“NECESSARY CONTEMPT”: AN ANALYSIS OF MARTIN MCDONAGH’S ARAN ISLAND TRILOGY

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 2009

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies
(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2011

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ABSTRACT

In a narrative sense, how does a point of view create imaginable space in Martin McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy? And what role does bricolage, selective intertextuality, and postmodern pastiche play in the construction of imaginable space? McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy is a complex postmodern construction. It is not simply an appropriation of an iconic location, even though that is part of it, but something more of a subjective response which depends for its strength on a conviction that representation on stage is a form of truth. My research utilizes scholarship on the Aran Islands in conjunction with poets, filmmakers, and playwrights who engaged with these particular islands imaginatively. I illustrate how their diverse points of view created imaginable space that builds from a special place in western Irish imagery, a place that owes much to the late nineteenth century. Also, my examination focuses on McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy. These plays represent a new mix of messages, symbols, and cultures that reflect the postmodern condition. I employ two important postmodern thinkers to analyse McDonagh’s work through a postmodern filter: Umberto Eco for his theory of intertextuality, and Charles Jencks’ argument that postmodernism involves double coding the representation of modernism with something else----some Other. My research makes use of Robert Warshow and Carol Clover’s analysis of film genres: the Western and the slasher film. Also, I interrogate John Waters’ evaluation of McDonagh as a punk rock playwright in conjunction with the punk rock aesthetics of Shane MacGowan and the Pogues. These studies offer a methodological framework for my analysis of McDonagh’s style of representation: I argue that McDonagh’s punk-inspired mockery hollows out the primitivist representation of the Aran Islands and fills it with a postmodern plurality. Furthermore, the unsettling effect in McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy is due largely to the fact that he yokes the screen to the stage,
and he fuses elements from the classical canon of Irish drama with popular genres from American cinema.
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INTRODUCTION

Martin McDonagh was born on 26th March, 1970, in southeast London. He grew up in both the Elephant and Castle area of south London and nearby Camberwell amongst a large Irish immigrant community. His parents were originally from the West of Ireland. McDonagh’s mother came from County Sligo and his father hails from Connemara. During his childhood, he spent every summer with his parents’ families in Connemara and Sligo, where the Irish inflected English he heard spoken by his relatives influenced his playwriting. Later, both his parents moved back to Ireland, leaving McDonagh and his brother (screenwriter John McDonagh) in London. After leaving school early, McDonagh began writing short stories and radio plays, but he suffered a series of rejections. Apart from two radio plays broadcast by an Australian radio station, his works remained un-produced. Consequently, McDonagh turned to theatre, or so the legend goes.

As a dramatist and screenwriter, McDonagh has written eight plays and two screen plays. His first six plays are located in the West of Ireland, including The Beauty Queen of Leenane (Critics Circle Theatre Award—most Promising Playwright, 1996); A Skull in Connemara (1997), and The Lonesome West (1997). At the Dublin Theatre Festival (1997), the Leenane Trilogy was named ‘Best Production’ winning over competition from Thomas Kilroy and Robert Lepage. The second trilogy consists of The Cripple of Inishmaan (1997), The Lieutenant of Inishmore (2001) (Olivier for Best New Comedy, 2002), and the as yet un-produced The

McDonagh burst on to the theatre scene in 1996, when The Beauty Queen of Leenane premiered at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway. Within a year, four of his plays were being staged in London’s West End. While the Leenane Trilogy was running at the Royal Court Theatre, The Cripple of Inishmaan (the first instalment of his Aran Island Trilogy) premiered at the Royal National Theatre. And Patrick Lonergan writes in the year 2009, “[t]he only other writer in 1997 to have four plays appearing simultaneously in London’s West End was William Shakespeare” (Lonergan xvi).

McDonagh has disparaged the third play of his Aran Island Trilogy stating, it “isn’t any good” (McDonagh, qtd. in O’Toole 5). This has left him and audiences with the uncanny case of a trilogy that has failed to materialize. The first two plays of the trilogy, The Cripple of Inishmaan (1996) and The Lieutenant of Inishmore (2001) both deal with the Aran Islands. Both have been produced; The Cripple of Inishmaan opened January 5th 1997, at the Royal National Theatre, London, and the Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of The Lieutenant of Inishmore, opened May 11th 2001, at The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. The third play
however, has not been produced. It remains shrouded in a cloak of mystery, the final play of a promised trilogy that has yet to materialize. McDonagh has produced another successful trilogy (the Leenane Trilogy) and his geographical reference to *The Banshees of Inisheer* suggests that the trilogy structure has shaped the aesthetic of his first two plays. In this study, I investigate the connections between the first two plays and the as yet unproduced third. All are tied to the three islands of Aran referenced in the plays which I aim here to explore.

While it seems that *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* was written first and prior to McDonagh’s plans for a trilogy, the concept of a trilogy seems to have stemmed at least in part from to the geography of the islands themselves. Setting *The Lieutenant* on Inishmore, *The Cripple* on Inishmaan, the logical conclusion suggests that *The Banshees* was meant to be set on Inisheer. McDonagh is on record stating that *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* has an Aran Island location simply because “it is far enough from Belfast to delay the return of Padraic” (McDonagh, qtd. in Chambers and Jordan 6). This statement suggests that for purely pragmatic reasons, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* was given an Aran Island setting. However, Shaun Richards also points out that

The casualness with which Inishmore was selected is matched by the fact that it was merely the numerical equivalence of the three Aran Islands with a dramatic trilogy which ‘prompted the idea’, rather than any overt commitment to a thematically unified exploration of a community.

(Richards 257)
Richards’ comment suggests that *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* ‘prompted’ McDonagh to write the Aran Island Trilogy. Patrick Lonergan tells us that McDonagh’s initial impulse was to write a play about the Troubles in Northern Ireland, but when he discovered that there were three Aran Islands, he changed his course of action and wrote a trilogy instead (Lonergan xxiv-xxv). And Fintan O’Toole claims that in 1994, over a period of nine months, McDonagh wrote “drafts” for seven plays (O’Toole 5). Therefore, it appears that McDonagh’s entire corpus was hastily written over a relatively short period of time. This might help to explain the nature of McDonagh’s methodology. In contrast to his Aran Island Trilogy, McDonagh set the Leenane Trilogy in one town, Leenane (circa 1990s). This seems to have had certain structural advantages; not only does it provide thematic unity but also a sense of enforced intimacy is created by three families living in close contact (Huber 16). Werner Huber also tells us that McDonagh introduces the trilogy’s dramatis personae in the first play. Therefore, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996) functions as a platform for numerous intertextual allusions and cross-references that occur in the two remaining plays of the trilogy (Huber 16-8). In *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the second play of his loosely connected Aran Island Trilogy, McDonagh re-imagines the making of Robert Flaherty’s film, *Man of Aran* (1934). The play takes an ironic perspective on the discrepancy between the filmmaker’s heroic imagery of island life and the pettiness of McDonagh’s characters. The film is also referenced in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*; Flaherty’s film begins with a geographical description of the islands immediately after the opening credits, “The Aran Islands lie off western Ireland. All three are small…wastes of rock…without trees…without soil. In this desperate environment the Man of Aran, because of his independence” on land is beholden only
to “his master the sea” (Flaherty 1934). While I will interrogate the film’s intertextual relevance to the plays further below it is useful to begin here by noting how Flaherty’s “three wastes of rock” are aligned with the unfinished trilogy structure.

McDonagh is not the first artist or playwright to engage with these particular islands imaginatively. This may in part be due to the islands’ ripeness for “re-mythologizing”, as Patrick Sheeran succinctly remarks in “Aran, Paris and the Fin-de-Siecle” (Sheeran 305). An island, especially a small island, seems to hold a privileged place in the imaginations of most people. Moreover, according to Jill Franks, they “fulfil a specific need [for escape] in the human psyche”, which Franks refers to as an “imaginable space” (Franks 1). Unlike geographical space, “imaginable space” is a mental landscape constructed by the human psyche. Also, because of their separation from the mainland islands give the illusion that they are both “controllable” and “paradisiacal” (Franks 1).

In what follows I hope to demonstrate how documentary film pioneer Robert Flaherty (one of the first filmmakers to bring the Aran Islands to international attention) views the Aran Islands through the lens of a primitivist fantasy, while Martin McDonagh re-imagines the same islands as a brutal postmodern landscape. The first chapter frames both the impact of Flaherty’s primitivist vision in Man of Aran and McDonagh’s dialogically deconstructive response to Flaherty’s fabricated primitiveness. I analyse the symbiotic connections between Arthur Symons’s sense of space as a mediated text both in Flaherty’s film and McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy. In this chapter, I show that the appropriation of Aran as a zone of primitivism and the current trend for deconstructing that appropriation suggests that the Aran Islands “are to be
found on an imaginative map that is always in the making” (Franks 18). Chapter two features McDonagh’s new imaginings of the Aran Islands as postmodern. I propose that McDonagh’s success as a *bricoleur* and *pasticheur* is predicated upon an aggressive intertextual engagement with a Celtic punk rock aesthetic and two popular film genres: the Western and the slasher film.

If the Aran Islands can be imagined, then they can be re-imagined. In the Aran Island Trilogy, McDonagh re-imagines the islands as an unforgiving landscape where the primitive and the postmodern coalesce. In both *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, pettiness, cruelty, and violence function as the social glue that binds the characters together into a brutal, albeit hilarious, little community. McDonagh’s plays seem most interested in the immediacy of comedy, violence, and intermedial pastiche to generate a sense of frisson in his audience.
In this chapter I will examine the primitivist distortions in Flaherty’s film *Man of Aran* in opposition to McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy. Numerous factors contribute to these cultural distortions, but I will only discuss one at length: the concept of primitivism. When thinking about the Aran Islands, it is tempting to place them within the context of the primitivist subgenre of modernism. In his article on the Aran Islands and the fin-de-siècle, Sheeran states:

> We have recently learned to see primitivism as historically specific, as related in the first instance to Parisian modernisation (‘Baudelaire’s capital of the nineteenth century’) rather than belonging to a realm of eternal ideas. It is a discourse which each artist could appropriate to his own end in the specific historical circumstances which he found himself. (Sheeran 301)

In the above passage, Sheeran is suggesting that the representation of the Aran Islands as a primitivist discourse is fundamentally based on the subjective impulses of an individual artist. As
early as 1907, John Millington Synge wrote in The Aran Islands that he decided to move from Inishmore to Inishmaan, “where Gaelic is more generally used, and life is perhaps the most primitive in Europe” (Synge 10). The islands’ separation from the mainland gave its inhabitants a sing-song language and quaint manners, but how did Synge mould the Aran language and the local stories into a theme of universal value? Synge names his theme when he writes, “I cannot say it too often: the supreme interest of the islands lies in the strong concord that exists between the people and the impersonal limited but powerful impulses of the nature that is around them” (Synge, qtd. in Kiely 115). In 1934, Flaherty not only researched his film by reading Synge’s text, but he was determined to cinematically resurrect life on Aran as it was represented in Synge’s text (McMahon 292).

In my analysis of Flaherty’s Man of Aran and McDonagh’s The Cripple of Inishmaan, I hope to demonstrate how McDonagh deliberately sets up an antagonistic relationship between the stage and the screen. Ironically, in the play, Man of Aran is the movie which confounds the locals it was meant to represent. They do not recognize themselves on the screen, nor do they care about the film’s aesthetics. They are more interested in the ongoing conversation amongst themselves. Ultimately, they analyse the film and find it wanting. What did Flaherty’s primitivism mean to McDonagh’s hard-edged punk inspired characters? Well, according to Helen, Flaherty’s primitivist aesthetic amounted to “[a] pile of fecking shite” (85).

Before we can interrogate the significance of the Aran Islands, it is necessary to give a brief overview of Flaherty’s works in relation to Aran because it helps to explain the impact his film has had on constructing the Aran Islands as imaginable space. In “Robert Flaherty and the
Naturalistic Documentary”, Hugh Gray suggests that Flaherty was the first to combine documentary subjects with fiction film narrative and give it a poetic treatment (Gray 46). Furthermore, Gray’s definition of the naturalistic documentary easily maps on to Flaherty’s Man of Aran. Gray states that a naturalistic documentary is

A nontheatrical film, not purely representational, but having a dramatic form, theme, and unity, and taking as its subject, from the actual world, some aspect of the life of man, either in a state of primitive nature or, at least, unaffected by industrialization. (Gray 46)

The above passage accurately reflects the central theme of Flaherty’s film canon. Moreover, Gray claims that the naturalistic documentary film came into existence with the making of Flaherty’s Nanook of the North (1922) (Gray 46). Two of Flaherty’s films that won critical acclaim, Nanook of the North and Man of Aran construct imaginable space that is based on primitivism. Both films depend on a heroic nuclear family that struggle against the fierce, dangerous, and ultimately dominant forces of the Canadian Arctic, and the Aran Islands off the westcoast of Ireland. In Man of Aran there are thirteen scenes that depict a nuclear family’s heroic battle against the elemental forces of nature. Out of the thirteen scenes in the film, five scenes focus on the activity of shark-hunting: for example, the title of scene seven is “The Silent Monster”; scene eight begins with the heading, “Harpooning the Beast”, and finally in scene eleven the audience is given the title, “Going Home” (Flaherty). My point is that almost half of Flaherty’s film aligns itself with the atavistic fantasy of shark-hunting rather than reportage on the cultural reality of Araners. All of these scenes suggest that the Aran Islands were not
primitive enough to satisfy Flaherty’s preconceptions; therefore, he felt compelled to create an imaginable space on the screen that reflected his primitivist mythology.
1.2 IMAGINABLE SPACE

In Islands and Modernists, Franks tells us that “[t]hose lonely rocks” off the westcoast of Ireland have fulfilled a specific need for imaginable space in the psyche of artists, poets, and playwrights since the late 19th century (Franks vii, 1). Because of this, the Aran Islands have been singled out for special attention. As insular outposts, both the islands and its inhabitants have been revered as a repository for authentic Irish culture. Consequently, Aran has been imagined as worlds apart in temperament, lifestyle, and ethnicity from the rest of Ireland even though the islands are only one hundred and forty miles from cosmopolitan Dublin (Franks 73). Interestingly, Franks points out that this close proximity between Aran and Dublin only “served to heighten the Irish theatregoers’ expectations that [Synge’s] plays would give a realistic (and flattering) view of west Irish peasants” (Franks 73). This type of realism aligns itself with the aesthetics of Flaherty’s naturalistic documentary film Man of Aran. For example, in How the Myth was Made, Flaherty’s biographer, Arthur Calder-Marshall tells us that “Flaherty wasn’t interested in actuality”, rather he was interested in how his own primitivist mythology of Aran fit into the film (Calder-Marshall, qtd. in Stoney).

