an interview with Fintan O'Toole McDonagh commented that "[t]he landscape 'always stuck in [his] mind'. 'Just the lunar quality, the remoteness, the wildness, the loneliness of it'" (see O'Toole 2006: 40). However, twenty years later, when his first play, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, was produced, little of the awe and amazement of his childhood days had remained in the picture he painted of the Irish West. The idyllic, rural Ireland of his youth had gone and been transformed. McDonagh presents a dark dystopia, where sons and daughters kill their fathers and mothers, husbands kill their wives, parents drown their children and young girls shoot their lovers. Hamsters, dogs, cats and cows are maimed and slaughtered, while cripples, fanatic terrorists and disillusioned priests and policemen roam the country. It is the ghosts of those devoured by the Celtic Tiger that haunt McDonagh's Irish West. The Irish economic boom of the 1990s had left large parts of society behind, while traditional values like the family, the law and the

Church had fallen to pieces.

However, many critics and commentators asked, on what authority this London playwright attacked and satirised Irish society with plays full of violent, drunken, stage-Irish characters, while referring to works of Irish canonical playwrights like J. M. Synge. Lonergan (2006: 295) summarises the debate about McDonagh as follows: “[S]hortly after *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* premiered in Galway in 1996, [the] opinion about his work usually [was] falling in one of two apparently irreconcilable extremes: the belief that he is cleverly subverting stereotypes of the Irish, and the conviction that, on the contrary, he is exploiting those stereotypes, earning a good deal of money by making the Irish look like a nation of morons.” Especially Merriman (2006) and Luckhurst (2006) were of the latter opinion. Luckhurst (126) even accuses McDonagh of having betrayed Irish Theatre by suggesting that he better read the “Manifesto for the Irish Literary Theatre” published by Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats and Edward Martyn a century earlier.

What exacerbated the resentments towards McDonagh was the fact that he did not qualify as a genuine Irish playwright. In an interview with Fintan O'Toole McDonagh illustrates his standing between an English and Irish identity as follows: “I always felt somewhere kind of in-between ... I felt half-and-half and neither, which is good [...]. I'm not into any kind of definition, any kind of -ism, politically, socially, religiously [...].” (qtd. in Middeke 213).

It is understandable that Irish critics and audiences are highly sensitive when a London playwright employs Irish stereotypes in one of his plays.

According to *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (533) the concept of the stage-Irishman has its origins in 17th-century English-language drama. “As a product of colonialism, the first stage-Irishman reflected a desire to stigmatize the native Irish as savages or anathematize them as traitors [...]”.

“The course of Irish drama in the 20th cent. was significantly influenced by the determination of playwrights and actors to avoid the appearance of trivializing Irish characters [...]” (535). However, those who resisted that kind of public pressure like Synge and O'Casey were heavily attacked the first time when their plays premièred but were later included into the Irish literary canon. If Martin McDonagh will eventually be also accepted in that order still remains to be seen.

The problem with Irish literature is that it is extremely difficult to identify genuine Irish features in texts produced by writers who lived in Ireland. Although there are specific literary devices like the Irish bull to be found in Irish writing, it is not appropriate to assume that such devices are distinctive for all Irish texts.

Another feature that can be identified is the attempt to represent an Irish variety of the English language. This would definitely be the case for renowned Irish playwrights like J. M. Synge and Sean O'Casey. However, since writers like Shakespeare, who would by no means pass as an Irish playwright, also employed this technique to mark Irish characters in their plays, this feature cannot be regarded as inherent in Irish literature either.

The assumption that Irish literature is more imaginative, more melancholic and more playful with words in comparison to its English equivalent due to the two countries' colonial and cultural history can certainly be deferred into the realm of national myths and stereotypes. Apart from the fact that this contention relies on predominantly subjective assessments it is also highly charged with specific historical narratives.

It is neither the ancestry of the author, literary devices, language nor style that qualify McDonagh's literature as Irish. It is the preoccupation with Irish problems and issues that makes his Irish plays Irish. In addition, the awareness and incorporation of the Irish literary tradition result in the fact that Martin McDonagh's *Leenane Trilogy* and Aran Island plays can be recognised as Irish literature. In the course of these five plays traditional preconceptions of Irish society and identity are questioned, satirised and deconstructed.

