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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

**The Depiction of Irish Community in The Leenane Trilogy by Martin
McDonagh**

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Práce se zaměří na zobrazení irské komunity ve třech hrách - The Beauty Queen of Leenane, A Skull in Connemara, The Lonesome West, které společně zachycují stejný časoprostor. V první části student zařadí zvoleného autora do literárně-historického kontextu, především do souvislostí irských dramatiků a také do in-yer-face theatre, a obecně pojedná o prvcích in-yer-face theatre. Autor rovněž vysvětlí termíny, s kterými bude pracovat (např. měnící se význam slova "Anglo-Irish"). V analytické části se student zaměří na způsob zobrazení života v irské komunitě ve výše zmíněných hrách a na její měnící se ráz. Autor bude věnovat pozornost místu a času, které mají pro tyto hry specifickou důležitost a rovněž objasní, proč se tyto hry někdy k in-yer-face theatre řadí a proč stojí často na okraji debat o in-yer-face. Práce bude založena na kvalitních sekundárních zdrojích a zakončí ji přehledné shrnutí daných zjištění.

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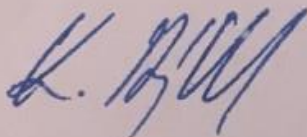
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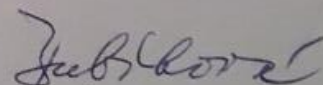
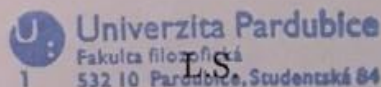
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Souhlasím s prezenčním zpřístupněním své práce v Univerzitní knihovně.

V Pardubicích dne 30.06.2017

.....

Jan Hlaváček

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ANNOTATION

This Bachelor Thesis is focused on the problematics and analysis of three plays by Martin McDonagh, which together form so the called Leenane trilogy. It is The Beauty Queen of Leenane, A skull in Connemara and The Lonesome West. The first theoretical part introduces British drama with focus on the transformation and evolution of Irish drama in the second half of the 20th century with subsequent brief placement and introduction of the author. Last theoretical part presents a popular theatre of the 1990's wave called In-Yer-Face, because it is often connected with the analyzed trilogy. The practical part of this thesis is focused on own analysis of the Leenane trilogy, paying attention to the way the author depicts the life in a typical Irish community, with consideration of the environment and time in which the plays take place. The whole thesis is then finished by a short chapter covering an analysis of a life-performance of the last part of the Leenane trilogy and a short summary of the findings.

KEYWORDS

McDonagh, Irish Drama, Leenane Trilogy, The Beauty Queen of Leenane, A Skull in Connemara, The Lonesome West, In-Yer-Face Theatre, Irish literature of the 20th century

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na problematiku a analýzu tří her autora Martina McDonagha, které spolu tvoří tzv. Leenanskou trilogii. Jedná se konkrétně o Krásku z Leenane, Lebku z Connemary a Osiřelý západ. V teoretické části práce je uvedena McDonaghova tvorba do literárně-historického kontextu irského dramatu z druhé poloviny dvacátého století. Dále jsou stručně představeny počátky autorovy tvorby ve srovnání s jeho současníky, irskými dramatiky. Jedna z kapitol se i druhu divadla zvanému In-Yer-Face, který je s analyzovanou trilogií často spojován. V praktické části se autor soustředí na vlastní analýzu Leenanské trilogie, věnujíc mimo jiné pozornost způsobu, jakým autor zobrazuje život v irské komunitě s ohledem na prostředí, v němž hry probíhají, a neurčitost času, která je v díle dobře viditelná. Práci zakončuje kapitola, v níž je srovnáno dramatické zpracování s literární předlohou posledního dílu Leenanské trilogie, a následuje shrnutí zjištěných poznatků.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

McDonagh, irské drama, Leenanská trilogie, Kráska z Leenane, Lebka z Connemary, Osířelý Západ, In-Yer-Face divadlo, irská literatura 20. století

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1. Introduction

The focus of this bachelor thesis is on a trilogy of plays by the British author Martin McDonagh, called the Leenane trilogy. There is no doubt about McDonagh being very famous worldwide, certainly also thanks to his success as a director of the Oscar winning piece *The Sixth Shooter*. This young dramatist became famous in the 1990s right after the premiere of his debut play *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. It is not easy to identify in terms of theatre styles. It may be partially relevant to the fact that his nationality is uncertain as well, due to him growing up in an Irish environment.

In the theoretical part of this thesis it is introduced why it is so hard to identify the young author in terms of his writing style. First, the time in which the plays were formed must be introduced. Information about the British drama scene of the last 50 years provides enough background for readers to grasp the idea and poetics behind it and then be able to possibly evaluate the subsequently analyzed plays themselves in the conclusion. The drama is introduced to the point in history, which was in the 1990s where a new and energetic wave of plays emerged. After the description of the recent history of British Drama scene the focus shifts for a moment to McDonagh himself and his work is introduced.

From the history of British drama from the 1950's to the end of 1980's, the focus shifts to a new (at that time - 1990s) emerging wave of playwriting. This way is called In-Yer-Face theatre. After a brief etymologic analysis of this term, a short history of its continuous evolution and typical signs that follow this type of drama is presented to the readers. These signs are then compared to the work of McDonagh in the last few paragraphs before the analysis of the plays.

The next part of the thesis is the analytical part. The first subchapter deals with the Leenane trilogy as a whole. Initially informing about the trilogy's premieres and awards achieved worldwide, there are a few words dedicated to inform also about our Czech premiere and its success. This part is, however, quite brief, because a more in-depth look is given to the Czech reception and interpretation of a life performance towards the end of the thesis, right before the final conclusion.

The Connemara region also earns its place and, to maybe better understand the placement and mentality of local people, the beautiful nature portrayed in the plays is described here. McDonagh's texts are very specific with their style and features, which is analyzed afterwards.

Following this description of the literary Leenane and also the real Leenane we could find today, there are four last subchapters of the analytical part. Each one of them deals with one specific play aiming to find out how Martin McDonagh depicts the Irish community throughout his descriptions of characters, environment to which they are exposed and the main characters' mentality. These analytical parts are based on the author's own research that is supported by specific examples from each play. Subsequently, there is one last subchapter further focusing on a live performance of one of the plays in the Czech theatres.