In the Aran Island Trilogy, McDonagh seems most interested in debunking Flaherty’s primitivist mythology by re-imagining Man of Aran (Murray 85; Arrowsmith 241). As the largest of the Aran Islands, Inishmore measures only nine miles long by two miles broad at its widest place (Kearns 422). And in Man of Aran, Flaherty romanticises the geographical space of the island and its inhabitants. The film depicts the heroic efforts of the islanders in a seemingly
epic battle for survival against the natural elements. Therefore, Flaherty’s vision of Inishmore can be construed as a heroic zone. By contrast, in his Aran Island Trilogy, McDonagh lances and drains Man of Aran of all its heroic content. For instance, in his “Commentary” to The Lieutenant of Inishmore, Lonergan states that McDonagh has a “marked indifference to geographical accuracy” (Lonergan xxiv). Unlike Flaherty’s film, there are very few references in McDonagh’s plays to local geography. While Flaherty’s characters heroically battle the elements, McDonagh’s Araners fight amongst themselves. Also, given that all three islands are tiny, the inordinate amount of violence, murder, and dismemberment that takes place on these islands suggests that McDonagh has re-cast the Aran Islands as a pathogenic zone.

Like theatre space, the bounded-ness of an island can serve as an intermedial space for experimentations; for example, Franks claims that for Synge, Aran functioned like “a language lab where Gaelic is spoken and a rich cultural fabric [was] waiting to be woven into drama for the rest of Ireland to witness” (Franks 1). Franks correctly highlights the “rich cultural fabric” of Synge’s dramaturgy. However, her reference to spoken Gaelic is somewhat misleading. What we find in Synge’s works such as Riders to the Sea (1904) and The Playboy of the Western World (1907) is Hiberno-English (Franks 77). Synge studied Gaelic, a Celtic language, while he attended Trinity however, in the two plays mentioned above, he blends English with Irish idiom to create a distinctly Hiberno-English text (Franks 77). Therefore, in both plays, the characters communicate with each other and by extension with the audience, in ‘Gaelicized English’. McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy is set in a Gaeltach (a region of Ireland where Gaelic is the official language) but his characters communicate with each other in Hiberno-English. We are
told that as a child, McDonagh spent nearly every summer with his parents in Connemara, a region on Ireland’s rugged west coast, and in a 2001 interview, McDonagh claimed that “[w]riting in an Irish idiom freed me up as a writer. I used to try and write stories set in London, but it was too close to home” (McDonagh, qtd. in Russell 2). Although McDonagh set his trilogy in a Gaeltach, his testimony indicates that linguistically he was able to create an “imaginable space” in a narrative sense by writing in Gaelicized English (Franks 1)

For Synge and McDonagh, the Aran Islands are both literal and imaginable space that functions as a crucible for their dramatic creativity. Both playwrights build from a special place in western Irish imagery, a place that owes much to the late nineteenth century. In “Aran, Paris and the Fin-de-Siecle” Sheeran states that the discovery and creation of a mythical Aran began on August 5th, 1896 when poet and magazine editor Arthur Symons and W.B. Yeats visited Inishmore (Sheeran 299). Later, Symons would write an article for the Savoy, a London journal in which he recounts the following revelation: a “sense of place is derived not so much from geographical experience as from reading competence. It points to the intertextual, [and] selective nature of perception, to the way in which experience is mediated” (Symons, qtd. in Sheeran 299).

This is an important concept, not only because Symons differentiates literal space from imaginative space; but also because he highlights how perceptions, in the context of a theatrical experience, might be manipulated by the use of selective intertextuality. Prior to his visit to Inishmore, relevant texts for Symons included Emily Lawless’s Grania [a classical treatise on the Aran Islands]; the prose of Roderic O’Flaherty’s Chronological Descriptions of West or H-Iar
Connaught, maps, and Tristan and Isolde (Sheeran 299). For Symons, these texts not only activated his imagination but synergised them into imaginable space:

Since I have seen Aran…I have never wondered that the Irish peasant still sees fairies about his path, and the boundaries of what we call real, and what is for us unseen, are vague to him. The sea on those coasts is not like the sea as I know it on any other coast; it has more twilight. And the sky seems to come down softly, with more stealthy step…I have never believed less in the reality of the visible world, in the importance of all we are most serious about. One seems to wash off the dust of the cities, the dust of beliefs, the dust of incredulities. (Symons, qtd. in Sheeran 300)

Cloaked in a veil of mysticism, Symons’s construction of Inishmore suggests that the walls between the literal and sublime are thin. From a modernist’s perspective the passage also highlights the islands as a universal symbol for escapism.

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary indicates that modernism is a blanket term for an explosion of new styles and trends in the arts in the early 20th century (918). And according to Franks, the modernist movement (circa 1890-1930) denotes a period of extreme scepticism toward the efficacy of major social institutions of nationhood, marriage, and church (Franks 5). She also tells us that this scepticism was extended into the arts as well; for example, we are told that the “social realism” of Victorian novels was superseded by the modernist novel which focused on “the nature of consciousness” (Franks 5). And in the theatre, the neoclassical unities were replaced with open forms of expression. And most importantly, Franks tells us that “form
and style [in the arts] were predicated on feeling rather than so-called realism” (Franks 5). I have already discussed the type of modernist aesthetic of Parisian modernization. This strain of modernism focuses on the subjective impulses of the artist rather than a set of eternal ideas like marriage, nation, or the church. Fundamentally, it is a discourse of appropriation: for instance, Sheeran states it is “a discourse which an artist could appropriate to his own ends in the specific historical circumstances in which he found himself” (Sheeran 301). Both of these strands of modernism are significant in Flaherty’s naturalistic documentary film Man of Aran. In his film, Flaherty creates an imaginable space on the screen by replacing “social realism” with his own primitivist mythology.

As a fin-de-siecle phenomenon, modernism refers to an era of scepticism in regards to the accomplishments of modernity and its social institutions (Franks 5). Modernism, at the turn of the century, might be seen as a catalytic agent that challenged the very foundations of reality. Symons challenges an industrialized reality by re-imaging the Aran Islands as a portal into the sublime when he states in the above passage that “One seems to wash off the dust of cities, the dust of beliefs, the dust of incredulities” (Symons, qtd. in Sheeran 300). During the fin-de-siecle, challenging both social and institutional constraints seemed to be the desired goal. Indeed, according to Sheeran, the excitement generated by the “transcendental expectations” of the era in regards to the Aran Islands is clearly highlighted in a letter written in 1896, by poet and freedom fighter Sarojini Naidu, and sent to Symons prior to his departure for Inishmore (Sheeran 301):

Do the gods speak unto the children of men in that sacred spot, and do beautiful demons lure mad poets to their destruction? (Naidu, qtd. in
Sheeran 301)

Evidently, Naidu anticipated that her friend would have “visions” on Inishmore (Sheeran 301). Clearly, the appropriation of the Aran Islands during the *fin-de-siecle* was fuelled by the escapist needs of certain urban intellectuals rather than the geographical reality of the islands or its inhabitants.

Small islands seemed to have a powerful effect on the modernist imagination because of the movement’s inherent “double gaze” (Franks 18). On the one hand, modernists looked forward in a quest for new forms of community; on the other hand, they nostalgically gazed backward to a pre-industrial lifestyle. Franks claims that the insularity of a small island simultaneously serves both of these visions. A small island can be easily conceptualized in “one’s ideal image” (Franks 18). The Aran Islands, because of their diminutive size, and their iconic location in the West of Ireland, offer a superb example of a group of islands ripe for mythologizing. In “The Aran Islands: An Imperiled Irish Outpost”, Kevin Kearns tell us that the islands number three, and they are situated some thirty miles from Galway on the west coast of Ireland. From west to east are “Inishmore (Large Island) measures 9 miles long and 2 mile wide; Inishmaan (Middle Island) 3 miles in length and 1 mile broad; and Inisheer (East Island)” is only slightly smaller than Inishmaan (Kearns 422). Another reason that may have accounted for a constant imaginative engagement with the islands is opined by Franks. She argues that no literary engagement with an island can withstand the test of actual travel, no island can sustain the burden of idealization. The concept of islands frequently detaches from the reality of
islands. Such islands are to be found upon an imaginative map that is always in the making. The quest for perfection figured as islands illustrates the desire to create imaginable space for truth and beauty.

(Franks 18)

Franks highlights the tension between the geographical actuality of the islands and their modes of representation. Islands, according to Franks, seem to be ‘burdened’ by the imposition of complex metaphors. Franks’s remark that [t]he quest for perfection figured as islands illustrates the desire to create imaginable space for truth and beauty” sums up Flaherty’s agenda in Man of Aran (Franks 18).
1.3 FLAHERTY’S PRIMITIVISM

Exactly what are the theoretical contexts of Flaherty’s iconography? We can approach the question of textualizing such concerns by interrogating recent work on the discourse of primitivism.

The concept of primitivism seems to be associated with the modernist movement in both art and literature. In The Aran Islands (1907), Synge re-imagines the islands within the context of a primitivist strand of modernism. Sheeran claims that during the *fin-de-siècle*, iconoclasts like Synge could and did appropriate a primitivist discourse to serve their own creative agendas (Sheeran 301-2). Synge’s employment of a primitivist discourse in The Aran Islands is not just a case of juxtaposing primitivism with modernity, but rather an attempt to create an imaginable space where both the primitive and the modern can be seen as “historically contingent” (Sheeran 302). While I will discuss how Flaherty’s film undercuts Synge’s juxtaposition of primitivism and modernism further below, it is useful to reiterate that from Synge’s perspective, the primitive is constructed as an extension of modernity:

Rather than inviting the reader into a dream space where modernity may be forgotten, this kind of textuality holds both terms before us in dissonance that tends to under-mine the absolute dominance of either.

(Sheeran 302)

In his essay on Aran and the fin-de-siècle, Sheeran suggests that Synge casts the Aran Islands as both primitive and modern in order to generate a sense of dissonance in his text. Shortly, we...
shall see that in *Man of Aran*, Flaherty constructs an imaginable space on Aran where “modernity may be forgotten”; and conversely, in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh re-imagines the islands as both “pre-modern and post-modern at the same time” (O’Toole xi).

Robinson argues that Aran’s representation as a locus of the primitive seems to be fuelled by the human need for romance, mystery, identity, and the necessity to project such desires into a specific geographical location (Robinson xv):

> In the bare sanctuary of these islands the soul of ancient Ireland now has its ephemeral resting place. Language, and habiliments, customs, traditions, flesh and blood, from days of St. Patrick and before, forced westward through Connaught during seething ages, have concentrated in the Arans. (Murphy 474)

Robert Cushman Murphy seems to suggest that the Aran Islands are only a cipher for larger ideological concerns elsewhere. And as Robinson explains in his introduction to *The Aran Islands*: “If Ireland is intriguing as being an island off the West of Europe, than Aran, an island off the West of Ireland, is still more so; it is Ireland raised to the power of two” (Robinson xvii). The symbolic importance of the islands, according to both Murphy and Robinson, is reflected in the necessity of grounding the concept of Irish identity in an iconic location.