Yet, “[a]fter *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh chose to not only move away from Ireland but also away from specific locations” (Lonergan 2012: 99). Thus, *The Pillowman* and *A Behanding in Spokane* can be more easily interpreted in a non-Irish, more universal context. The shift to rather vague geographical settings also allowed for the appreciation of features that were previously overshadowed by the Irish context in the *Leenane Trilogy* and the Aran Island plays (see Lonergan 2012: 99-100).

It can be argued that the question of McDonagh's national identity is basically of a secondary nature. It is primarily his dedication to Irish issues and the Irish theatrical tradition that classify his first five plays produced as Irish theatre and thus make him an Irish playwright. Fintan O'Toole (1997) observes

that “[i]t is often said, with a great deal of truth, that the characteristic mode of Irish theatre is tragicomedy. And in that sense, McDonagh, for all the complexity of his background and influences, is clearly an Irish playwright.” As the issues and settings featured in McDonagh's plays have become more universal the question of the author's national identity has been rendered more than irrelevant. In a globalised world an author's national identity plays a subordinate role. To follow Sara Keating's assessment (287), “[i]n a transnational, globalized age where the very concept of cultural authenticity has become problematized, and arguments about 'nationality' have been replaced by more expansive arguments about citizenship, the suggestion that McDonagh is not Irish enough to write a play set in Ireland is absurd.” The only area in which McDonagh's nationality might still be interesting and relevant is the marketing of his plays as commodities.

7.2 McDonagh's Plays as Commodities

In the globalised Western world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries the theatre is highly affected by economic factors and necessities. All stages of theatrical production, beginning with the conception of a text and ending with an actual performance on stage, are subjected to materialistic considerations. As Terry Eagleton (59) notes, “[d]rama is not just a collection of literary texts; it is a capitalist business which employs certain men (authors, directors, actors, stagehands) to produce a commodity to be consumed by an audience at a profit.”

In an interview McDonagh provocatively claimed that he “only started writing for theatre when all else failed. It was a way of avoiding work and earning a bit of money” (qtd. in Sierz 222). What might appear as a polarising statement has actually become a reality in modern society. A young dramatist whose name is still unknown to producers, theatre managers, artistic directors and large audiences will have difficulties earning a living with his writing. The script he offers has to be evaluated and approved of with regard to its potential financial success. Due to financial and economic obstacles plenty of creative writing will never reach the theatre stage. The case of Martin McDonagh, however, proved to become a success story. As Werner Huber (2006: 13) points

out, "part of McDonagh's success can be attributed to the lucky circumstance that from the start productions of his plays have been associated with the most distinguished names and institutions of the contemporary theatre scene in the British Isles." These names include the renowned directors Garry Hynes and Nicholas Hytner. The collaboration with these people opened the doors to prestigious theatres and consequently larger audiences (see Huber 2006: 14). It is, however, safe to assume that McDonagh's supporters did not only take the literary qualities of his scripts into account but also expected a potential market for the plays they intended to produce.

In neoliberal market societies public spending on the Arts is not a major issue on the political agenda. As far as Celtic Tiger Ireland is concerned the wealth generated by the economic boom did not necessarily foster artistic production. Michael O'Connell (118-121) shows that there actually occurred a rise in state funding for the Arts during the prosperous years in comparison to the meagre 1980s. However, in a cross-national comparison of 1997 he demonstrates that the Republic of Ireland only spent 0.09 per cent of GDP, while England provided 0.19 per cent of GDP for artistic funding. The top-ranked country, Sweden, however, even put 0.35 per cent of its GDP into fostering the Arts.

Working in this economic and political environment it is not surprising that Martin McDonagh wrote his first plays anticipating contemporary theatre audiences' tastes. As quoted in Sierz (222) he once commented: "Why should anyone pay ten or twenty pounds to be lectured at for two hours?" Thus, it could be argued that McDonagh's work was conceived as predominantly audience-oriented. As a representative of In-Yer-Face Theatre he tried to entertain, to shock, to provoke and polarise.