After the analysis of the individual works, all facts obtained by it are summarized in the conclusion.

Most of the literary sources are studies by renowned experts on this topic. Works used in my thesis the most frequently include works such as Jordan Eamonn's *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, which is a volume of studies about McDonagh's work. Other used source is Patrick Lonergan's *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh* and I must not forget the work of our Czech expert in the field of Irish studies Ondřej Pilný and his work *Irony & Identity in Modern Irish Drama*. He is also an editor of the *Litteraria Pragensia* magazine, which also proved to be useful, because it contained information concerning Irish drama and findings of other renowned experts from the field. In the part devoted to analyzing the individual plays I rely on my own understanding of the text, notes and experience of a live performance.

2. Modern British Drama in the 2nd half of 20th Century

British drama in the 20th century has changed significantly due to social and cultural events. The aim of this chapter is to briefly introduce the last few decades of the 20th century in terms of history and its cultural background up to the point of the rising drama movement called the *In-Yer-Face*. It is necessary to first describe the times in which the drama evolved since the drama has always been considered as a mirror of contemporary society. Because this thesis focuses on an theatre trilogy that is supposed to cover rural Irish community and is also recognized as Irish, this chapter also focuses on these socio-historical changes from the point of view of the Irish folk. The last few words are then dedicated to Martin McDonagh with the intention to place the author into the period and introduce him before the next chapter dealing specifically with introduction and subsequent analysis of the *In-Yer-Face* theatre.

1960's drama in Britain is considered to be the beginning of modern Drama in Britain, starting with Friel's *Philadelphia Here I Come* premiere in the Gate theatre. The Gate Theatre at the time produced works by Friel and McGuinness, but its program was more or less still the same. It contained canonical plays from abroad, mixing it up with some domestic works for example works of Joe Dowling.¹ Despite some new writing, the Gate still produced less work than the Irish National Theatre in Dublin, called the Abbey. Of course, there were authors before that can now be called the pioneers of modern drama such as J.M. Synge, S. O'Casey, G. B. Shaw or even Oscar Wilde², but the first 50 years of the 20th century accompanied many events, namely the world wars or the Easter Rising that changed attitudes and opportunities of later dramatists. 1944 Education Act also helped to create opportunities, by enabling more people reach higher education and that expanded the white collar sector.

Liam Harte aptly noted in his book, that thirty years of violence in Northern Ireland, mixed with a period of rapid and far-reaching social and cultural change in the Republic, has deeply marked Ireland's literary texts and compelled writers from all traditions not only to question inherited beliefs and truths, but also the authority and efficiency of art itself.³ In their uncertainty about how to respond to the unstable and disruptive socio-political situation that was going on at that time, writers have continually engaged in discursive dialogues with other

¹Margaret L. Jones, *Contemporary Irish Drama & Cultural Identity* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002), 4-6.

² Ondřej Pilný et al., *Litteraria Pragensia: Irish Theatre & Central Europe*, Vol. 25. Issue 50 (Prague: Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Philosophy Faculty, Charles University, July 2015).

³ Liam Harte. *Contemporary Irish Fiction; Themes, Tropes, Theories* (London: St. Mary's College), 1-3.

writers, trying out new styles or modifying the existing ones. J. M. Synge's concern for Gaelic language and literary traditions which infused his plays with rhythms, vocabulary and structures respectfully drawn from – but not exact copies of – the speech of working people on the Aran islands and elsewhere, seems to have created a long term climate of expectation for audiences.⁴ Ondřej Pilný mentions in his introductory article for *Neglected Irish Fiction* issue of *Litteraria Pragensia* that not always have the plays met with success. As an example he mentions B. MacNamara's novel *The Valley of the Squinting Windows* that depicted savage rural Ireland, which was met with fierce hostility when it first appeared.⁵ As a result of the socio-political situation, Harte further adds, while contemporary Irish novels deal with specific situations and characters which may or may not have been treated in fictional form before, many also bear the imprint of unresolved political and cultural narratives and debates, and of other texts that have engaged with them.⁶ A key feature of Irish contemporary drama is therefore both disruption of realist form and the re-working of mythical and folk elements as a means of deconstructing ideas of language, history and gender through performance.

New inventions and social policies of the 1960's opened new possibilities for topics to break down. As Margaret Jones mentions in her book *Contemporary Irish Drama & Cultural Identity*, experts such as Murray, Roche and Grene agree with the early 1960s being the renaissance of Irish drama, with the first one being at the beginning of the 20th century with literature of the aforementioned Synge and O'Casey.⁷ J. W. Lambert partly disagrees with Jones' claim in his survey covering years of 1964-73, characterizing drama in Britain as '*Minority Middle-class middle-aged interest.*'⁸ It was a problem of not being able to hold interest of new generation of viewers and dramatists that were mostly not at the peak of their creativity.

Luckily, this issue was soon dealt with. New Britain's Minister for the Arts Jenny Lee insisted on the necessity of public funding for the arts and with great success.⁹ Writing could be funded in various ways, whether it were commissions, or after submission of a synopsis and scenes to the Literary Department the ideas could be later presented as a rehearsed reading, most often during lunchtime. Sometimes they proceeded to full production. As an

⁴ Jones. *Contemporary Irish Drama & Cultural Identity*. 6-7.

⁵ Ondřej Pilný et al., *Litteraria Pragensia: Irish Theatre & Central Europe*, Vol. 24. Issue 40 (Prague: Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Philosophy Faculty, Charles University, July 2015).

⁶ Harte. *Contemporary Irish Fiction*, 1-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

⁸ Michelene Wandor, *Drama Today: A Critical Guide to British Drama 1970-1990*. (London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1993), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

example The Abbey theatre offered £7000 sponsorships to the dramatists up to 6 times a month.¹⁰ This was a great way of promoting and supporting writers to create something new and fresh. It also action brought new audiences and it helped to gradually build new venues, especially the *'Fringe'* theatre¹¹ became exceptionally popular by the 1970's, with over 100 new venues emerging in the first few years of its business.