As mentioned earlier, the islands barely cover eighteen square miles of mostly barren rock (Kearns 422). In *Man of Aran*, Flaherty describes the islands as “three small…wastes of rock…without trees” (Flaherty). And, sixty-seven years later, in an interview with O’Toole,
McDonagh recounts a trip to the Aran Islands with his family when he was six years old: “the landscape ‘always stuck in my mind’, he remarked. ‘Just the lunar quality, the remoteness, the wildness, the loneliness of it’” (McDonagh, qtd. in O’Toole 1). Paradoxically, both Flaherty and McDonagh’s description of the islands suggests that less is more. The islands’ minimalist landscapes seem to be open to imaginative engagement. In his introduction to Synge’s book, Robinson argues that a romantic strand of Irish nationalism transformed “that forlorn outcrop of want…into one of the chief shrines of [an] Ireland of the mind” (Robinson xv). Collectively, these rocky islands might be thought of as an Irish *omphalos*. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary states that as a literary term *omphalos* points to “the centre of something”. In the ancient Greek, *omphalos* literally means “navel” (998). In the above passage, Robinson grounds his concept of an “Ireland of the mind” in a single location, the Aran Islands. And the dominant feature of these islands, apart from their diminutive size, is that they are composed mostly of barren rock. An *omphalos* is an ancient religious stone that symbolized the centre of the Greek cosmos. Therefore, Aran might be seen as the epicentre of Irish national identity. And like an ancient stone artefact, Aran’s barren and rocky landscape might symbolize an “Ireland of the mind” (Robinson xv).

In 1927, the writer Liam O’Flaherty noted that the power of Aran is derived from its landscape rather than its people. O’Flaherty remarked that,

The island [Inishmore] has the character and personality of a mute God.

One is awed in its presence, breathing its air. Over it broods an overwhelming sense of great, noble tragedy. The Greeks would have liked
it. The people are sadly inferior to the island itself. But the sea birds are almost worthy of it. (O’Flaherty, qtd. in Toibin 4)

O’Flaherty links Aran with the aesthetics of Greek tragedy, and he disparages the islanders as “being sadly inferior” to the islands themselves. The apparent disconnect between the Araners and the romanticized landscape they inhabit is treated differently in Flaherty’s Man of Aran and McDonagh’s The Cripple of Inishmaan. While I will discuss Flaherty’s appropriation of Aran generally as a site for a primitivist fantasy, and McDonagh’s deconstruction of that appropriation further below, it is useful to start by noting how the Aran Islands were mythologized at the turn of the century by urban intellectuals. Not until 1907 were the islands brought to the attention of the outside world by Synge’s The Aran Islands. And twenty-seven years later, they were featured in Flaherty’s film Man of Aran (McMahon 292). Both of these works served to familiarize the literary world with the unique geographical elements of the Aran Islands. Despite their acclaim, many early representations of island life have been criticized for concentrating on both the dramatic and heroic qualities of the islanders (Messenger 41-2). This seems to explain why Ireland’s “nativist movement” focused its attention on the Aran Islands (Messenger 42-3). Their re-imagining a Gaelic past for the purpose of preserving an Irish cultural tradition seemed to be their goal. However, John Messenger argues that the Aran islanders have not been championed for their retention of the Gaelic language but rather because they were believed to be the direct descendents of the Celts who resided on Aran centuries ago (Messenger 45). Therefore, the islanders were regarded as the “purest of Gaels” (Messenger 45; Evans 44). It is within this context that the Aran Islands are thought to possess intrinsic primitivist individuality.
1.4 DISMANTLING PRIMITIVISM

In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, McDonagh deconstructs Flaherty’s primitivist footprint by re-imagining *Man of Aran* (1934). In his film, Flaherty embroiders a fictive Irishness that romanticizes the hostile and unforgiving elements of the Aran Islands. And as I have previously pointed out, Symons argued that “sense of place” is derived from reading a variety of texts rather than a geographical experience. This points to how place might be mediated through selective intertextuality (Symons, qtd. in Sheeran 299). Also, in *Islands and Modernists*, Franks argues that at the turn of the 19th century, disaffected artists, poets, and playwrights were attracted to islands because they represented “contained space”, a locus that is at least theoretically “controllable” and therefore similar to theatre space (Franks 7). Furthermore, if islands allowed both filmmakers and playwrights to project their “subjective impulses” into a “contained space” then we might also conclude that the human psyche is equally capable of projecting its desires as well as its hostility on to the Aran Islands (Sheeran 302; Franks 7). In *Man of Aran*, Flaherty constructs Aran as a primitivist utopia, an imaginary place removed from the corruption of industrialization. By contrast, in both *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, McDonagh re-imagines the Aran Islands as a postmodern dystopia that undercuts Flaherty’s primitivist mythology.

How, if at all, does the setting of Inishmore and the casting of locals to play themselves affect meaning in *Man of Aran*? And as both screen-writer and director, how does Flaherty construct his primitivist mythology to enhance the film’s impact on his target audience? In “The
Making of *Man of Aran*, Joe McMahon recounts how Flaherty mediated ‘a sense of place’ through what Symons refers to as selective intertextuality:

He [Flaherty] prepared for Aran by reading Synge’s *The Aran Islands* (1907) and *Riders to the Sea* (1904) and arrived on the islands determined to find life as it was in Synge’s time and before. In fact, most of Flaherty’s films depict life not as he experienced it but rather as an idealized reconstruction of its past. (McMahon 292)

The selective nature of Flaherty’s perception of Aran suggests that he created an imaginative map of Aran not so much from geographical experience as from an intertextual engagement with his own Irish-American ancestry and Synge. The reconstruction of Aran’s past suggests that Flaherty’s primitivist vision distorts the cultural reality of the islands. While I will analyse how McDonagh’s task as a satirist is to identify a specific human behaviour and exaggerate it, it is useful here to illustrate how certain distortions in Flaherty’s film depart from the cultural reality of the islands. Flaherty is fundamentally a “film poet”, and his biographer, Calder-Marshall, who appears in George Stoney’s documentary film, *How the Myth was Made* (1978), explains that “Flaherty wasn’t interested in actuality; he was interested in his own idea of life…” (Calder-Marshall, qtd. in Stoney). Furthermore, in a 1949 profile in *The New Yorker*, Flaherty succinctly remarks that “[o]ne often has to distort a thing in order to catch its truth” (Flaherty, qtd. in Gray 47). Flaherty’s sense of truth and beauty can be conceived of as highly subjective because it aligns itself with the concept of a primitivist utopia. Flaherty himself confesses that we selected
“a group of the most attractive and appealing characters we [could] find, to represent a family and through them tell our story” (Flaherty, qtd. in McMahon 289).

The fictive nuclear family assembled for the film contradicts what Flaherty claims to be his first rule in shooting a documentary: “the material must be approached without preconceptions and the film must grow ‘naturally’ out of the filmmaker’s exposure to and involvement in the community” (Flaherty, qtd. in McMahon 291). In Man of Aran, Flaherty does not bend his romantic vision to the reality of the islands; rather he distorts the Aran Islands to fit his own version of the truth. In How the Myth was Made Stoney, a descendant of Aran islanders, has tried to show some of the consequences of what happens “when life becomes myth” (Stoney). He argues that Flaherty had an eye on the box office when making his film. For example, the domestic scenes he filmed of shark-hunting have been criticized from a historical perspective since the activity was abandoned in the early 19th century, well before Synge’s The Aran Islands (1907) was written (Stoney). In Stoney’s documentary film, Flaherty himself admits that these scenes were needed for the box office, and he brought experienced harpooners to the Aran Islands so that these scenes could be shot (Stoney).

Distortions of cultural reality are highlighted by Flaherty’s montage editing. Shark-hunting scenes are dominated by frequent jump cuts that alternate between scenes depicted on land and sea. I have already discussed how shark-hunting was considered recherché, even by the islanders themselves. What is interesting is that amidst the heroics of shark-hunting, Flaherty inserts a pastoral scene. When the camera cuts to the Man of Aran’s cottage, we see a close up of what is presumably shark oil burning in a large scallop shell; next in a medium shot, the wife
(Maggie Dirrane) is seen looking out the window and singing a sea shanty in what sounds like Gaelic; and finally, another medium shot features the boy (Michael Dillane) sitting by a fireplace accompanied by a lamb, a rabbit, and a duck. Given that the film was shot in the 1930s, the cohabitation of humans and animals seems to be a reflection of a primitivist utopia. Even though this pastoral scene is contrived, Flaherty’s montage editing juxtaposes the heroic shark-hunting scene on the ocean with the pastoral scene in the thatch-roofed cottage on land. This gives the film its mythological texture: cinematically, Flaherty attempts to mythologize Aran by depicting a seemingly epic battle: the Aran islanders’ heroic efforts to survive the unforgiving forces of nature. In Stoney’s documentary film, Flaherty himself confesses that “The sheen and texture of myth is all about me” (Flaherty, qtd. in Stoney).

**Man of Aran** has been criticized as a primitivist fabrication. Graham Greene has disparaged the aesthetics of Flaherty’s film. In an article, entitled “Subjects and Stories”, Greene remarks,

> How affected and wearisome were those figures against the skyline, how meaningless that magnificent photography of storm after storm. **Man of Aran** did not even attempt to describe truthfully a way of life. The inhabitants had to be taught shark-hunting to supply Mr. Flaherty with dramatic sequence. (Greene, qtd. in Gray 42)

In his savage critique of **Man of Aran**, Greene seems to forget that Flaherty’s film is a fictional documentary: the truthfulness of the film, according to Solon T. Kimball, is reflected in “the discovery of people who in the midst of life were always so close to death that they lived in the
moment nobly” (Kimball 79). The aesthetics and length of the shark-hunting sequence in the film is another matter for concern. In The Cripple of Inishmaan, Helen’s violent critique of Flaherty’s film, although less eloquently expressed, is similar to Greene’s evaluation of the film. In scene eight, she remarks, “Ah, they’re never going to be catching this fecking shark. A fecking hour they’ve been at it now, it seems”. Then for good measure, she adds, “If it was me had a role in this film that fecker wouldn’t have lasted as long” (79). Also, in How the Myth was Made, Stoney illustrates the impact of Flaherty’s primitivist vision on the Aran islanders and their stories. His documentary contains a number of interviews with Araners involved in Flaherty’s film. For example, an unidentified elderly man commented that “lots of things [in the film] never happened at all”. He opined that “very cheap labour” brought Flaherty to the island, and he added that “even the poorest on the island had their pride” (Stoney). Later in the film, an unidentified woman comments on the wisdom of filming the shark-hunting scenes in rough weather---“I think they were very foolish to risk their lives for a few pounds” (Stoney). In contrast, Stephen Dirrane, who played one of the canoe men in the film, stated that he was “proud of the part he played for Flaherty” (Dirrane, qtd. in Stoney).

Pat Mullen played a pivotal role in the making of Flaherty’s film. He became Flaherty’s assistant director and “contact” person with the islanders. Interestingly, his book is also called Man of Aran and he provides an anecdotal account of Flaherty’s relationship with the islanders (McMahon 290-1). As a traditional Irish storyteller, Mullen is important because his stories are based on exaggerations rather than cultural distortions. Unlike Flaherty, Mullen is not manufacturing new customs that define the reality of island life. In “Sharing the Jobs”, he spins a
tale about a man named Cook who worked for Flaherty. When it came time to go home for dinner, Cook refused to leave with the crew. Taking on the persona of Cook, Mullen tells us why:

    Go home for dinner when there is more thrown away out of this house, they say, than would give food to half the village in the island? Where there are quarters of beef and quarters of mutton and millions of tins of everything...me go home for dinner! (Mullen 170)

In his story, Mullen exaggerates to make a point----Flaherty was incredibly wealthy by island standards. In Messenger’s ethnographic study of the Aran Islands, he recorded the reactions of several islanders who had seen both Flaherty’s film and read Mullen’s book. Their consensus is reflected in the following conclusion:

    Mullen tends to exaggerate, but this is an island (and Irish) trait among storytellers that my informants were well aware of and discounted in their evaluation. Flaherty was so influenced by primitivism and his philosophy of aesthetics that he created new customs, such as shark fishing which is a central theme of the film. (Messenger 47)

The above passage suggests that the Aran islanders draw a line between Flaherty’s filmic distortions and Mullen’s anecdotal exaggerations. It seems clear that Flaherty is being evaluated as a traditional Irish storyteller. His film is thought to be a distortion of Aran culture because he projects his own primitivist fantasy on the cultural reality of the islands. Therefore, Flaherty
manufactures an “imaginary map” of Aran that departs from actuality (Franks 18). Moreover, the central ‘characters’ of Flaherty’s film seems to be both the sea and the barren landscape. Fundamentally, the film focuses on the Aran islanders’ heroic efforts to survive in these harsh conditions. Unlike the film, Mullen’s point of view also creates imaginable space in a narrative sense by exaggerating events that might have occurred during the shooting of the film. Also, Mullen’s stories are focused on the antics of local characters on the island rather than nature. Therefore, we can conclude that, on the one hand, the Aran islanders see narrative distortions as less believable because they are detached from the cultural reality of the islands. On the other hand, narrative exaggerations are more believable because they remain grounded in the actuality of Aran existence.