This strategy was also inherent in McDonagh's public appearances and interviews. McDonagh's career is essentially a modern fairy tale. Brought up in the Elephant and Castle area in Southwark, London, he made his way into the halls of fame of Theatre and Film. Reflecting on his youth in an interview with Fintan O'Toole (2006), McDonagh reminisced: "I didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't want to educate myself toward some kind of job. I didn't even want a job. I didn't want a boss." Before his initial success with *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* in 1996 he was living with his elder brother John in a house in

Camberwell after their parents had moved back to Ireland (see Sierz 222; O'Toole (2006)). During this period “[he] was unemployed for a long time, with the odd spell in an office and a supermarket” (qtd. in Sierz 222). Yet, young Martin McDonagh had found the time to write and develop his style (see O'Toole 2006). Approximately ten years later “McDonagh live[d] alone, in Limehouse, a trendy neighbourhood in East London, in a flat overlooking the Thames which he bought with income from productions of his plays” (O'Toole 2006). By 2012 his plays were produced on Broadway, his films were distributed by Hollywood production companies, and he had even won an Academy Award for *Six Shooter*.

On his way upwards Martin McDonagh marketed his persona as theatre rock star. The account of his meeting with Sean Connery is emblematic of his kind of self-promotion. At a theatre award ceremony at the London Savoy he interrupted a toast to the Queen. As Connery cautioned him to be quiet McDonagh, on second thought, told the acclaimed film star “to fuck off” after he had apologised in a first reaction (see O'Hagan). This, of course, caused a major outrage in the British yellow press but only added to McDonagh's fame and notoriety. Suddenly he was known to a wide public that had never heard his name before. He certainly played to the British public with the stereotype of the Irish quarrelsome artist who would not toast the Queen.

The cultural climate of the 1990s in the British Isles demanded polarising stars that would shake the the dust off British stages. As Sierz (xii) notes, “scores of young writers emerged and contributed to the renaissance of new writing. [...] As a buzz developed, theatre was counted among the glories of British culture in that brief but highly hyped moment of cultural confidence known as Cool Britannia. New writing had rediscovered the angry, oppositional and questioning spirit of 1956, the year of the original Angry Young Men.” Martin McDonagh was able and willing to comply to these demands not only in his writing but also in his self-marketing. Interestingly, McDonagh's mode of presentation has changed over the years of his career.

The photograph displayed on the cover of *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook* portrays a young slightly angry looking man in his twenties with long hair and a goatee and moustache wearing a dark shirt. By 2006, when McDonagh had won his Academy Award, he had changed his beard, his

hairstyle and his clothing. A clean-shaven Martin McDonagh with neatly trimmed hair wearing a business suit and a tie received the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film, *Six Shooter*. Another six years later in 2012 McDonagh has changed little in comparison to his Academy Award acceptance speech. In an interview on his latest film *Seven Psychopaths* he appeared still wearing short grey hair and a dark suit, the only difference being a trimmed full beard and the lack of a tie. It can be observed that Martin McDonagh eventually has developed a style he is comfortable with. After he had himself firmly established in the theatre and film business he no longer needed to present himself as an Angry Young Man. This is also apparent in the public and scholarly reception of Martin McDonagh's persona. At the beginning of his career McDonagh was perceived as a young rebel playwright who would boast that he had hardly ever seen a play in his life and would rather prefer watching violent action films on television. Sixteen years later McDonagh is well accepted as an Irish playwright, scriptwriter and director. He has lost some of his notoriety, yet he still stands for sharp, satirical, black comedy.

Thus, McDonagh's image has changed to some extent. Nevertheless, he is still marketing himself and his productions to theatre and film producers and eventually to viewers. Since productions of McDonagh's Irish plays are not limited to the British Isles, it is interesting to examine the manner of production and reception of *The Leenane Trilogy* and *The Aran Island Plays* on the international stage.

7.3 The Internationalism of McDonagh's Drama

Martin McDonagh's five Irish plays deal with transformations in Irish society conditioned by Ireland's globalisation process known as the Celtic Tiger. The plays portray communities lacking or losing authorities and guidelines still provided in pre-modern Irish society. The internationalisation and economic liberalisation of a once conservative, rural society have left large portions of society not participating in the economic boom. This crisis, however, is not unique to Ireland. Similar developments can be observed throughout the Western World. Yet, what renders the Irish condition most interesting is the fact that these transformations occurred in an extremely rapid manner.

Consequently, the tensions and contradictions between pre-modern and Celtic Tiger Ireland can be well observed.