The end of the 1960's brought numerous important changes that helped to change the way of writing. One of these changes was the end of state censorship in 1968.¹² Up to that point all plays had to be handed over for evaluations to Lord Chamberlain as he was empowered to demand any changes of text. That obviously meant censorship of subject of matter, 'inappropriate' ways of expressing and impossibility of certain topics. The process of submitting alone was also quite tedious and long.¹³ The office's abolition meant newly acclaimed freedom to criticize certain issues that were previously under strict supervision. These topics covered mainly institutions like the Catholic Church or the Crown and dramatists were for the first time in modern history able to freely write about any desired topic and they could do so using a new range of language, because it was not restricted in any way anymore and nobody was checking whether it was socially 'proper' or not.

The rising popularity of *'New Writing'*¹⁴ was of course very welcome, but there was a counterside to it. In economic terms, it was the law of supply and demand, meaning that more interest in these types of performances meant more venues and more venues meant the government had to support more companies. Michele Wandor mentions that this development brought the attention during the 1970's to the rising demand by talks about the first standards for the funding with an opinion that the money should only go to large venues and companies. She also mentions that many people felt that it was wrong to pay the young people to criticize the political status quo via their work and 'to bite the hand that feeds them'.¹⁵ The later election of Margaret Thatcher as the Prime Minister in 1979 meant an unfortunate stop to the

¹⁰ Abbey Theatre. "*History*." Accessed May 16, 2017 from <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/about/history/>

¹¹ Fringe theatre was a small venue usually located above a pub or restaurant that became popular in the 1960's and 1970's. Its main policy was to put on new plays by new to visitors who first had lunch or diner and then saw a play. Since they were small these venues were usually guested about 35 viewers per performance. Retrieved from: *Drama Today: A Critical Guide to British Drama 1970-1990*, 2.

¹² Wandor, *Drama Today*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴ New Writing is a term referring to young British Writers who emerged in new waves after John Osborne's success with *Look Back in Anger* in 1956. Each new wave reinvented theatrical language, and New Writing (in capital letters) can be defined as plays by young writers put on by subsidised theatres. These plays are usually contemporary in language, urgent in theme and preferably experimental in form. retrieved from Aleks Sierz, *In-ner-face Theatre: British Drama Today*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

¹⁵ Wandor, *Drama Today*, 2.

government funding. Since her party was very conservative and inclined towards general privatization and focus on health and industry, new conservative Arts Minister cut the public subsidy to the arts. The following two decades continued in the opposite manner that was the current government's policy, which was privatization. Those theatre companies that used to draw funds from the government were left stranded with only one option, which was to seek sponsorship elsewhere, which was however not an easy task. What followed was a political and social instability caused by rise of oil price, high inflation and huge rise in unemployment – one of the more serious consequences of the privatization. Another problem according to Seán Duffy was the declining support from The European Community (integrated in 1993 into EU).¹⁶ This decline affected especially the rural parts and only helped to undermine the achievements done during the 1960's country's revival.

Even though the 1980's was a decade of literary stagnation, there were some areas, mainly social, that flourished and helped people to deal with the issues connected with ongoing privatization of Britain. One of the most important events was a breakthrough in television drama, when the *Channel 4* came 'on air' in the 1982.¹⁷ Millions of audience members started to engage nightly to help popularize these 'soap operas', which began to be broadcasted periodically. In fact, Vera Gottlieb called the 1980's the decade soap operas.¹⁸ These 'soaps' were especially popular for the lower class people who after a hard day at work simply wanted to relax and they provided exactly that, because the format was a serial television without any narrative ending. That provided periodical continuation of the soap character's lives. One of these soap operas was the *Brookside*, airing on the *Channel 4*. Other type of program that gained popularity was the sitcom, for example the successful *Yes, Prime Minister*. As it can be deduced from its name, this sitcom aimed to satirize the current political situation.

The last thing that should be mentioned in connection to the decade of the 1980's is the triumphant achievement of the Irish national football team.¹⁹ They managed to first reach the finals of the European championship and then just two years later they managed to the finals of the football World Cup in Italy, in 1990. Not only it was a historical success of the team, but this event also helped drastically to rise the sense of national pride.

¹⁶ Seán Duffy. *Atlas Of Irish History*. 2nd ed. (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd.: 2000), 126.

¹⁷ George W. Brandt, *British Television Drama in the 1980s*. (Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 1993), xv.

¹⁸ Brandt, *British Television Drama in the 1980s*, 41.

¹⁹ Duffy. *Atlas of Irish History*, 126.

By the year 1989, only six per cent of the adult went to the theatre.²⁰ The subsequent decision of new Arts minister in the 1990, to finance only the large national companies, only deepened the fears for the new theatre. Not much later, a new and fresh wave of theatre began to surface, but before this wave is described, it would be appropriate to briefly introduce the author whose trilogy will be subsequently analyzed.

Martin McDonagh is one of the most celebrated Irish playwrights of the last decade of the twentieth century. “I walk that line between comedy and cruelty,” McDonagh declares, “because I think one illuminates the other”.²¹

In his short but fruitful career as playwright he managed to achieve great success with his Irish plays. More than any other contemporary playwright, McDonagh has brought Irish comedy back to the forefront of the public attention. Russel characterized McDonagh’s plays in his book *A Casebook*. He says that “His [McDonagh’s] plays—which feature a unique fusion of humor, violence, and postmodern themes—have found a great deal of critical acclaim while at the same time they have bewildered the theatre community.”²²

In a sense, we could thank Garry Hynes, the Artistic Director of Druid Theatre in Galway for ‘discovering’ McDonagh.²³ The stage debut of McDonagh’s *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* on 1 February 1996 was the igniter for her career. It was quickly followed in a short span of time in 1997 by successful plays like *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, *The Lonesome West*, and *A Skull in Connemara*. These plays all took place in west of Ireland and were written in Irish idiom. Werner Huber also did not forget to note that the work of McDonagh was seen by London critics as “a new voice, a new quality in Irish drama, grotesque, manipulative”.²⁴ The audience in the theatres surely agreed with the critics’ opinion, even though there were some critics that praised rather the actors’ performance over the play’s quality.