In defence of Man of Aran, Flaherty’s editor, John Monck-Goldman emphatically remarked that “it was not a documentary, it was not intended to be a documentary…it was a piece of poetry” (Monck-Goldman, qtd. in Stoney). In Man of Aran, Flaherty’s affinity for poetry can be traced back to the modernist movement, and Symons’ rhetoric that “sense of place” is derived not so much from geographical location as from an engagement with literature. (Symons, qtd. in Sheeran 299). For Flaherty, these texts included Synge’s The Aran Islands and Riders to the Sea. Unlike Flaherty, Mullen creates imaginable space in a narrative sense through his use of exaggerations rather than cultural distortions. Flaherty has been described as a “film poet” and in Man of Aran, he offers us an atavistic fantasy (Stoney). As a traditional Irish storyteller, Mullen recounts anecdotal stories grounded in actuality.
As a playwright, McDonagh’s task as satirist is to identify certain behaviours and exaggerate them. Previously I have suggested that the nativist movement focused its attention on the Aran Islands for the sole purpose of constructing an Irish national identity. Also, I have analysed how primitivism has been employed to deconstruct industrialization; Aran islanders, according to primitivism discourse, represented both women and men as they once were in a ‘natural’ state. And, in his article, Patrick Sheeran stated that “islands are ripe for re-mythologizing” (Sheeran 305). I propose that the Aran Islands have functioned as an imaginary map that reflects larger ideological issues related to Ireland and nationhood. In his Aran Island Trilogy, McDonagh fundamentally debunks Flaherty’s primitivism by re-imagining Man of Aran.
If *Man of Aran* were known to a popular audience today, it might be possible to see McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy as a rebuttal to the romanticism of Flaherty’s film. In these plays, McDonagh’s characters face forces less elemental than Flaherty’s. They are not seen as heroic figures against a barren landscape: rather McDonagh’s characters are represented as emotionally and physically damaged individuals for whom verbal abuse, incidental cruelty, and casual violence seem to provide the only recourse to their empty lives. At this point, I shall interrogate why *Man of Aran* is referenced both in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, and how this might be relevant to the as yet unproduced *The Banshees of Inisheer*. While I will analyse how each play in the Aran Island Trilogy has intertextual relevance further below, it is useful to begin here by noting the order in which the three plays were written, and what compelled McDonagh to write them.

Previously, I have suggested that McDonagh’s initial impulse to write a trilogy about Aran seems to have come at least in part from the islands themselves. In a 2001 interview with in the *Irish Times*, McDonagh stated that setting *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* on Aran was an arbitrary choice because “for plot purposes, [he] needed ‘a place in Ireland that would take a long time to get to from Belfast’”. And Inishmore seemed the logical choice (McDonagh, qtd. in Lonergan 109). Consequently, in his “Commentary” to *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Lonergan argues that plot, rather than location, is of prime importance to the stories that McDonagh wishes to tell:
His initial impulse was to write about the Northern Irish Troubles but, realising that there were three Aran Islands, McDonagh considered composing a trilogy. After he had completed *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, he turned to *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and the (as yet) unproduced *The Banshees of Inisheer*. (Lonergan xxiv-xxv)

The above passage is important because Lonergan outlines the chronological structure of McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy. The order in which the trilogy was written allows us to analyse the discrete personality of each play as a cohesive structure that undercuts the heroics of *Man of Aran*. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* adheres to McDonagh’s claim that plot rather than setting compelled him to select the Aran Islands. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* contains only four geographical references to the Aran Islands. Stage directions in scene one point out that the play is set in “[a] cottage on Inishmore circa 1993” (3). Later, in scene two, Inishmore is mentioned in a cell phone conversation when Padraic asks his father Donny, “[h]ow is all on Inishmore?” (13). For the purpose of this study, the most significant reference that links this play to the other plays in the trilogy, and Flaherty’s film, occurs in a roadside argument between three INLA (Irish National Liberation Army) men over the political ethics of killing Padraic’s cat, Wee Thomas. Christy, Brendan, and Joey have come to Inishmore to assassinate Padraic for threatening to form his own “splinter group” and torturing Skank Toby, a drug dealer who funds the group’s bombing campaigns. It turns out that Padraic’s ideology is so extreme that even the IRA (Irish Republican Army) has rejected him. In contrast to the other members of the group, Joey is
morally outraged that “an innocent cat” was killed just to lure Padraic back to Inishmore (47, 28). And as an apology of sorts, Christy explains,

None of us enjoyed killing that cat, Joey-o…But hasn’t it worked?

Haven’t we lured the Madman of Aran home to where never once will he be looking behind him for that bolt from the blue he knows is someday coming. (29)

For Christy and Brendan the end justifies the means. More importantly, Christy refers to Padraic as the “Madman of Aran”. Padraic’s epithet is important here because it alludes to Flaherty’s Man of Aran. It is a given that intertextuality is a key component of a trilogy structure. In “Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage”, Umberto Eco recognises the playful interrelationship between discrete filmic texts (Eco 71). For Eco, certain films not only invite a comparison with other films, but they also operate on the assumption that an attentive spectator will both recognize and appreciate the ‘borrowings’ from other filmic texts (Eco 69) Moreover, when one film references symbolic elements from another film, the two films enter into a dialogical relationship. As a matter of fact, Eco states that these texts “speak to each other independently of the intention of their authors” (Eco 70). Consequently, Eco calls this textual strategy “intertextuality” (Eco 71). In the realm of theatre, McDonagh organises his Aran Island Trilogy around the concept of intertextuality. The Lieutenant of Inishmore, The Cripple of Inishmaan, and The Banshees of Inisheer are part of a loosely connected trilogy set in the Aran Islands. And a certain degree of thematic coherence and jouissance is created by a dialogical engagement between McDonagh’s Aran Trilogy and Flaherty’s Man of Aran.
McDonagh has a less romantic conception of Aran than Flaherty. His Aran plays are black comedies in which acts of extreme cruelty and violence are routine, as are savage rebukes of both primitivist mythology and political sentimentality (Russell 1). Thus, in the Aran Island Trilogy, McDonagh seems to be fixated on demythologising Flaherty’s myth-making film. Let us take McDonagh’s fixation and broaden it out by focusing on anti-heroic figures that invoke Man of Aran. As mentioned earlier, McDonagh is not the first person to engage imaginatively with the islands. Collectively, both the nativists and the primitivists have metaphorically colonized the islands with their romanticized projections. From this, we might conclude that as “an imaginative map” the islands do not signify empty space, rather they are burdened by what Franks refers to as an accumulation of idealizations (Franks 18). McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy deconstructs the primitivist fantasies that have been foisted on the cultural reality of the islands. He re-imagines Flaherty’s film as a postmodern pastiche. While I will analyse how McDonagh uses both bricolage and pastiche to re-imagine Aran through the lens of two film genres in chapter two, it is useful here to note how McDonagh deconstructs the primitivist mythology associated with the Man of Aran.

In order to comprehend how polemic might be masquerading as fiction in the Aran Island Trilogy, one needs to be aware of the manner in which McDonagh deconstructs Flaherty’s film: first, The Lieutenant of Inishmore and The Cripple of Inishmaan feature anti-heroic figures that invoke the Man of Aran. These plays underscore the gap between the filmmaker’s heroic imagery and the pettiness of McDonagh’s characters. Second, McDonagh deconstructs Flaherty’s sentimentalism by harnessing theatre to deconstruct film. On stage ‘real’ Aran
islanders interrogate romanticized representations of themselves on the screen and find them wanting. Third, in each play, intertextual cross referencing pits negative stereotypes against positive stereotypes. McDonagh uses negative stereotypes to countermand Flaherty’s heroic imagery.

It might be useful to begin here by examining how Flaherty’s film is aligned with the structure of McDonagh’s unfinished Aran Island Trilogy. A trilogy is commonly governed by a certain degree of thematic unity. Also, intertextuality allows for certain authorial obsessions and themes to travel from one play to another. For McDonagh, Man of Aran seems to be a high value target because he harnesses a trilogy structure to deconstruct both the sentimentalism and primitivist mythology surrounding Flaherty’s film. In the classical sense, a complete trilogy develops a theme over the course of three plays. At this point we might ask, how can an incomplete trilogy affect meaning? One way McDonagh affects meaning in the Aran Island Trilogy is through intertextuality. By the end of The Lieutenant of Inishmore, both “Mad Padraic Osbourne” (29) and Mairead “Claven” (32) have been prefigured in the dramatis personae, and in each play there are allusions and cross references to characters which figure in one (and possibly two) of the remaining plays. For example, characters who share a common surname seem to point to the existence of a dialogical relationship between the islands of Inishmore, Inishmaan, and possibly Inisheer. In The Cripple of Inishmaan, “Billy Claven” (29) shares his surname with Mairead “Claven” (32) in The Lieutenant of Inishmore. Meanwhile, on Inishmore, “Padraic Osbourne” (42) shares the same surname with “Eileen Osbourne” (5) and her sister Kate on Inishmaan. For the purposes of this study, the most important allusion to Flaherty’s film
in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* occurs in scene five, when Christy re-christens Padraic as the “Madman of Aran” (29). Padraic is an anti-hero who tortures and dismembers his victims but dotes on his pet cat, Wee Thomas. In scene one, when Davey and Donny suspect that the dead cat in Donny’s cottage might be Wee Thomas, both men have grounds to fear for their lives:

Davey:  Wee Thomas is his?

Donny:  …His only friend in the world.

Davey:   Was he fond of him?

Donny:   Of course he was fond of him.

Davey:   Oh, he’ll be mad.

Donny:   He *will* be mad.

Davey:   As if he isn’t mad enough already. Padraic’s mad enough for seven people. Don’t they call him ‘mad Padraic’? (6-7)

Madness is a central motif in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. In his play, McDonagh uses a motif of madness to deconstruct the “cult of sentimentality” (O’Toole 3) surrounding Wee Thomas and Padraic. For McDonagh, madness seems to be synonymous with the sentimentality associated with a militant nationalism. For instance, in scene nine, a duet of the “The Dying Rebel” is sung by Padraic and Miaread (65). McDonagh fuses a love duet with political sentimentalism to suggest a theme of madness and violence. This is evident in scene eight when Padraic performs a threnody for Wee Thomas’s apparent demise:

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. (44)

In the above passage, McDonagh satirizes the sentimentalism associated with a violent
Republican discourse. Not only that, but Padraic’s epithet “Madman of Aran” (29), alludes to an
important intertextual link between The Lieutenant of Inishmore and The Cripple of Inishmaan.
In McDonagh’s Aran Island Trilogy, a motif of madness seems to travel from Inishmore, to
Inishmaan and possibly Inisheer.

In The Cripple of Inishmaan, “Kate Osbourne” (5) is cross referenced with “Padraic
Osbourne” (42) on Inishmore. Also, Kate’s madness is alluded to by Helen, in scene six, when
she refers to Kate as a “stonewoman” (72) because of her history of talking to stones. In scene
eight, Johnnypateen tells us that Kate has “gone loopy” (83). And Bartley remarks, “your oul
aunty’s a mad woman, Billy” (23). Unlike Padraic, Kate’s madness is brought on by what seems
to be a case of post-partum depression, and her stone functions as a surrogate child. In each play
these allusions and cross references demythologise Flaherty’s Man of Aran. Anti-heroic figures
on stage deconstruct the heroic imagery in Flaherty’s film. And Flaherty readily admits that for
aesthetic purposes “he selected a group of attractive characters to … tell his story” (Flaherty, qtd.
in McMahon 289). Therefore, we might conclude that Flaherty chose Coleman King to play the
Man of Aran because of his dramatic appearance. In his book Man of Aran, Mullen describes
King as “a fine looking man, six feet in height, supple as deer and as light on his feet as a cat”
(Mullen 115). King’s appearance is parodied in The Cripple of Inishmaan. In fact, McDonagh’s
characters challenge the romanticized representations they see of themselves on screen. For instance, during the screening of the film, in scene eight, Bartley exclaims, “Look at the size of that fella’s nose” (81). And in scene one, Johnnypateen claims, “Coleman King I know already they’ve chosen for a role…and if Coleman King can play a role in the film anybody can play role in the film, for Coleman King is as ugly as a brick of baked shite” (13). The Cripple of Inishmaan is fundamentally a play that deconstructs a film. Also, parodic cross references between the film and the stage are employed to deflate Flaherty’s mythos. Near the end of Scene six, Helen remarks, “Man of Aran me arsehole. ‘The Lass of Aran’ they could’ve had, and the pretty lass of Aran. Not some oul shite about thick fellas fecking fishing” (72). Helen’s statement that the film Man of Aran should have “The Lass of Aran” as its title is a deconstruction of both the “conventional gender hierarchy”, and Flaherty’s repeated formula of focusing on a heroic “male protagonist” (Kurdi 112; McMahon 292).

Since identity is deconstructed in McDonagh’s trilogy, we might ask the question, who actually is the ‘real’ Man of Aran? A hermeneutical approach to McDonagh’s text (or storytelling) might allow us to answer this question. In The Lieutenant of Inishmore, Padraic’s epithet, “Madman of Aran” (29) invokes the film Man of Aran. And in the film, the actor Coleman King represents the ‘Man’. However, in The Cripple of Inishmaan, Flaherty himself is referred to by Billy as “the man Flaherty” (106). This suggests that the Man of Aran might be a cinematic avatar of “the man Flaherty” as director of the film. In How the Myth was Made, Calder-Marshall, who appears in Stoney’s documentary, explains that “Flaherty wasn’t
interested in actuality; he was interested in his own [romanticized] idea of life…” (Calder-Marshall, qtd. in Stoney). Also, in “Aran, Paris and the Fin-de-Siecle”, Sheeran points out that,

> People at different times locate yearnings of this kind in different sorts of places, islands were once such ‘elective sites’ (the phrase is Andre Breton’s) for artists of the 1890s. Poets and painters discovered in them the symbolic equivalence of their subjective impulses. (Sheeran 302)

The primitiveness that the film fabricates and wants to share with us reflects Flaherty’s subjective impulses, rather than the actuality of the Aran Islands. In Stoney’s documentary, Monck-Goldman claims that Flaherty’s film “was not a documentary, it was not intended to be a documentary…it was a piece of poetry” (Monck-Goldman, qtd. in Stoney). And in that same film, Flaherty is referred to as “the first American film poet” (Stoney). As a film poet, Flaherty seems to have stamped his primitivist footprint on the geographical setting of Aran; therefore, we might conclude that metaphorically, Flaherty himself is the Man of Aran. And in *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, McDonagh uses the stage to interrogate the primitiveness that is fabricated on the screen.