It is precisely these tensions appearing in McDonagh's plays that are appealing to international audiences who experienced similar tendencies in the course of globalisation in their countries. The contrast between the Connemara kitchen and the amoral, destitute lower class inhabiting it provides the framework in which McDonagh's drama can function on theatre stages all over the world. Especially, the preconceived hetero-stereotypes of Ireland originating from the pre-modern phase stand in clear contrast to the physical and psychological violence presented on stage.

Although the underlying themes in McDonagh's Irish plays are of a universal nature, they are firmly embedded in an Irish context and setting. The choice of an artificial Connemara English as a marker for the geographical setting cannot be underestimated. In addition, the exaggerated portrayal of Irish stereotypes contributes to McDonagh's theatrical agenda of subverting and undermining the image of the Irish West. Consequently, productions outside the Irish context are faced with the difficulty to translate these qualities in order to stage a play still conveying its original aspects.

The label "Irish" evokes a number of distinct meanings for non-Irish audiences. For example, Werner Huber (2012: 88) identifies three hetero-stereotypes featured in Viennese productions of Irish plays: "(1) Violence [...] is foregrounded as a national stereotype, which in turn is seconded by general references to Ireland's 'troubled history'. (2) Alcohol and the (excessive) consumption thereof are constantly cited as markers of national identity [...]. (3) A penchant for black humour and the grotesque [...] is often perceived as denoting Irishness." In addition, the word "Ireland" still triggers the pastoral image of the Emerald Isle populated by sheep and comely red-haired maidens. This is enforced by contemporary Irish musical productions by popular ensembles such as Riverdance or Celtic Woman, who are successfully exporting Irish cultural heritage to the rest of the world.

It has to be pointed out that Martin McDonagh consciously employs the aforementioned stereotypes. On the one hand, this serves to attack these stereotypes, however, it is also interpreted as a marketing strategy by McDonagh's critics, on the other hand. Martin McDonagh, when "asked about

the international popularity of [*The Leenane Trilogy*], especially in the States, in Scandinavia and in Germany, he replied: 'I just count the money'" (qtd. in Luckhurst 117). Of course statements like these are to be taken with a grain of salt, however, they still might contain a grain of truth.

Karen Fricker suggests that "many thought that McDonagh's depiction of the Irish is 'particularly problematic when it's exported', because 'it feeds the whole *Angela's Ashes* view of Ireland. When it travels, it's taken at face value'" (qtd. in Lonergan 2006: 297). Therefore non-Irish producers, directors and actors face the challenge to translate a McDonagh play to the extent that it achieves the same effects on international audiences as it does in an Irish/British theatrical environment. As Lonergan (2006: 308) puts it, "[...] the central 'Irish' narrative must be framed or mediated in a way that will provide an interpretative or moral anchor for an urbanized, cosmopolitan audience assumed to be lacking in specialized knowledge of Ireland."

As regards the Sydney production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* in 1999 Frank Molloy argues (340-341) that Martin McDonagh's celebrity in the British media certainly facilitated the Sydney Theatre Company's decision to produce the play. Australian audiences were excited about the shooting star from London and eager to see his plays. "The principal criterion in selection was likely commercial success" (Molloy 341). The production actually attracted enough theatregoers to generate the revenue expected. In addition, Molloy (341-342) notes that clever marketing strategies suggested that McDonagh's stagecraft originated in watching Australian soap operas. The actual presentation of a scene from *The Sullivans* in the play connected with the audience (see Molloy 342). "Audiences would also have been responsive to the dissimilarity between their world, portrayed in these soap operas, and the world of Leenane" (Molloy 342). By contrasting dreary, rainy Connemara with sunny Australia the production certainly convinced parts of the audience that Australia cannot be such a bad place compared with the West of Ireland. "In a society such as Australia *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* confirms a view of rural Ireland that has never entirely disappeared: a primitive, violent community where intense personal grudges predominate over reasonableness, and the rule of law does not prevail" (Molloy 343). Thus, it can be argued that the Sydney production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* did not deconstruct but foster Irish hetero-

stereotypes expressed by Australian society. Moreover, the notion of Australian superiority over the Irish was re-enforced.