Mary Trotter mentions certain doubts about the play’s future, saying:

This production of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* was blessed by the hard work in performance of Ireland’s best and brightest. The textual weaknesses of the script, however,

²⁰ Duffy. *Atlas of Irish History*, 126.

²¹ “*Martin McDonagh by Fintan O’Toole*”, Accessed August 1, 2016.

From : <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2146/>.

²² Richard R. Russel, *A Casebook*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2001), 52-53.

²³ Eamonn Jordan. *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

make it doubtful that this play will do as well in productions from less experienced and talented ensembles.²⁵

Being an English playwright who was born to an Irish family, McDonagh is able to work with the genre of rural Irish traditional drama while mixing new energy and aggression into the pot. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, his most widely produced play to date, illustrates McDonagh's skill in combining traditional storytelling with the "savage and ironic humor of the modern generation"²⁶ while employing several distinctive postmodern themes and devices—"intertextuality with other Irish plays; the relationship between reality, fiction, and identity; the dehumanization of character; and the instability and ambiguity of language and meaning."²⁷

These are all the characteristics that enabled critics, like Ondřej Pilný, of his plays to connect him and his work to the rising phenomenon of the 1990s which began to be called the In-Yer-Face theatre.²⁸

3. Defining the term In-Yer-Face

'In-your-face' originated from American sports journalism during the mid-1970s²⁹ as an exclamation of derision or contempt, and gradually seeped into more mainstream slang during the late 1980s and 1990s, meaning 'aggressive, provocative, brash'.

This phrase is defined by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*³⁰ as something 'blatantly aggressive, provocative and even deliberately designed to make people react strongly for or against it'. Another dictionary adds adjectives 'harsh, rough and blunt'.³¹

It implies being forced to see something close up, having your personal space invaded. It suggests the crossing of normal boundaries up to the point where you might react the way

²⁵ Trotter, Mary. *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Theatre and Capital (The Johns Hopkins University Press: 1999), pp. 337. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068689> Accessed: 15-05-2017

²⁶ Russel. *A Casebook*. 42-43.

²⁷ Russel. *A Casebook*. 42-43.

²⁸ Pilný, *Irish Theatre & Central Europe*, 2.

²⁹ Sierz, Aleks. *In-yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

³⁰ OXFORD. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Dictionaries intermediate to advanced)*. 8th ed. Oxford, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 823.

³¹ *Anglicko-Český Česko-Anglický Velký Slovník*. 3rd ed. (Brno: Lingea s.r.o., 2010), 340.

you never thought was possible. In short, it describes perfectly the kind of theatre that puts audiences exactly in such situation.

The man who first coined this term with connection to theatre and drama was a drama critic named Aleks Sierz. He he was the first one to promote it in his book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2001).³² But he himself disclaims inventing this phrase, saying that he “only began using it as the other critics were using it already.”³³ Thanks to him this term began to be used to refer to a new wave of British drama of the 1990s that was notable for its provocative uses of obscene language, nudity, violence, and taboo subject-matter.

This feature of new 1990s drama had been noted before, and referred to by theatre critics as ‘*the new brutalism*’³⁴ among other labels.

3.1. The In-Yer-Face Theatre

It offends today, but we look harder and we know, it will not offend tomorrow.³⁵

Having commented upon how the In-Yer-Face term came to be and how the phrase changed over time, it will be mentioned at this point how this theatre scene developed its place since it was first recognized by the public.

In-Yer-Face theatre always shocks audiences by its language and images; unsettles them by its emotional frankness and disturbs them by its questioning of moral norms.³⁶ Most of these plays are not interested in showing events in a detached way and allowing audiences to speculate about them; instead, they are experiential - they want audiences to feel the extreme emotions that are being shown on stage.³⁷

³² SIERZ. *In-Yer-Face Theatre*.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9..

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

Although the rise of *In-Yer-Face* theatre in Britain had many predecessors, especially in the alternative theatre and the so called kitchen sink drama of the 1960s, it only took off as a new and shocking sensibility in the decade of the 1990s.³⁸ It was surely connected with the fact that people and critics felt that the current work of authors was either a rework of a classic or a generic work that brought nothing new to the table, so to speak.

This ‘*seal*’ on the 1990s drama, Sierz mentions, was broken by the production of Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* in January 1995.³⁹ He also does not forget to mention that the impact this play made can safely be compared to the infamous John Osborne’s ‘kitchen-sink drama’ *Look Back in Anger* with its premiere in 1956.⁴⁰ Thanks to the scenes of sexual abuse and cannibalism, as well as its language it was quickly attacked by the critics. Sierz also notes, their message was clear: “Even though it was both shockingly radical and unsettling, the following uproar demonstrated that theatre could be highly provocative and controversial.”⁴¹ The impact this play has made at the time of its release showed authors new ways of exploring topics, perhaps even taboos, which with today’s perspective we could say became a new standard. Harte contrasts with this idea by his own comparison of *In-Yer-Face* with history, saying: “Just as the origins of provocative and confrontational theatre can be found in the theories of Alfred Jarry and Antonin Artaud, at the start of the 20th century, so it was that in the 1990s it gradually became the dominant style of much new writing.”⁴²

In-yer-face drama has been staged by new writing theatres. Among the many, the ones that could be named are the Royal Court, Bush, Hampstead, Soho Theatre, Finborough, Tricycle, Theatre Royal Stratford East, and even the trendy Almeida, all of which are in London.⁴³ But experiential theatre is not an exclusively metropolitan phenomenon. The Traverse in Edinburgh was really important - as were Manchester, Birmingham, Bolton, West Yorkshire, and so on. Especially Live theatre in Newcastle. Of course, this is not an exclusively English or Brit affair either. Americans such as Phyllis Nagy, Naomi Wallace and Tracy Letts made a vital contribution to new writing in English - as did Scottish writers such as David Greig and David Harrower.⁴⁴

³⁸ Harte. *Contemporary Irish Fictions*, 6-9.