In *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the stage talks back to the screen. In scene one, Johnnypateen adopts the persona of a news anchor, and he tells us that Flaherty is coming to make a “moving picture film [that] will show life how it’s lived on the islands” (13). Johnnypateen’s claim that Flaherty’s film is a documentary is problematic. At this point we might ask: how does authenticity need to be represented in order to be considered ‘authentic’? As a film poet, Flaherty was primarily interested in how the film fit into his own primitivist
vision, rather than an ethnographic depiction of how life is lived on the islands (Stoney). By contrast, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is concerned with debunking a primitivist representation in favour of a brutal realism which better reflects the human condition. This hard-edged realism is achieved on stage by the manner in which McDonagh’s ‘real’ Aran Islanders respond to representations of themselves on film. And in “The Identity Politics of Martin McDonagh”, Jose Lanters points out that

> The ‘real’ film they watch (*Man of Aran*) was billed as a documentary of ‘real’ life on Aran featuring ‘real’ Aran Islanders, but contains scenes that had no counterparts in the lives of the islanders on Inishmore of 1934. The ‘Aran Islanders’ of McDonagh’s play reject the ‘Aran Islanders’ of Flaherty’s film as bogus. (Lanters 19)

In the above passage, Lanters rightly argues that *The Cripple of Inishmaan* hinges on one set of representations deconstructing another set of representations. However, the liveness of a stage representation seems to countermand the authenticity of a filmic representation. During the screening of *Man of Aran* in scene eight, McDonagh’s Araners refuse to suspend their disbelief of a primitivist narrative; instead, they deconstruct the film with derisive and hilarious comments. Ironically, most of the caustic commentary focuses on the long and protracted shark-hunting sequence which Flaherty himself admits were needed for “box office” (Stoney). Helen throws eggs at the screen and comments, “Ah, they’re never going to be catching this fecking shark. A fecking hour they’ve been at it now, it seems like” (79). Ironically, Helen seems to evaluate the shark-hunting scene as if it were a sequence from an action movie. This alludes both
to Flaherty’s concern for box office revenue and the creation of dramatic suspense. And Bartley critiques the historical authenticity of the shark-hunting scene by stating that, “It’s rare that off Ireland you get sharks. This is the first shark I’ve seen off Ireland” (78). Thus, it comes as no surprise to hear Helen state that the shark in the film was not a real shark, but only a pretend shark played by “a tall fella in a donkey jacket” (86). And Mammy O’Dougal, whose husband was eaten by a shark in 1871, retorts, “All that fuss over a fella in a donkey jacket. I don’t know” (86).

Also, in scene eight, a pivotal moment occurs that metaphorically shatters Flaherty’s preconceived primitivist notions: after “[t]he film winds out, leaving the screen blank. A light goes on behind it, illuminating the silhouette of Billy on the screen” (85). The silhouetted image of Billy seems to highlight the deconstructive process that countermands Flaherty’s heroic primitivism. Billy’s physical deformity is symbolic of a disease that deconstructs the physicality of Flaherty’s heroic islanders. In “The Cripple of Inishmaan Meets Lady Gregory”, Christopher Murray argues that that in McDonagh’s play, “frailty, and disease replace the myth of heroic essence. Ugliness, insult, and obscenity take the place of Flaherty’s representation of an idealized world” (Murray 85).

In Man of Aran, Flaherty’s romantic vision pits the heroic efforts of a fictive nuclear family against the hostile elements of their environment. In The Cripple of Inishmaan, the characters on stage face less elemental forces. McDonagh pits two mutually exclusive types---Flaherty’s idealized, heroic stereotypes and his own anti-heroic stereotypes---against one another. This approach might be seen as tandem deconstruction. McDonagh also seems to
employ a resurrection trope as a rebuttal to Flaherty’s heroic primitivism (Dean 26). Of all the play’s entrances, none is more important than that of Billy; his metaphorical resurrection on stage occurs as he emerges from behind the screen to supersede Flaherty’s primitivist fantasy. The stage directions tell us that “Kate pulls back the sheet, revealing Billy, alive and well” (86). McDonagh uses this “resurrection trope” to launch a two pronged attack on Flaherty’s primitivist mythology (Lonergan 151). Helen talks back to the screen, calling the film “[a] pile of fecking shite” (85). And Billy critiques the filmic representation of himself as “a rake of shite” (88). He disparages the “arse-faced lines” of his Hollywood screen test: “Can I not hear the wail of the banshees for me, as far as I am from me barren island home” (88). And, in a meta-theatrical response, Bartley concludes, “[t]hem was funny lines, Cripple Billy. Do them again” (89). This suggests he finds the cultural contortions of Billy’s performance amusing. A resurrection trope also recalls the end of The Lieutenant of Inishmore; like Billy, the entrance of the supposedly dead Wee Thomas at the end of the play highlights the fallacious sentimentality surrounding a militant political cause:

Davey: So all this terror has been for absolutely nothing?

Donny: It has!

Davey: All because that fecker [Wee Thomas] was after his hole? Four dead fellas, two dead cats…Have I missed anything? (68)

Both plays expose how identity and ideology are consciously constructed by political sentimentalism and heroic primitivism. In a 2006 interview with O’Toole, McDonagh remarked
that his dramatic works are largely predicated on a “rejection of the cult of sentimentality” (McDonagh, qtd. in Russell 1).

I propose that McDonagh’s ruthlessness with sentimentalism provides a high degree of cohesion to the Aran Island Trilogy. As I have already pointed out, the first two plays of the trilogy rebuke romantic narratives. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to hear Doctor McSharry tell Billy that “[d]isease caused you to turn out the way you did, Billy. Not punching at all. Don’t go romanticizing it” (96) McSharry’s scientific approach seems to deflate the romanticised narrative constructed by the rest of the community.

A playwright’s thematic obsessions can be analysed for a number of reasons. McDonagh’s savage treatment of romantic narratives (in his Aran Island Trilogy) travels from one play to another play. In these plays, sentimentality is targeted by McDonagh. Also, his interest in the trilogy structure suggests that his penchant for debunking the sentimentalism and primitivism associated with the islands can be carried over to the unproduced third play, The Banshees of Inisheer. In the first play, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, the epithet “the Madman of Aran” (29) points to the Man of Aran. And The Cripple of Inishmaan is fundamentally a play that deconstructs the primitivist fantasy of Flaherty’s film; therefore, we might conclude that “the wail of the banshees” (74) referenced in Billy’s Hollywood screen test provides us with an intertextual reference to the as yet unproduced third play. Also, Banshee, or “benside” in Old Irish, refers to “women of the fairies”. And in Irish mythology, a banshee wails nearby if someone is about to die (COED 105). Furthermore, historically, when a person died, a woman would come and “keen” or sing a threnody at the deceased’s funeral. In “Fairy and Folk Tales of
the Irish Peasantry”, both Yeats and Gregory tell us that, depending on who was telling a story that when several banshees appeared at once, it was an occasion that marked the death of an important person (Yeats and Gregory 108). I will not speculate on the plot of The Banshees of Inisheer. Suffice it to say that McDonagh seems to have compromised the structural and narrative integrity of his Aran Island Trilogy by withholding the final play. This has left him and audiences with the peculiar case of an unfinished story. The Aran Islands have been mythologized by the concept of primitivism. McDonagh debunks Flaherty’s primitivist mythology by emptying Man of Aran of all its heroic content. He also pits Flaherty’s heroic characters against his own anti-heroic figures which results in tandem deconstruction. As a playwright and a satirist, how does McDonagh create an imaginable space on Aran in a narrative sense? And how does he re-cast the Aran Islands as postmodern? Using bricolage and postmodern pastiche, McDonagh infuses the islands with a punk aesthetic, and he re-casts the islands within the context of two popular film genres: the Western and the slasher film.
CHAPTER 2

BRICOLAGE WITH PASTICHE NUTS: PUNK AESTHETICS AND MCDONAGH’S IRISH WESTERN-SLASHER

2.1 BRICOLAGE, PASTICHE, AND INTERTEXUALITY

In “Subculture: The Meaning of Style”, Dick Hebdige discusses how an individual can be identified as a bricoleur when they appropriate a “range of commodities by placing them in a symbolic ensemble which [serves] to erase or subvert their original straight meanings” (Hebdige 592). Both the fashion industry and certain pop stars also make use of stylistic bricolage by incorporating fashion items that are typically utilized for other purposes. For example, in the fashion industry, chocolate has been made into wearable dresses. And Lady GaGa (as a purveyor of controversy) has staged a public appearance in a dress made entirely of meat. GaGa’s dress is significant because it allies itself with the subculture of punk aesthetics. In Practices of Looking, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright tell us that “[o]ne of the terms used to describe tactics of appropriation is bricolage which literally means ‘making do’ or piecing together one’s culture with what ever is at hand” (Sturken and Cartwright 64). Furthermore, they also state that bricolage can be seen as an aggressive strategy when used to appropriate specific commodities by reframing them into a “youth style” (Sturken and Cartwright 64). As a subculture, the punk movement has appropriated particular fashion styles and, using bricolage, has changed the
meaning of those items of clothing and accessories. For instance, taken collectively, the hyperbolic Mohawk hair style, Doc Martins, safety pins worn as jewellery, and the privileging of a spontaneous music which favours ‘error’ and disharmony can be seen as a counter-discursive strategy that assaults “the normative values inherent in tasteful fashions” (Sturken and Cartwright 66).

In their discussion of appropriation and oppositional reading, Sturken and Cartwright argue that consumers of cultural products such as movies and television programs are not simply passive viewers (Sturken and Cartwright 58-59). According to Sturken and Cartwright, the viewer may not be able to directly alter the cultural products they are exposed to, but “they can ‘make do’ by interpreting, rejecting, or reconfiguring the cultural texts they see” (Sturken and Cartwright 59). For instance a counter-hegemonic reading of a text might involve an outright rejection---walking out of the cinema before a movie has finished, or channel surfing while watching television. However, Sturken and Cartwright tell us that an “oppositional reading” can also take the form of reconfiguring a text and “making a new use for” a cultural product through the process of appropriation (Sturken and Cartwright 59).

With certain cultural artefacts, such as films and plays, bricolage is used to reconfigure the text and alter its meaning (Sturken and Cartwright 66). Michel de Certeau has described “textual poaching” as being analogous to inhabiting a text “like a rented apartment” (Certeau, qtd. in Sturken and Cartwright 66):

In other words, viewers of popular culture can ‘inhabit’ that text by negotiating meanings through it and creating new cultural products in
response to it, making it their own. (Sturken and Cartwright 66)

The above passage suggests that “textual poaching” is a fluid process that denotes “cultural bricolage” (Sturken and Cartwright 66). What McDonagh has done in The Lieutenant of Inishmore is similar to what Shane MacGowan and the Pogues did to Irish music in the 1980s. What this implies is that McDonagh has appropriated traditional Irish drama and inflected it with a punk sensibility.

Perhaps the best way to highlight the importance of punk aesthetics, bricolage, pastiche, and intertextuality in relation to the The Lieutenant of Inishmore is through a brief comparison of McDonagh and MacGowan. Both men grew up in London (during the hey-day of the punk movement), and rejected the nostalgia associated with Ireland. However, while previous Irish immigrants felt they had to choose between Irish or British identities, both MacGowan and McDonagh rejected these alternatives. Rather, they found a way to express their own situation: both men took the shell of a culture that they had been told was theirs and filled it with their own sensibilities: MacGowan took the Irish ballad and inject it with a raw punk energy; McDonagh grabbed hold of traditional Irish drama and infused it with a punk sensibility (O’Toole 3). If bricolage calls for a cobbling together of one’s culture with whatever is at hand, then MacGowan is a bricoleur because Celtic punk is fuelled by an antagonistic intertextual relationship between Anglo punk rock music and the traditional Irish ballad. For McDonagh, bricolage is intertextuality with a punk aesthetic. In an interview with O’Toole, McDonagh remarked that he was inspired by how the “Pogues set harsh new lyrics to old Irish tunes” (O’Toole 3). Also, McDonagh has stated publicly, that he views theatre through the prism of cinema (Eldred 114).
Consequently, McDonagh wields the concept of bricolage like a weapon; in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh sets two violent film genres (the spaghetti western and the slasher film) against traditional Irish drama in order to subvert the nostalgia associated with the West of Ireland. Moreover, McDonagh plays with the concept of postmodern pastiche. For example, the spaghetti western is a pastiche of the classical western; and the slasher film is a pastiche of the classical horror movie. Therefore, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is a bi-focal pastiche of both a spaghetti western and slasher film. Also, since the spaghetti western and the slasher films are pastiches of their respective genres then McDonagh’s play is a pastiche of a pastiche. These violent films speak to a punk aesthetic, and they signal an assault on the traditional Irish drama. Moreover, the jumbled effect that is produced by several genres in close proximity creates a kind of savage intertextual relationship between traditional Irish drama and the style of violence commonly found in certain types of American cinema. Therefore, we might conclude that McDonagh appropriates a range of cultural products and through a “symbolic ensemble” of film genres erases the nostalgic imagery associated with both the Aran Islands and the West of Ireland (Hebdige 529).