The theme of terrorism in productions of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* was received differently outside Ireland and the UK. In Sidney audiences received the play as reference to terrorist attacks on a Bali nightclub in 2002. In the United States, on the other hand, the play was interpreted in the context of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. Turkish audiences linked a production in 2003 with recent bombings in Istanbul (see Lonergan 2006: 299). “While Ireland was not isolated from these events, an Irish audience at *The Lieutenant* would inevitably receive the play more as a direct statement about the Troubles in Northern Ireland than an exploration of the post-9/11 geopolitical map” (Lonergan 2006: 299). Thus, the reception of McDonagh's Irish plays heavily relies on the cultural and political background the audience are embedded in. As McDonagh's works freely travel the world as cultural commodities, it is up to theatre directors to provide local audiences with a meaningful translation and transposition of the texts. The meaning of McDonagh's plays is not inherent in the actual script. It is generated in the context of the cultural knowledge of the respective audience.

It is, however, safe to assume that most Western audiences are able to recognise the instances of globalised popular culture that are woven into Martin McDonagh's Irish plays. As pointed out earlier a large number of references to widely-known cultural artefacts, predominantly US American ones, are incorporated into *The Leenane Trilogy* and *The Aran Island* plays. Thus, Martin McDonagh can also be discussed in a framework of globalised culture. Due to a shared knowledge of Tarantino, Woo and Hitchcock, *Star Wars*, Jimi Hendrix and graphic novels audiences cannot only identify the plays' characters as part of a globalised popular culture but are also able to relate themselves to that shared cultural framework.

Also Lonergan (2009: 126) notes that “McDonagh's construction of Irishness operates as commodified abstraction – or a brand – that can operate globally, being received reflexively, and selectively, by international cultures”. Moreover, Lonergan contends that the focus on the “geographically peripheral” allows the plays also to function outside an Irish/English setting since the audience are thereby able to relate the plays to their own cultural background

(see Lonergan 2009: 126).

Considering all these different factors it can be concluded that Martin McDonagh's international success is rooted in both extrinsic and intrinsic qualities of his plays. On the one hand, clever marketing of McDonagh's persona in the context of the emerging of In-Yer-Face theatre of the mid-1990s created an international interest in his works. On the other hand, the plays themselves provided qualities that theatre audiences all over the globe were able to relate to.

8 Conclusion

As is well known Irish society underwent significant changes in the last decade of the 20th century. Due to the support of the European Union and liberal economic policies that attracted US foreign direct investment Ireland experienced an unprecedented economic boom. In 1994 the term “Celtic Tiger” modelled after the Asian tiger economies was coined to describe Ireland's rapid economic growth.

As Irish society changed substantially from a previously economically underdeveloped country into a neoliberal globalised market economy, large parts of the population did not profit from the newly generated wealth and eventually formed a destitute lower class without proper perspectives. In addition, institutions formerly providing guidance and authority were disintegrating and post-independence Irish identity was transforming.

In 1996 Irish playwright Martin McDonagh appeared together with the wave of young Irish and British dramatists who were subsumed under the label of In-Yer-Face theatre. McDonagh's dark comedies heavily attacked and satirised contemporary Irish society. Set in the Irish West his Irish plays employed classical Irish theatre conventions and stereotypical characters to debunk preconceived notions and representations of the rural Irish West.

The Beauty Queen of Leenane portrays a dysfunctional mother-daughter relation set in a fictional version of the township of Leenane. The play reflects the fact that the traditional notion of the Irish family is no longer intact. Without the security and comfort formerly provided by the institution of the nuclear family the characters suffer from isolation and alienation. Combined with a lack of prospects, sexual frustration and desperation this leads to the ultimate destruction of the remnants of the family, to matricide.

A Skull in Connemara represents the disintegration of the state and the law. The crisis has gone beyond the family and has affected the entire community of Leenane. The foundations of communal identity, the bones of ancestors are literally hammered to pieces. The village community is penetrated by ruthless criminals and murderers that cannot be contained by the local law enforcement authority, since he has become one of them. The play aptly

reflects the loss of confidence in state authority due to various instances of corruption that occurred in Celtic Tiger Ireland.

In *The Lonesome West* the highest authority of pre-Celtic-Tiger Ireland is subject to disintegration. The Catholic Church can no longer provide its function as a moral institution. Subsequently, the entire township of Leenane succumbs to violence and anarchy. In a modernising and secularising Ireland the institution of the Catholic Church, shaken by scandals of child abuse, has lost its former prominent position in both the private and the public sphere.