³⁹ Sierz. *In-Yer-Face Theatre*. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, xii.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, xii.

⁴² Harte. *Contemporary Irish Fiction*, 6-9.

⁴³ Jones. *Contemporary Irish Drama & Cultural Identity*, 8-10.

⁴⁴ Wandor. *Drama Today : A Critical Guide to British Drama 1970-1990*, 13.

Soon after *Blasted* was produced, a couple of similar plays emerged. As an example worth of mentioning could be Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* and Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator*.⁴⁵ As well as the *Blasted*, they were produced at London's Royal Court by the new director Stephen Daldry together with a couple of other 'provocative' plays by young new writers like Joe Penhall, Philip Ridley, Rebecca Prichard and Martin McDonagh.⁴⁶ Of course, some writers wrote one or two in-yer-face plays and then moved on.

Like all categories, this one can't completely grasp the ever-changing reality of the explosive new writing scene. They all used confrontational material as a means of exploration, often pushing matters to the limits: "If drama dealt with masculinity, it showed rape; if it got to grips with sex, it showed fellatio or anal intercourse; when nudity was involved, so was humiliation; if violence was wanted, torture was staged; if drugs were the issue, addiction was shown."⁴⁷ The characteristic features of this new writing are more than clear. It may be taken as outrageous, but they are raw and as direct as they can be, which was exactly their purpose. What's more, they perfectly support Sierz' definition of In-Yer-Face theatre, which is "any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message."⁴⁸ That indicates that the most important purpose is the reaction of the audience to the stage. When audiences see or hear unmentionable subjects, their emotions are shared throughout the theatres and they are forced to react. This force that pushes them is most often shock. It is either used to wake up the audience, provoke them, shock them or even attack their prejudices. In other words, it is also considered as a means for the authors to find out how far they can go with their writing, how far will the audience follow. Ondřej Pilný fittingly notes about the 1990s that it was a time when audience yearned for the macabre and the grotesque combined with extreme violence and vulgarity.⁴⁹

Sierz also mentions two ways we can differentiate the In-Yer-Face theatre: 'hot' and 'cool' theatre.⁵⁰ The 'hot' theatre is usually the smaller performance with more limited audience. It uses more open aggression with the aim to make the experience unforgettable using the aesthetics of extremism. The 'cool' theatre on the other hand, uses aggressive and extreme emotions but it is eased up with a clever combination of distancing devices. These devices can be larger audiences or the use of more traditional structures, although the comedy

⁴⁵ Sierz. *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 16.

⁴⁶ Sierz. *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁹ Ondřej Pilný, *Irony & Identity in Modern Irish Drama*. (Praha: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006), 156.

⁵⁰ SIERZ. *In-Yer-Face Theatre*. 5.

is considered as the most effective distancing device. “It can sometimes defuse an emotionally fraught situation. After all, a common reaction to terror is either to ignore it or to laugh at it.”⁵¹

It is not at all difficult to identify an In-Yer-Face play. The language is filthy, there's nudity, people have sex right on the stage, violence breaks out, one character humiliates another, taboos are broken, unmentionable subjects are raised, conventional dramatic structures are destroyed. Expect tales of abuse; don't worry about the corruption of theatre form; expect personal politics, not ideology. Sierz also comments on his website saying: “This brat pack⁵² is the voice of youth. At its best, this kind of theatre is so powerful, so visceral, that it forces you to react - either you want to get on stage and stop what's happening or you decide it's the best thing you've ever seen and you long to come back the next night. As indeed you should.”⁵³

Martin McDonagh's work, or at least a part of it, is definitely a member of the ‘cool’ theatre. His *Beauty Queen of Leenane* contains most of the examples. The placement of the play is mostly in a kitchen, which became almost a tradition since Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Pilný cleverly notes that a part of McDonagh's success lies on the fact that he engaged with the well-received dramatic tradition, mixing it with brutally portrayed black humour shenanigans⁵⁴. That supports Sierz's thought, that “some shocking emotional material can be made more acceptable by being placed within a theatrical frame that is traditional, either in its tone or form.”⁵⁵ Then there are typical family situations and conversations which suddenly take a swift turn and the audience is shocked with scenes full of violence. For the traditional part we could safely mention the work of J. M. Synge, who is considered as a main acting figure in evolving the Irish drama scene of the 20th century.⁵⁶ The crazy and aggressive part can be compared to modern movies of John Woo and Q. Tarantino. McDonagh himself confirmed in an interview with Fintan O'Toole that these people played an important role in creating his own style.⁵⁷ Martin's knowledge of rural Ireland, local inside jokes and mastery of the language than helps him ease up the situation with a quick and witty quip. His texts are

⁵¹ Ibid., 16.

⁵² Brat pack was a common name for young writers of the 1990s who were seen as a group, but they were not a movement. Best description of their relationships to each other is a network or a web

⁵³ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*.

⁵⁴ Pilný, *Irony & Identity in Modern Irish Drama*. 154-157

⁵⁵ Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre*. 6.

⁵⁶ Russel, *A Casebook*, 25.

⁵⁷ “Martin McDonagh by Fintan O'Toole”, Accessed August 1, 2016.

From : <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2146/>.

uncensored and full of slang and vulgarisms. It even seems as if McDonagh created his own dialect. Eamonn Jordan partly agrees with Martin being considered as part of the In-Yer-Face theatre writers by saying about his writing that “McDonagh seems not to embrace the symbolic or mythic possibilities of the west of Ireland spaces, instead he downplays, even disparages them.”⁵⁸

McDonagh’s stylistics and themes are not as aggressive and vigorous as the other In-Yer-Face writers⁵⁹, but there are enough signs to look for in his work. His plays were so successful that they quickly spread all over the British Isles, with the London National Theatre included. Eamonn stated that with the Leenane trilogy especially, got worldwide recognition, staging in America as well as Australia.⁶⁰ To fully grasp the depth of its success it is fitting to mention that *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* has been translated to over 28 languages. Over the first few years on the theatre scene, McDonagh’s plays ensured him several prestigious prizes and he was ‘heralded as the shooting star of the contemporary theatre scene just by the strength of four published plays alone’⁶¹. That is why, as a part of the analytical part the author will not leave out these circumstances and also look for the signs and features of In-Yer-Face theatre in his Leenane trilogy.