McDonagh’s dramas employ punk aesthetics to deconstruct the romantic imagery of Irish nationalism associated with the West of Ireland. In a 2006 interview with O’Toole, McDonagh remarked, “I was always coming from a left-wing or pacifist or anarchist angle that started with punk, which was against all nationalities” (McDonagh, qtd. in O’Toole 3). Perhaps the best way to place McDonagh within a punk context is to think of Shane MacGowan, the Anglo-Irish songwriter, who in the heyday of the Pogues, gave voice to a raw lyricism that caught the
attention of Ireland, England, and America. In “The Irish Mummy: The Plays and Purpose of Martin McDonagh”, John Waters outlines the fundamental dynamics employed by MacGowan and the Pogues:

The music of the Pogues was in one sense a formula: Irish traditional ballads given a punk treatment, a straightforward combination of incongruous elements, which carried also an element of the ambiguity with which we who grew up in Ireland had regarded the music growing up. Surrounded by the mythic balladry of our fathers, we rushed into the embrace of Bruce Springsteen or Johnny Rotten. The last thing we imagined was that the leaden, desperate ejaculations of our drunken uncles might one day be turned into gold. (Waters 30)

Fundamentally, MacGowan is not creating a new vision of Irish music but an original take an old one. Furthermore, Waters refers to a sense of ambiguity that reflects both a cultural attachment to traditional Irish music and a rejection of it. Therefore, he remarks “the music also demonstrated a passionate attachment to what it sought to deconstruct…It was not simply two things at once but two opposing things at once” (Waters 30). Within the context of punk aesthetics, MacGowan pits two mutually exclusive types against one another; therefore, his approach to music is governed by tandem deconstruction. Also, the heterogeneity of Celtic punk serves the function of imploding cultural fossilization. One of the problems with a calcified construct is that it has no way of evolving; it can only repeat what Waters refers to as an “exaggerated reverence” for
cultural stereotypes (Waters 31). Furthermore, he theorizes how a heterogeneous Anglo-Irish punk aesthetic revolutionized traditional Irish music:

In a healthy society, this kind of solemnity is constantly, publicly and roundly undermined by scepticism and disdain of the rebellious and the young. But in a society where the issue of culture has become one of life or death, this necessary contempt is often absent or suppressed. (Waters 31)

Therefore, MacGowan’s belligerent interpretations of traditional songs seem to serve as an antidote to the stultification of Irish music.

So it is with McDonagh. And he is on record stating that “even while [the Pogues] were trying to destroy the crap side of Irish folk, they still had brilliant lyrics, brilliant tunes, and a love of music…Maybe not consciously, [but] I was beginning to get the same idea: taking the parts you love and destroying the parts you hate” (McDonagh, qtd. in O’Toole 3). Carrying forward Waters’ theme of “necessary contempt”, McDonagh’s plays subject the romantic imagery associated with the West of Ireland to biting satire.

McDonagh has stated that “I’m coming to the theatre with disrespect for it. I’m coming from a film fan’s perspective” (McDonagh, qtd. in Eldred 114). This attitude of “necessary contempt” aligns itself with a punk aesthetic. Just like MacGowan sets harsh lyrics to traditional Irish music, McDonagh layers violent popular film genres on to traditional Irish theatre. In fact, Laura Eldred states in “Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic”, that McDonagh’s “roots lie more explicitly in the tradition of violent film than in the Irish dramatic lineage of
Synge and O’Casey” (Eldred 114). For the remainder of this chapter, my examination will adopt a three pronged analysis of the *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*: first, my analysis will focus on how McDonagh’s use of postmodern pastiche fits in with Charles Jencks’ concept of “double coding” (Jencks 15); second, I will argue that McDonagh’s use of pastiche creates double coding in his play through eclecticism. By cramming two different film genres into one Irish play, McDonagh encourages a tri-focal perspective that alludes to Quentin Tarantino’s bricoleur approach to filmmaking in *Pulp Fiction* (1994). And finally, I will suggest that bricolage can also be applied to a theatrical form of stereotyping. In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, a series of violent tableaux is used by McDonagh to construct a “symbolic ensemble” of negative stereotypes that bounce between humour and horror; these negative stereotypes also function as a counter discursive strategy that countermands positive stereotypes (Hebdige 592). However valid Eldred’s hypothesis might be, it is important to note that McDonagh appropriates specific film genres, and he plays with stereotypes to keep his plays current.

While blatant Irish stereotypes are certainly present in McDonagh’s plays, they are rearticulated in interesting ways. In his dramas, the nostalgic associations linked with the West of Ireland are wrenched out of their context by the irreverent way that McDonagh plays with traditional Irish dramatic forms and the sentimentalism attached to them. McDonagh parodies and interrogates aspects of Irishness in complex and confusing ways. Therefore to see in them only a lack of positive stereotyping is to miss the point. While McDonagh’s plays have didactic possibilities, he also seeks to entertain his audience:

People should leave a theatre with the same feeling that you get after a
really good rock concert. You don’t want to talk about it, you just let it buzz into you. I can’t stand people analysing things. A play should be a thrill like a fantastic rollercoaster ride. (McDonagh, qtd. in Chambers and Jordan 24)

What this statement implies is that in appropriating traditional Irish drama, McDonagh has inflected it with a punk sensibility which has consequences for how we understand issues of representation. For the remainder of this study, I will analyse how McDonagh maps the Western and the slasher film genre on to pastoral imagery associated with the West of Ireland and its frontier, the Aran Islands.
2.2 THE IRISH WESTERN

In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh plays with the process of hybridization in a way that seems to give generic clichés new life. In “Martin McDonagh: Parody? Satire? Complacency?” Ondrej Pilny describes the “manipulation of genres as a key aspect of McDonagh’s work” (Pilny 228). Using traditional realism, McDonagh instigates specific expectations. These expectations reflect traditional themes of Irish culture and mythic notions of the West of Ireland. In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh proceeds to blend traditional representations of the West of Ireland with the cinematic conventions of an American Western. By using formulaic elements commonly found in a western film, McDonagh links the mythological representations of the American West with the Irish West. While I will discuss how McDonagh’s use of hybridity straddles several film genres and links the screen with the stage further below, it might be useful to begin here by noting the significance of the location of the West of Ireland and the American West as an imaginary space that reflects issues of representation.

In “The Real Ireland, Some Think”, Declan Kiberd jokingly remarks that “[t]he West of Ireland is really wild” (Kiberd 363). Then he adds that going west in Ireland has a similar connotation as going west in America: “a final confrontation on the frontier between civilization and wilderness” (Kiberd 364). He also tells us that historically the demarcation between East and West is more significant than the recent divide between the North and South:

More than three centuries ago, the rampaging armies of Oliver Cromwell...
told the natives to go ‘to hell--or Connaught’. The Western province—including the wild, stony, mountainous region of Connemara in the county of Galway where the [Aran Islands] can be found—was so bleak and infertile that the planters willingly ceded most of its badlands to the Irish. Ever after it became a byword for all that was primitive and undeveloped. (Kiberd 364)

By contrast, W.B. Yeats held another point of view; he stated that “Connaught for me is Ireland”. For Yeats, the West represented the true essence of an Irish identity which was embodied both in poetry and the Gaelic language: “It was a landscape of dreams and imagination” (Kiberd 364). The construction of the Irish ‘West’ as a locus of native primitivism finds its double in the American Old West. The mythology of the American West as a site of regeneration and pastoral rebirth easily maps on to Ireland’s West. Moreover, the American West also reflects a national identity embodied in the Western film genre (Cawelti 2). Like the West of Ireland, the American West was ripe for mythologizing, and in The Six-Gun Mystique, John Cawelti tells us that two important concepts differentiated the western frontier as imaginable space from the rest of the United States (Cawelti 2-3): for example, in Frederick Jackson Turner’s essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), we are told the following:

The striking characteristic in American intellect—restless energy, practical expediency, exuberance, individualism among them—is the product of highly charged encounter between civilization and wilderness,
East and West: the frontier experience which lies behind so many western films. (Saunders 6)

In his book, Cawelti states that the popular imagination of the 19th century was titillated by an imaginary Old West as a locus of “lawlessness and violent individualism” (Cawelti 3). Furthermore, he suggests that when Turner’s frontier thesis is combined with popular fantasies of gunslingers and the concept of extreme individualism, the frontier can be imagined as “the true source of violence in America” (Cawelti 3). Whatever the validity of Turner’s hypothesis, it seemed to reflect what 19th century Americans wanted to believe and so became available to be exploited by filmmakers.

But what is the formula of a Western and how can it best be defined? Cawelti succinctly remarks in The Six-Gun Mystique that,

Westerns must have a certain kind of setting, a particular cast of characters, and follow a limited number of lines of action. A Western that does not take place in the West, near the frontier, at a point in history when social order and anarchy are in tension, and does not involve some form of pursuit, is simply not a Western. (Cawelti 58)

The classical form of the Western is devoted to telling stories set primarily in the latter half of the 19th century in the American Old West. The formula commonly features a set of stock characters such as cowboys or gunfighters as heroes and villains. Female characters are divided into two main categories. Robert Warshow remarks in “Movie Chronicle: The Westerner” that
often there is a woman who comes from the East and her failure to understand the hero’s code of honour represents a clash between the civilized East and the wild West. Also, the civilizing elements of the East are represent as being feminine, “[b]ut the West, lacking the graces of civilization, is the place ‘where men are men’” (Warshow 91). Women are depicted either as virtuous women from the East who fail to understand the hero’s justification for violence or as “quasi-masculine prostitutes who share the hero’s weltanschauung (Warshow 91). On the surface the Western hero seems to fight on the side of “justice and order”, but Warshow claims that justice and order only function as an ideological platform that allows the hero to ‘reluctantly’ do what “he has to do” (Warshow 93). What the Western fights for is the representation of himself; “the purity of his own image—in fact his honor” (Warshow 94). Therefore, the Western film depicts a society organized around codes of honour and personal justice.

As a filmmaker, Sergio Leone brought profound changes to the Western film genre with his spaghetti westerns: A Fistful of Dollars (1964), For a Few Dollars More (1965), and The Good, The Bad and the Ugly (1966). These films had larger-than-life visual style, a harsher more violent representation of frontier life, choreographed gunfights, and the Eastwood persona as a cynical gunfighter (Celli and Cottino-Jones 95). As a pastiche of the classical Western, the hybridity of Leones’s Dollars trilogy can be celebrated for successfully balancing the new and the established (Cawelti 54-5). In The Western Genre, John Saunders tells us that Leone has exploited a variety of genres and forms; for example, he claims that Leone’s A Fistful of Dollars was inspired by Kurosawa’s samurai film Yojimbo (1961); however, Leone himself has asserted
that the film was inspired by Carlo Goldoni’s commedia dell’arte play The Servant with Two Masters (1745) (Saunders 82). And Carlos Celli and Marga Cottino-Jones suggest that the film is a pastiche of Piero Bonelli and Aurelio Galeppini’s comic book series Tex (Celli and Cottino-Jones 93).

Like Leone, McDonagh gives generic clichés new meaning. He interweaves traditional Irish drama with the Western film genre. However, scant work has been done on how McDonagh exploits the Western film genre, despite the importance he places on cinema in his interviews.

The Lieutenant of Inishmore is riddled with explicit references to the Western genre. McDonagh offers a new approach to traditional Irish theatre through the use of pastiche. He superimposes the formula of a Western film on to a traditional Irish play to create an Irish Western. The audience’s expectations and familiarity with the Western formula has been largely cultivated through the endless recycling of the genre’s basic setting, characters and plots. In his essay, Warshow writes that the Western “is an art for connoisseurs, where the spectator derives pleasure from the appreciation of minor variations within the working order of a pre-established order”, and he empathically states that “variation is absolutely necessary to keep the type from becoming sterile; we do not want to see the same movie over and over again, only the same form” (Warshow 99). McDonagh’s transcultural borrowings from Hollywood, Ireland, and Italy suggest that like Leone, McDonagh specializes in sampling and pastiche.

In What is Postmodernism?, Charles Jencks states that postmodernism creates “double coding” through eclecticism; and by putting together two different styles from two different periods, it creates parody and ambiguity (Jencks 30). Jencks argues that postmodern architects
are not simply revivalists who bring back the past (Jencks 34). They use pastiche. Also, this “double coding” stages a dialogical relationship between the past and the present. Thus, according to Jencks, this deliberate dissonance between past and present can be both ironic and playfully allusive—but it makes the “reader” of a building pause to reflect. Jencks states that in a sense the “reader” becomes something of an architectural critic (Jencks 14). Double coding can also make the “reader” something of a theatre-film critic. In The Lieutenant of Inishmore, everything is double coded; the play is set in contemporary Ireland but quotes from the Old West in America. And an audience conversant in the formula of the Western can simultaneously ‘read’ both codes.