The Cripple of Inishmaan attacks the representation of Ireland and Irishness in Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran*. In addition, the construction of Irish identity is heavily questioned. The play illustrates the fact that former definitions of Irishness that are oblivious to recent changes are highly problematic and no longer valid in multi-ethnic, globalised Celtic Tiger Ireland.

In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* McDonagh tackles an immensely delicate issue in Irish society, namely nationalism and the Northern Irish Troubles. By ridiculing and disenchanting Northern Irish terrorism the play reveals and undermines the anachronistic myths and narratives sectarian violence relies on. Although the conflict still remains unsolved, the issue of national borders can no longer be of highest priority on the political agenda in a globalised world.

Martin McDonagh has been polarising audiences ever since his first play premièred at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway. His critics have accused him of capitalising on Irish stereotypes and of being a traitor to the literary Irish tradition. It is, however, more plausible to assume that McDonagh's Irish plays have captured changes and problems the transformation of Irish society in the 1990s has brought with it. His dark and sharp satires provide critical insight into globalised Celtic Tiger Ireland to theatre audiences in the British Isles and worldwide.

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10 Appendix

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

In der letzten Dekade des 20. Jahrhunderts hat sich die Irische Gesellschaft substantiell verändert. Im Zuge des Wirtschaftsbooms, der später „Keltischer Tiger“ getauft wurde, modernisierte sich Irland zu einem neoliberalen Staat. Jedoch profitierten große Teile der Bevölkerung nicht vom wirtschaftlichen Aufschwung sondern bekamen lediglich die Schattenseiten der neoliberalen Marktwirtschaft zu spüren. Diese Modernisierungsverlierer stehen im Zentrum von Martin McDonaghs Theaterstücken, die im Westen Irlands angesiedelt sind.

McDonagh, der als Sohn Irischer Eltern in London aufgewachsen war, gelang Mitte der 1990er der Durchbruch auf Englischsprachigen Bühnen. Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit seinen Irischen Stücken, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Skull in Connemara*, *The Lonesome West*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* und *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* und untersucht diese in Hinblick auf ihr Setting, Charaktere, sozioökonomischen Kontext, makabre und groteske Elemente, Einflüsse von Massenmedien, Konsumkultur und Intertextualität. Darüber hinaus wird ein Überblick über McDonaghs internationalen Erfolg geboten.

Es wird gezeigt, dass McDonaghs Stücke als scharfe Gesellschaftssatiren gesehen werden können. Die im traditionellen Irland wichtigen Institutionen Familie, Staat und Kirche werden als dysfunktional präsentiert und können daher den Modernisierungsverlierern, die McDonagh beschreibt, keinen Halt mehr bieten. Durch den übertriebenen Einsatz von Stereotypen gelingt es dem Autor das Irische Selbst- und Fremdbild zu hinterfragen. Der abschließende Überblick über Martin McDonaghs internationale Erfolge zeigt, dass neben den literarischen Qualitäten seiner Texte geschicktes Marketing seiner Person und seiner Werke zu seiner weltweiten Popularität beigetragen haben.

Abstract

During the last decade of the 20th century Irish society changed substantially. In the course of the economic boom that was later called the “Celtic Tiger” Ireland modernised into a neoliberal state. However, large parts of the population did not profit from the economic gains. On the contrary, they suffered from the drawbacks inherent in neoliberal market economies. These modernisation losers are in the centre of Martin McDonagh's plays that are set in the West of Ireland.

McDonagh, who grew up in London as a son of Irish parents, had his break-through on English-speaking stages in the mid-1990s. This thesis is concerned with his Irish plays: *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Skull in Connemara*, *The Lonesome West*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. These texts are examined in terms of setting, characters, socio-economic conditions, instances of the macabre and the grotesque, influence of mass media and consumerism, and potential intertextualities. In addition, an overview over McDonagh's international success is provided.

It is shown that McDonagh's plays can be interpreted as sharp satires of contemporary Irish society. Important institutions of pre-Celtic-Tiger Ireland, such as the family, the state and the Church are presented as dysfunctional. Therefore, they can no longer provide comfort and guidance to the modernisation losers that McDonagh describes. By displaying exaggerated stage-Irishness the author questions Irish auto- and hetero-stereotypes. The concluding examination of Martin McDonagh's international success suggests that both the literary qualities of his texts and clever marketing have contributed to his international popularity.

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