3. The Leenane Trilogy

The first play of the Leenane trilogy that was introduced to the public was *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. Its premiere was 1st of February 1996 by the Druid Theatre Company on the occasion of opening of the new Town Hall Theatre in Galway. The main character Maureen was played by Mary Mullen, her mother was represented by Anna Manahan. It was created by co-production with the London Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, where it had its premiere 5th of March 1996. Only two years later, Garry Hynes, who discovered McDonagh as it was mentioned it before, brought *The Beauty Queen* to Broadway where the play earned her a Tony award for The Best Director. No woman has earned this award ever before. Her

⁵⁸ Eamonn Jordan, *Dissident Dramaturgies: Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 136.

⁵⁹ Sierz. *In-Yer-Face Theatre*. 16.

⁶⁰ Jordan, *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh*. 14.

⁶¹ Jordan, *Dissident Dramaturgies*, 133.

performance was also praised in a review of *The Beauty Queen* by Mary Trotter in the *Theatre Journal*, who mentioned that “Hynes and the Druid Theatre Company were essential not only to the play's success, but its survival.”⁶²

Only a year later followed the premiere of two remaining plays of the trilogy. *A Skull in Connemara* and *The Lonesome West* were presented soon after one another, again co-produced by the Druid Theatre and Royal Court Theatre's Garry Hynes. *A Skull in Connemara* firstly appeared on stages 3rd of June 1997, then in the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs on 17th of June. Gravedigger Mick Dowd was played by Mick Lally, police officer Thomas Hanlon was portrayed by Brian F. O' Byrne, who also played Valen Connor in *The Lonesome West*.

The Lonesome West had its premiere in the Town Hall Theatre on 10th June of 1997 and in the Royal Court immediately after that, 19th of June. The whole trilogy was a huge success. It was so successful that theatres started to present the whole trilogy as one day cycles. The Druid company based several productions on this cycle style and traveled around Irish cities with it. Amongst the many, at least the London West End or even Australia can be mentioned.

This trilogy was also staged in the Czech Republic. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* had its premiere in Divadlo v Řeznické in Prague, 1999. It was directed by Jiří Bábek. It was historically the first production ever of McDonagh's drama here. *A Skull in Connemara* was produced last, in 2007 by Martin Glaser in Švandovo Divadlo, Prague. *The Lonesome West* first appeared on the Czech scene in 2002. It was produced by The Drama Club in Prague and directed by Ondřej Sokol, who also first translated this play. This play became so famous and popular here that it stayed in the repertoire of this theatre to this date (2017). Sometimes the Leenane trilogy is also called the Connemara trilogy in the Czech Republic.

All three plays take place in Leenane (sometimes called Leenaun, Irish An Liónán). It is a village with size about 7,5km² placed in Connemara region (Irish Conamara) in Galway County (Irish Gaillimh) in the west of Ireland. The North, south and west of Connemara borders with the Atlantic Ocean. National Park in Connemara counts as one of the most beautiful parks in Ireland. It is created by two mountain ridges divided by the river Polladirk.

⁶² Mary Trotter, “*The Beauty Queen of Leenane by Martin McDonagh; A Night in November by Marie Jones*” in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Theatre and Capital (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). 336-339. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068689> , Accessed: 15-05-2017

It is characterized by its harsh nature with lots of lakes. Amongst many natural beauties there are megalith tombs and remains of old Christian monasteries. Tourists seem to love this area since it is one of only few places that still keep the same countryside tone, undamaged by all kinds of modern civilization ills.⁶³

Next to their equivocal placement, McDonagh's texts are much more closed group of dramas. Mostly with a small number of characters that have their firm place and purpose. Everything in the play has its place and precise connectivity to future events. Information and relationships are so crammed in, but so well interconnected that there is no place for misunderstandings. The whole trilogy is distinguished by the unity of place and plot. Time is conceived rather chaotically, but that will be discussed subsequently. The atmosphere keeps the same tone throughout the plot and the relationship interconnectivity between characters is seen in the past already, from which it affects the plot variously. The protagonists of the trilogy mutually enter the plays, even though it is not physical and it is mostly only rumors and innuendos. Each play has its own coherent plot, but also its own set of characters, consisting of four members, specific and appearing only to each play. It makes it an interesting case of narrative, combining events or characters either appearing in the future, or calling upon them to the past. It creates an illusion of small connected community that keeps no secrets, since everybody knows everything about everyone in the Leenane. Pato only confirms it by saying: "*You can't kick a cow in Leenane without some bastard holding a grudge twenty year.*"⁶⁴

Lots of similar features can be found also with individual characters of McDonagh's plays. Their peculiarities include brutality, selfishness and self-centeredness, but also this sense of isolation in which they find themselves. Not only are they in the closed area of their village in which they spend most of their lives, if not whole, but they are isolation in themselves. For this reason it is possible for them to accept the violence around them with such ease and also the most importantly, they accept the violence they inflict to themselves.

The intimate atmosphere and the feeling of certain coherence of the story is reflected in the spaces of scenes. That is another characteristic sign for McDonagh's plays. One room is dominant throughout the play, because the whole plot is concentrated there. Exteriors are only

⁶³ "Fáilte Go Leenane Village." *Leenane Village*. Accessed August 01, 2016. <http://www.leenanevillage.com/>.

⁶⁴ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

a small part of the whole and of little importance. Anything happening outside this dominant zone is either rumored about, or heard about from the main characters.

In the following subchapters I am going to analyze The Leenane trilogy, but first it is necessary to mention that each play will be analyzed separately, with only limited blending of plays when it is necessary to maintain the tackled ideas and possibly support a claim. Each play's content will be first briefly summarized to familiarize readers with the plot and main characters. Subsequently, I am going to pinpoint and analyze key features and characteristics and finally I will try to compare the events that are described in the play with the historical events that might be connected to them. That might help with finding out what were McDonagh's thoughts on these events at the time of writing back in the 1990s.