In The Lieutenant of Inishmore there are many explicit references to the Western genre. The play evokes imagery associated with the Old West. The traditional “cottage on Inishmore” is an allusion to the homesteads on the American frontier (3). At the opening of scene one, stage directions prefigure several allusions to the Western genre: the “framed piece of embroidery” hanging on the back wall of the set, “reading ‘Home Sweet Home’” seems to elicit a sense of nostalgia attributed to a homestead on the open range in a Western (3). Also, McDonagh uses the “clock” mounted on the back wall of his set as a plot device both to build suspense and as an intertextual reference to Fred Zinneman’s High Noon (1952). In the film, an outlaw whom a marshal sent to prison has been pardoned and will return on the noon train. The outlaw and three other men will attempt to kill the Marshal at ten past noon (Warshow 100). The Lieutenant of Inishmore quotes the plot of High Noon: Christy, Brendan, and Joey travel from Belfast to Inishmore to kill Padraic at ‘high noon’. Therefore, McDonagh builds suspense by means of the
clock. Also, in scene three, Davey foreshadows the formulaic shoot-out that will occur in scene eight when he tells Mairead that “Padraic roars home at high noon tomorrow” (19). And the term high noon is significant because it evokes the film High Noon. Furthermore, scene five contains several explicit references to the Western genre. For instance, the imagery of a rural setting at night and a group of men sitting around eating beans suggests that we are in the territory of a Western (27). Another standard formulaic device of the western genre involves the element of pursuit. This convention is illustrated in scene five, when Christy instructs Brendan and Joey to

Collect up your gear. We’ll lie low in a barn or somewhere tonight.

Twelve noon the little fat lad said Padraic wouldn’t be home till. We’ll arrive at ten past, and enter blasting. (31)

This passage contains several elements of a generic Western: for example, the element of pursuit that culminates in a shoot-out between the hero and the outlaw; the image of a group of men ‘lying low’ on the frontier is another allusion to the Western genre. Also, in scene eight, Padraic uses the iconic “bowie knife” to cut Davey’s hair (42). And in scene four, stage directions tell us that Donny and Davey take turns “swigging poteen from [a] bottle” (22). The image of men drinking poteen from a bottle is an allusion to gunfighters drinking whiskey from a bottle in a Western saloon. However, perhaps the most significant prop in a Western is the iconic six-gun.

While I will analyse the significance of guns and gender and the frontier experience shortly, it is useful to begin by noting the dominant role that guns play in The Lieutenant of Inishmore. There are eight tableaux in the play which feature guns: in scene three, Mairead “cocks her gun and aims it at Davey’s face” (17); in scene five, Brendan, Christy, and Joey engage in a stand-off and
point their guns at each other (30). In the same scene, stage directions tell us that “while Padraig still has the gun to her head, Mairead points [her] rifle to one of his eyes” (35). In the fourth tableau, “Padraig points guns to the back of [both Donny and Davey’s] heads” (43). Also, when Christy, Brendan, and Joey arrive on the scene, they become a part of a complex tableau: Padraig points his guns at the back of the heads of Donny and Davey’s who are kneeling down and facing the audience; meanwhile, the three men at the door rush over and point their guns “right up against Padraig’s head----one on the left side, one on the right side, in something of a triangle” (45). Furthermore, in scene eight, “Mairead…sidles up behind her brother and puts the gun to his head, [then]Padraig and Mairead smile at each other, while Padraig puts the gun to his father’s head” (53). Scene nine features a tableau that fuses romance with violence: “Padraig kisses [Mairead] at length, as he does so, Mairead reaches down behind him, picks up one gun in each hand…and points them one on each side of Padraig’s head…she shoots Padraig with both guns” (65). Finally, the last tableau features the absurd, as both Donny and Davey “cock their guns and slowly raise them till they’re pointed at the cat”, Wee Thomas (68). Given that in performance the play runs for approximately eighty minutes, this means that the audience reads a violent tableau every ten minutes of the play. And, as Warshow points out in his essay, a significant feature of the Western is “men with guns. Guns as physical objects, and the postures with their use, form [the] visual and emotional center of the genre” (Warshow 89). In the play, these tableaux seem to function like a series of freeze frames that highlight guns, physical posturing, and the aestheticization of violence.
In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh subverts the traditional “models of masculinity” found in a Western by melding the aesthetics of the spaghetti Western with the ‘justifiable’ violence of the classical Western (Saunders 2). In the main, gender is represented in Westerns as being mostly unambiguous. The virtuous woman from the East represents a feminized “value” (civilization) that demands the hero’s protection (Warshow 91). However, according to Warshow, the prostitute is gendered as a “quasi-masculine” woman who shares the hero’s values: “those values are an image of a single man who wears a gun on his thigh. The gun tells us that he lives in a world of violence, and even that he ‘believes in violence’” (Warshow 105). Both guns and outlaws represent instances of extreme individualism which is central to the myth of the West. McDonagh aligns this myth with the West of Ireland. The plot of McDonagh’s play is organized around notions of gender and guns. However, the representation of guns in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is problematic. A gun is indeed a tool, but its phallic power in the play is not exclusively a symbol of masculinity. Consequently, guns in the play are gendered both quasi-masculine and quasi-feminine. For example, Padraic carries two guns in his holster, but he is gendered quasi-feminine; Mairead and her air rifle are represented as being quasi-masculine. Also, McDonagh seems to have left the type of guns used in the play open to a myriad of interpretations. We are told at the beginning of scene two, that “[a]round Padraic’s chest are strapped two empty holsters and there are two handguns on the table” (10). In scene three, the stage directions tell us that Mairead “carries an air rifle” (17). If *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is a pastiche of a Western how might the type of guns used on stage be important to the mise-en-scene of the play? The play contains many explicit references to the Western film genre;
therefore, the inclusion of the iconic six-gun and the Winchester rifle (known colloquially as “the gun that won the West”) would serve to link the Old American West with the West of Ireland.

Throughout the play, Padraic’s masculinity is constantly being interrogated, and he seems to be unable to inhabit the traditional masculine role of the outlaw hero in an unambiguous manner. In scene one, Davey refers to the “girly scarf” Padraic used to wear when he was twelve (7). McDonagh de-phallicizes Padraic by gendering him as quasi-feminine. By contrast, Mairead’s skill with an air rifle aligns her with the traditional masculine role of an outlaw hero. In scene six, she tells Padraic that “from sixty yards I hit them cows’ eyes, which is bloody good shooting in anyone’s books” (34). Moreover, like the Western hero, Mairead is represented as “a figure of repose” as she coolly rescues Padraic from execution (Warshow 91).

Padraic’s rescue inverts the gender hierarchy of the Western. In the traditional Western, the virtuous woman embodies a value (civilization) that wants protecting (Warshow 91). By contrast, Padraic is the one who represents the value (militant Irish republicanism) that needs to be protected. Consequently, stage directions tell us that Padraic is “impressed beyond words at her abilities with a gun” (52). Thus, violence is also depicted as being romantic. Scene eight commences with the senseless killing of Mairead’s cat, which we are told “explodes into a ball of blood and bones” after being shot point blank by Padraic (40). Appropriate to the genre, Mairead is compelled to do what she “has to do” and kill Padraic (Warshow 93). Thus, she becomes the titular figure of the play.

The Lieutenant of Inishmore has been doubled coded. The Aran Islands represent the extreme frontier of the West of Ireland. However, McDonagh’s play makes explicit references to
the far west in America. Moreover, McDonagh uses pastiche to create a dialogical relationship between the pastoral imagery associated with the West of Ireland and the frontier experience of the Old West in America. Pastiche is intertextual in its very form as it quotes from an earlier text. And this would not be the last time that McDonagh would use pastiche to link contemporary Ireland with the Old West in America. In his film *Six-Shooter* (2004), McDonagh foregrounds the iconic six-gun associated with the Western film genre. In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Donny’s cottage metaphorically doubles as both a homestead and a saloon. Homesteads and saloons are generic locations for the iconic shoot-out scene featured in a Western. In the play, the climatic shoot-out between Mairead and Padraic and the INLA men occurs in Donny’s cottage. By imposing the aesthetics of a Western on to a traditional Irish play, McDonagh seems to be suggesting that the political turmoil in Northern Ireland (circa 1993) doubles as a metaphor for the Wild West in America. In his essay, Warshow remarked that the moral significance of the Western was that the frontier represented a “moral openness”, and an extreme form of individualism “corresponding to the fact that guns are carried where they can be seen” (Warshow 93). However, he also states that as hard edged realism crept into the genre in the 1960’s the “moral openness” long associated with the open range was replaced with a more nihilistic perspective:

> Once it was discovered that the true theme of the western movie is not freedom and expansiveness of the frontier, but its limitations, its natural bareness, the pressures of obligation, then even the landscape itself ceases to be the arena of free movement it once was, but becomes instead a great
empty waste. (Warshow 96-7)

When the concept of freedom and “moral openness” collapses, it seems that only extreme individualism and guns as physical objects remain available both to the American westerner and McDonagh’s ‘Irish westerners’. Therefore, it seems that empty and bored people turn to violence because they have nothing else to do.

In The Lieutenant of Inishmore, hyperbole and violence function as meta-theatrical devices. And McDonagh is on record stating that, “Yeah, I tend to push things as far as they can because I think you can see things more clearly through exaggeration than through reality” (McDonagh, qtd. in Castleberry 41). The hyperbolic violence and ironic humour in Sergio Leone’s spaghetti western seems to meet its match in McDonagh’s play:

The cartoon-like quality of much of the violence, the exhilarating effect of Ennio Morricone’s music and the ironic humour might remind us that the same audiences were watching the James Bond film, with Clint Eastwood Sean Connery competing as it were, with laconic one-liners and contrasting exhibitions of cool. (Saunders 82-3)

I have already discussed how an audience practiced in the conventions of the western genre might read the violent tableaux in McDonagh’s play as a pastiche of the formulaic stand-off in a Western film. However, in The Lieutenant of Inishmore, the graphic violence departs from the conventions of the classical western. And as Warshow claims, “there is little cruelty in Western movies” or graphic violence (Warshow 105). By contrast, in scene eight, at point blank range,
Padraic shoots a cat which “explodes into a ball of blood and bones” (40). In the same scene, Padraic shoots Brendan, Joey, and Christy with “the double-gun method” (52). And finally, Padraic himself is killed with his own guns by Mairead who mimics the aesthetics of Padraic’s double-gun style (65). John Saunders remarks in The Western Genre that, “for Leone style took precedence over plot” (82). In McDonagh’s play, the double-gun style of killing recalls the aesthetics of the detached, amoral gunfighter of a spaghetti western; especially the ‘cool’ serape-clad, stubbly-faced Eastwood persona. In a meta-theatrical moment Davey remarks, Padraic’s double-gun method is “just showing off” (56). The cartoon like quality of the hyperbolic violence has a reflexive quality. A moment of recognition occurs in scene eight, when the play seems conscious that it is quoting from a film. For example, in scene eight, Padraic puts his gun to the back of his father’s head, while Mairead puts her gun to Davey’s head:

    Donny:  No, now…
    Davey:   Ar, come on, now…
    Donny:  You’re only tinkering with us again, aren’t ye?
    Padraic: On the count of three?
    Mairead: On the count of three. Like in the films. (53)

Clearly, the dialogue in the above passage suggests that the play is aware of itself as pastiche. For the purpose of this study, I propose that the film is a Western; however, the play could also reflect back to the audience a different film genre. And Saunders has stated that the decline of the Western as a popular film genre was at least partially due to the fact that it could not match the level of violence found in the horror film genre (77).
2.3 THE IRISH SLASHER

In The Lieutenant of Inishmore, McDonagh participates in traditional Irish drama, but he also seeks to update that tradition through the integration of the horror film genre with the stage. Perhaps the best known subgenre of horror is the slasher film represented by infamous titles such as Friday the 13th, Nightmare on Elm Street, and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. The plots of these films usually begin with a group of raucous teenagers heading out for a vacation or party in a remote area far from civilization. Their antics are interrupted, however, when a psychotic killer appears, leaving a trail of dead teenagers in his wake. Inevitably, the group will be ‘hacked’ down to one girl: “the final girl” (Clover 21). The final girl is represented as being stronger, smarter, and more masculine than the other females in the film; also, the final girl endures a protracted fight with her killer, but she generally emerges victorious, often killing the intended murderer with his own weapons (Clover 38; 40-41). Carol Clover argues that this basic formulaic plot structure destabilizes the traditional gender hierarchy in order to highlight the quasi-masculine final girl’s victory over a feminized villain. And Clover emphatically states that “the final girl has not just manned herself; she specifically unmans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with” (Clover 49).

In The Lieutenant of Inishmore, the plot seems to be a pastiche of a slasher film. A psychotic killer comes to a rural community; killing commences and dismemberments occur, and body parts are strewn about. The final girl kills the murderer with his own weapons. Therefore, the basic plot structure of McDonagh’s play readily maps on to the generic pattern of a slasher
film. However, the most significant link between the play and the film genre occurs within the dynamics of the characters themselves. The formula of a slasher film calls for particular type of killer, and a particular kind of heroine; moreover, the gender dynamics of the average slasher features a quasi-feminine male killer, and a quasi-masculine female final girl. While the masculinization of women and the feminization of men is not a new development, McDonagh broadens it out in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and uses the formulaic pattern of a slasher film to do so (Clover 49).