4.1. The Beauty Queen of Leenane

The Beauty Queen of Leenane is the first play to be described and analyzed. It is first in the trilogy and it is the longest, with having nine acts in total if we count Pato reading the letter to Maureen from the distant England. I dare to also say that it feels to be kind of different with its 'story within the story' from the other two.

In short, the story is about the peculiar relationship between a 'damaged' mother and a 'damaged' daughter. It may be an overstatement of their mental situation, but the decision whether or not it is true is not clear. Maureen Folan is a forty year old virgin, who never had a serious relationship with a man and was probably hospitalized in a psychiatric ward. She is living with her seventy years old obese, selfish and despotic mother Mag. Maureen has some sisters but they all got married and moved away. Maureen's and Mag's relationship is mutually insufferable, which they prove on each occasion they see each other. At the same time, however, neither one of them is able to get out of it. The Folans (that is their surname) live rather far away from the village Leenane, so they are literally cut off the world, somewhere on a really high muddy hill in their little house. Scenes with Mag and Maureen are mostly full of quarrels, vulgarisms and mutual harm, which escalates from mental to physical harm. All cruelties are dealt with by the main characters without any sugarcoating, they talk face to face. Two adult women, who rather look like two little children are mutually laughing

at each other instead of with each other. Their conflicts, however, start from banalities and futilities because of their everyday stereotypical coexistence.

There is no doubt that Mag is dependent on her daughter and is afraid that she might lose her caretaker. Maureen hates her for it and blames Mag for ruining her life. Mag firstly seems as harmless, but that is only a part of her strategy of how to ensure her daughters care and attention. Using this stance she manipulates with Maureen to her own benefits. In reality, Mag is a very cunning and calculating woman, who does not hesitate to use any means necessary to achieve her goals, including humiliation of her own daughter in front of a different person or destroying Maureen's hopes for potential partnership. Her selfish and maybe even childish self-centeredness and the need to be in scope of attention makes her gradually unbearable "old hag", for which she pays the greatest price in the end.

Certain ambiguity lies in the poetics of Maureen's character. During the plot of the play we find out about her stay in the psychiatric ward and the reader cannot be totally sure what her mental health status actually is and how much certain "psychic liability" reflects in her behavior. In her utterances with her mother she often uses irony and some insults are full of black humor – often very cruel. When talking about a guy murdering a woman in Dublin, Maureen displays her hatred for mother sarcastically without any hesitation.

Mag: The fella up and murdered the poor ould woman in Dublin and he didn't even know her. The news that story was on, did you hear of it? Strangled, and didn't even know her. That's a fella it would be better not to talk to. That's a fella it would be better to avoid outright.

Maureen: Sure, that sounds exactly the type of fella I would like to meet, and then bring him home to meet you, if he likes murdering ould women.

Mag: That's not a nice thing to say, Maureen.

Maureen: Is it not now?⁶⁵

The comical effect is multiplied here by the fact, that her mother who usually dodges and counters her daughter's attacks immediately and without hesitations, she initially does not understand Maureen's innuendos and acts with naïve seriousness. She even expects, with a

⁶⁵ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

smile on her face, that her daughter will be nice to her. Most of the times, however, Maureen speaks to her mother face to face, being capable of expressing cruel things.

Later in the story, comes the first twist in the story, when Maureen gets her chance to establish a firm partner relationship. For a forty year old unattractive girl, this is a great chance. She meets her former classmate named Pato Dooley. They meet by a coincidence on a party organized by Dooley's family, for their relatives visiting from the U.S. Born in Leenane, he now works in England as a hired worker for miserable wage. The work on a construction site is dangerous and Irish workers must endure insults from the English "colleagues". That is also one of the reasons, why further in the story Pato decides to sail for work to America.

When Pato sees Maureen interacting with her mother, he is initially terrified by the hatred both women have for each other, but then he writes a letter to Maureen that he would be glad if she followed him to Boston and live with him. Unfortunately, this letter falls into the wrong hands, which are hands of Mag. She first reads this letter and then she burns it so Maureen never finds out. Later, when Maureen has lost all her hopes for marriage, she finds out by a coincidence what her mother did. That is the last drop to the pot. Her hatred overflows and the whole thing comes to Maureen torturing Mag with hot oil to spill out the contents of the letter and then – in a fit of rage surely – she kills Meg. She is free finally, but she stays in her empty house, in a rocking chair, predestined to become the same person who her mother was.

In the play we also meet a character named Roy, Pato's twenty year old brother. His function in this play is mostly a messenger, an unsuspecting but in my opinion important role. He works in this play as a catalyst. First, we see Roy inviting Maureen to the party. There she meets Pato and the play is able to continue its course. Then, when the play has nowhere to move, we see Roy bringing the letter, which sparks the plot again. It is this type of messenger that is essential to this play, in its inconspicuous way.

Roy also brings a kind of youth rashness of a boy raised in the age of television shows. With it comes a topic of crazy 1990s time, when young boys thought it was cool and heroic to bust as many cops' heads open as possible. Roy rates TV shows based on how many girls wear bikinis and how many dead people are in it.

Ray: D'you see Patricia with the hair? Patricia's bad enough, but Wayne's pure terror. I do like Sons and Daughters, I do.

Mag: Do ya?

*Ray: Everybody's always killing each other and a lot of the girls do have swimsuits. That's the best kind of programme.*⁶⁶

The text of the play is comprised of nine scenes that present individual extracts from the lives of a mother and a daughter. The whole plot takes place in one place – a kitchen a Mag an Maureen's house. The scenery is broken only once, when Pato his reciting his letter to Maureen out loud in England.

The Beauty Queen of Leenane takes a turn out of the trilogy. It is the only one, maybe because it is first, that is not connected so much to the other plays, leaving out notes and references to other characters that live in Leenane but are characters of other plays. This means *The Beauty Queen* feels more coherent and compact. When there is a moment of choice in Maureen's life, where she can choose to leave, she stays. She sits in her mother's rocking chair and starts acting the same as Meg. This feature closes the play and brings out a piece of absurdist drama. We do not find out whether Maureen really leaves in the end or she really loses her mind. The tragedy of Maureen's character is however shown. It is her own incapability (maybe inherited), but also her strong bond with her mother, who she killed with a poker. The topic of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* is therefore a desire for a change that will never occur.