In the play, McDonagh seems to use stock character types to deconstruct both traditional gender roles and the romantic imagery associated with the West of Ireland: an imagery that invokes a family gathered around the hearth in a white-washed cottage with a thatch roof; a life devoted working the fields, a faith in the church, and caring relationships within a tightly knit community. McDonagh is less romantic. In their introduction to *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, Lilian Chambers and Eammon Jordan argue that McDonagh savagely satirises the romantic pastoral imagery associated with the West:

> McDonagh generates a reality that cannot be bound up with old pastoral images of the West of Ireland. The frugality, simplicity, community, and scale of pastoral are there, but something else is also accommodated; community morphs into perverse disconnections, sympathy twists into rivalry and petty vindictiveness, and sharing transforms into crude individuality and ownership. (Chambers and Jordan 9)
In his plays, families are primarily a source of hatred and murder, and the community members look forward to an interesting feud in order to break up the monotony of their empty lives. Also, in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh’s uses satire to deconstruct both masculine representations of paramilitary groups and demure Irish girls. The gender dynamics in a slasher film enable McDonagh to simultaneously deconstruct both sides of a gender dichotomy.

Paradoxically, in slasher films, the psychotic killer represents a “cultural conservatism” (Clover 15). In McDonagh’s play, “Mad Padraic” fits the profile of a slasher film killer (7); he has an ultra-conservative moral outlook on life. For instance, while torturing James in scene two, he uses anti-drug rhetoric, charging James with “keeping our youngsters in a drugged up idle haze, when its out on the streets pegging bottles at coppers they should be” (12). He also exhibits a low opinion of women: he refuses Mairead entrance into his paramilitary group, suggesting instead to “let your hair grow out…and learn to cook and sew” (36). In the play, Padraic’s character seems to integrate torture and murder with an ultra-conservative morality. Therefore Padraic’s character is similar to the morally conservative psychotic killer of a slasher film. In *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, Clover argues that “violence and sex are not concomitants but alternatives, the one as much a substitute for…the other” (Clover 29). For most of the play, Padraic’s love interests are focused on his cat, Wee Thomas. And when Miaread questions Padraic about the girls in Belfast, he demonstrates a lack of interest in women:

Mairead: The girls must be falling over themselves to get to you in Ulster.

Padraic: A few have fallen but I paid them no mind. Not while there was work to be done ridding Erin of them jackboot hirelings of England’s foul
monarchy, and a lot of girls up North are dogs anyways, so it was no loss.

(33)

The above passage suggests that for Padraic, like most killers of a slasher film, torture and murder are a substitute for sex. Therefore, Clover states that “the masculinity [of the ultra-conservative killer] is severely qualified”, despite his use of violence.

By contrast, the final girl is the opposite of the killer found in slasher films. Clover describes her as being “boyish” (Clover 40); if the killer is somehow quasi-feminine and not fully male, then the final girl is quasi-masculine and not wholly female. In The Lieutenant of Inishmore, stage directions tell us that “Mairead is a girl of sixteen or so, slim, pretty, with close-cropped hair, army trousers, white T-shirt, sunglasses. She carries an air rifle” (17). Moreover, Mairead establishes herself as a marksman by shooting the eyes out of cows from a distance of “sixty yards” (34). Therefore, within the context of McDonagh’s play Mairead as a quasi-masculine figure is a pastiche of the final girl from the slasher film genre.

The final conflict between the psychotic killer and the final girl will only end when the final girl kills the murderer with his own weapons. Clover argues that in the battle between a quasi-feminine male and a quasi-masculine female, the “tough girl” emerges the victor (Clover 5). In “Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film”, Clover states that the viewers mostly identify with the final girl and applaud her victory over an emasculated killer (Clover 153). In scene eight of the play, Mairead not only kills Padraic, but she mimics Padraic’s double-gun method of killing. And as Donny remarks in scene nine, “Padraic…uses two gun from only inches away” (56). Consequently, when Mairead realizes that Padraic killed her cat, Sir Rodger,
she uses the exact same method on Padraic: “Mairead reaches down behind him, picks one gun up in each hand, slowly raises them and points them one on each side of Padraic’s head” (65). Mairead’s use of Padraic’s guns aligns her with the final girl of a slasher film. Furthermore, Clover describes the “unmaning” of the killer by the final girl as a “symbolic castration” (Clover 8). This symbolic castration is highlighted in The Lieutenant of Inishmore not only by the method of Padraic’s murder, but also by Mairead’s symbolic act of placing the barrels of Padraic’s guns in his own mouth.

Using Padraic and Mairead, McDonagh introduces us to a “gender-identity game” in which the quasi-masculine final girl emerges the victor (Clover 57). Davey also reinforces the dynamics of the gender game because throughout the play his masculinity is constantly challenged by the other characters. In scene one, he begin the play with a “girlish mop” of hair (4), and the stage directions tell us that Davey’s bicycle “is pink, with small wheels and a basket” (5). Moreover, Davey’s hair is contrasted with Mairead’s “close-cropped hair” in scene three (17). Throughout the play both Donny and Padraic interrogate Davey’s masculinity. Clover argues that the audience for slasher films is primarily adolescent males, who are troubled by their own gender ambiguity (Clover 166-68). Therefore, as an adolescent male, Davey’s character symbolically represents the intended audience of a slasher film. Over the course of the play, Davey becomes more conventionally masculine. For example, in scene eight, Padraic cuts Davey’s hair (42); and in scene nine, Davey starts to challenge Padraic’s methodology (61). He also progresses from riding his mother’s bike to holding a gun. In the play, violence and
dismembering corpses seems to have helped Davey transition from being a quasi-feminine boy into being a ‘man’ (Clover 166-68).

These characters are not the only link between McDonagh’s play and the slasher film genre. The play itself progresses towards more violence, more gore and more bodies. This pattern underscores the trajectory of a slasher film. Also, according to Clover, in slasher films there is an emphasis on the use of special effects:

What can be done is done, and slashers…do it most and worse. Thus we see heads squashed and eyes popped out, faces flayed, limbs dismembered, eyes penetrated by needles in close up, and so on. (Clover 41)

McDonagh’s play necessitates a significant amount of special effects work. There are several torture scenes; for example, scene two involves a man being hung upside-down with several toenails removed (10). In scene nine a man is tortured with “a cheese grater” and splatters blood (55). And at the beginning of scene eight, a cat “explodes into a ball of blood and bones” (40), while the stage directions in scene nine demands that “As the scene begins the blood-soaked living room is strewn with body parts of Brendan, and Joey, which Donny and Davey, blood-soaked also, hack away at to “sizeable chunks” (55). The hyperbolic violence of The Lieutenant of Inishmore easily maps on to a slasher film.

Horror films, and especially the slasher, provide a popular platform through which to express suppressed negative feelings such as hopelessness and the loss of control, but they can also address issues of representation, gender, and identity. McDonagh fundamentally
‘dismembers’ the romantic imagery associated with the West of Ireland. However, he also uses the aestheticized violence, gore, and the camp of a slasher film genre to update traditional Irish drama and entertain the audience.
2.4 THE LAST ROUND-UP: MCDONAGH, TARANTINO, AND MACGOWAN

McDonagh was for theatre in the 1990s what Quentin Tarantino was for film. And in the realm of literature and popular culture, Certeau tells us that bricolage is synonymous with “textual poaching” (Certeau, qtd. in Sturken and Cartwright 66). If Certeau’s summation of bricolage is correct, then both McDonagh and Tarantino’s works can be viewed through a prism of bricolage and postmodern pastiche. In his essay, Huber has dubbed McDonagh “The Quentin Tarantino of the Emerald Isle” (Huber 20); and in another essay, John McDonagh has referred to McDonagh as the “Tarantino of Theatre” (McDonagh 231). What both these clever descriptions tell us is that McDonagh’s oeuvre finds its precedents in the film work of Tarantino, a filmmaker (and writer) whom McDonagh acknowledges a debt. As I have just mentioned, another commonality that both writers share is that they both favour “textual poaching”. And the best possible example of how close Tarantino and McDonagh’s works are is illustrated in Pulp Fiction (1994) and Six-Shooter (2004). In “Violence American Style”, Marsha Kinder tells us that Pulp Fiction demonstrates how violence is “narrativized through genre and other paradigmatic choices” (Kinder 81). The main thrust of Kinder’s argument is that the film has been deliberately constructed as a “database narrative” (Kinder 81). According to Kinder, what this implies is that the film has been orchestrated around a “generic contextualization of violence that moves fluidly from boxing movie, to gangster film, to horror…” (Kinder 83). And so it is with McDonagh’s films and plays. In Six-Shooter, McDonagh’s “narrative database” is less
extensive than Tarantino’s in *Pulp Fiction*. Nevertheless, the film draws on several conflicting paradigms: in *Six-Shooter*, McDonagh makes creative use of elements borrowed from both the western and the slasher film genre: in *Six-Shooter*, the title of the film is the first of many explicit references to a western movie. Also, as the wild gunslinger, the “Kid” (Ruaidri Conroy) perhaps alludes to the legend of Billy the Kid, or the ensemble of young outlaws featured in *Young Guns* (1988). Furthermore, the iconic imagery of the Kid drawing two six-shooters, for a final shoot-out with the police, is another allusion to the western genre. McDonagh also appropriates the aesthetics of blood, guts, and dismemberment that is associated with a slasher film. For example, in one episode, the Kid tells “Donnelly” (Brendan Gleeson) an anecdotal story about an exploding cow which is graphically depicted in a flashback. The violent explosion of a cow on screen alludes to the graphic dismemberment scenes in a slasher movie.

McDonagh’s works in theatre and film are organized around the concepts of stylistic bricolage and postmodern pastiche. Like Tarantino, he makes creative use of a diverse range of film genres through the process of postmodern pastiche and intertextuality. However, I propose that McDonagh’s plays and films are more closely aligned with the punk aesthetics of MacGowan. In my discussion, I have suggested that McDonagh is doing to contemporary Irish theatre of the 1990s what MacGowan did to Irish music of the 1980s. And as Anglo-Irish Londoners, both MacGowan and McDonagh shrugged off nostalgic representations of Ireland. Rather, they saw another way to express their own sensibilities through punk aesthetics: they hollowed out the Irish cultural forms that they were told were theirs and filled them with a punk sensibility: MacGowan sets his harsh and jagged lyrics to the Irish ballad; McDonagh, for his part, layers
ultra-violent films on to the rural Irish drama. Both MacGowan and McDonagh make creative use of the cultural materials that are available to them and reconfigure them into something new: Celtic punk is a pastiche of traditional Irish music, and for McDonagh both The Lieutenant of Inishmore and Six-Shooter are a pastiche of both the western and the slasher film. Lastly, in both MacGowan and McDonagh’s works, stylistic bricolage and postmodern pastiche are used to construct a savage intertextual relationship between the punk and the pastoral.
CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

In his introduction to Synge’s classic *The Aran Islands*, Robinson has argued that since Ireland is an intriguing island off the West of Europe, and Aran an island off the West of Ireland, then Aran itself he claims, is doubly intriguing. It is, as Robinson suggests, “Ireland raised to the power of two” (Robinson xvii). Since the turn of the century, the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland have been ripe for mythologizing. Symons regarded the islands as a portal into the sublime. Figures like Synge, W.B. Yeats, and Lady Augusta Gregory imaginatively engaged with the islands as an exercise in cultural nationalism. In *Man of Aran*, Robert Flaherty imagines the Aran Islands as a zone of native primitivism, but McDonagh fundamentally deconstructs Flaherty’s primitivist fantasy by re-imagining *Man of Aran*. McDonagh satirizes Flaherty’s primitivist discourse by offering an absurd and degenerated picture of the islanders. This is illustrated in *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, a play which engages with the issue of representation by letting the audience watch an anti-heroic stage audience watch a romanticized image of themselves. McDonagh uses bricolage and pastiche to recast the Aran Islands as postmodern. In “Violence American Style: The Narrative Orchestration of Violent Attractions”, Kinder argues that from a postmodern perspective, “all purebreds are suspect and all hybrids are valued for their canon of choices” (Kinder 73). McDonagh offers his audience a canon of choices. In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, McDonagh weaves a punk aesthetic with a postmodern sensibility to
explode the romantic imagery associated with the West of Ireland. He transgresses the artificial boundaries between film genres and stage and screen. An audience conversant in both the Western and the slasher film genres will read these conventions on the stage. The many explicit references to the western genre in the play transform a pastoral West of Ireland into the American Old West.; furthermore, multiple allusions to the slasher film transform a bucolic West of Ireland into a horror show. Through bricolage and pastiche, McDonagh melds elements of two film genres with traditional Irish theatre to suggest that realities are socially constructed, there is no one truth. McDonagh’s plays also offer didactic possibilities; he addresses issues of representation and gender. Implicitly, the Aran Island Trilogy engages with what John Waters refers to as something “real and terrifying, -----the emotional palsy of a people trapped in their own unrealised dreams” (Waters 51). Implicitly, McDonagh’s oeuvre engages with trauma and the human condition, while explicitly, they mostly entertain.
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