When it comes to time and its conception in the play, there is a certain uncertainty to be observed. In *The Queen's* case, the play carries a lot of signs from the 1950s and 1960s' so called the kitchen sink drama. Be it with its surroundings, scenery or descriptions of individual scenes (it is necessary to notice every detail that accompanies each of the scenes). Since each play has mostly one place where "it all happens" McDonagh paid attention to small details. We do not even have to go very far into the play to find these details. Just the house description in the beginning of the play sums up a room where it all starts as well as ends. It is the little things like:

*"...a touristy looking embroidered tea-towel hangin further along the back wall, bearing the inscription 'May you be half an hour in Heaven afore the devil knows you're dead'."*⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

These ‘echoes’ of kitchen sink dramas are screamed over from time to time by comments on events by characters or even inventions and everyday things that definitely belong to the 1980s and the 1990s. From everyday items we can name TV shows and radio. Events that are mentioned could be represented by rumors about child abuse by catholic priests. This was a serious topic after a revelation in 1992 that a Galway bishop Eamon Casey fathered child.⁶⁸ Following this first revelation was a series of scandals showing up after being kept in secret for years and it showed the corruption and irreparably disrupted the authority of Catholic Church. McDonagh touched this topic frequently, but only in *The Queen Mag* specifically, saying that “There was a priest on the news Wednesday had a babby with a Yank.”⁶⁹

Upon closer analysis, it is safe to identify the Leenane to be roughly in the year 1989. The reason why is, that Ray is described here as a twenty year old young boy. If then Maureen

*“...kept the tennis ball that came off me (Ray) and Mairtin Hanlon’s swingball set and landed in your fields and wouldn’t give it back no matter how much we begged and that was ten years ago and I (Ray) still haven’t forgotten it,”*⁷⁰

then by considering Ray’s age in the last act where Ray finds the dusty tennis ball the true time classification of the trilogy is finally discovered, with additional information that “a tenner that swingball set did cost me poor ma and da in 1979 that was, when a tenner was a lot of money.”⁷¹

The aforementioned scandals with Catholic priests resonated quite a lot with the British people, especially because it was so connected to almost everyone. Patrick O’Mahony and Gerard Delanty mention in their book *Rethinking Irish History* that the Catholic church in the 20th century was a significantly sized enterprise, because it employed a lot of people and engaged in many organizations and projects.⁷²

⁶⁷ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

⁶⁸ Duffy, *Atlas of Irish History*, 135.

⁶⁹ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

⁷⁰ Ibid.,

⁷¹ Ibid.,

⁷² Patrick O’Mahony and Gerard Delanty, *Rethinking Irish history: Nationalism, Identity and Ideology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). p. 64.

4.2. A skull in Connemara

A skull in Connemara is the second play of the trilogy to be analyzed. This play is considerably shorter than the other two, with only four acts. These acts differ slightly in their connections.

The play opens the same way as in *The Beauty Queen*. We are introduced to a “fairly Spartan main room”⁷³ of Mick Dowd’s cottage, where he is talking to his old bingo hopping/liquor-sharing neighbor and friend Mary. Mick is a type of man who, with a deep, repressed subtlety walks the line of a grieving man.

The difference in the plot pattern comes when, in the next act, we are moved to the local cemetery. The main storyline moves around a car accident that happened to Mick Dowd years ago, in which his wife Oona died. Or at least that is what Mick tells us. It must be fate then that Mick is a gravedigger who manages the graves on the local cemetery. Each year Mick Dowd works his way through a different part of the town cemetery, exhuming and disposing of the bones to make room for the next dead. One night his duties lead him to his wife’s grave. The news of him ‘meeting’ his wife again is too much and it only adds more sorrow to his soul, which he already likes to bathe in alcohol enough.

Throughout the play, Mairtin Hanlon, a young boy in his early twenties, suggests that Oona’s death was not an accident and that Mick is a murderer. Since it has been established in the previous chapters that Leenane is a small village, people here have little to no secrets from each other. That means everyone in Leenane thinks Mick killed his wife even though he says otherwise and no guilt was proven to him. This motive of gossip is also noticed by Heath A. Diehl, who mentions that “in Connemara, gossip circulates among the characters and motivates them to action.”⁷⁴

Mairtin is helping Mick with his works and, with Martin being a young ‘tough’ guy, he starts teasing Mairtin. They drink and talk about all sorts of things, but Mick keeps his cool and does nothing to this guy. Both men finish their work of digging graves and crushing

⁷³ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

⁷⁴ Heath A. Diehl, *Classic Realism, Irish Nationalism, and a New Breed of Angry Young Man in Martin McDonagh's "The Beauty Queen of Leenane"* in *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Midwest Modern Language Association, 2001), 98-117.
URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1315142> . Accessed: 15-05-2017

bones to save space and leave for home in Mick's car. His wife Oola's bones are never found in the grave where they were supposed to be.

Suddenly, we are moved to the last act beginning with Mick, entering his home covered in blood. Here we later meet Thomas the local cop, who is also Mairtin's brother. He brings a skull with its forehead busted open to make Mick confess. He, however, only laughs at him and uses black humor to mock Thomas even though it seems true at first.

Mick: A pure, drink-driving was all my Oona was, as all along I've said, but if it's a murderer ye've always wanted living in yere midst ye can fecking have one.

Thomas: D'you think I'm going to believe this pile of fecking bull?! Down the disco with Ray Dooley tonight Mairtin is, and nowhere but the disco.

Mick: But, sure, if down the disco Mairtin was, how would I have ended up with his bastard brains dripping down the bloody front of me ?

Mary: No...!

Mick: D'you see how great a copper he is Maryjohnny, with his skills and his solving and his lettuces in empty fridges, yet he doesn't bat an eye at a blood-soaked man standing whap-bang in front of the feck-brained fool...

Thomas: You killed him?

Mick: I did, aye. His body's hanging halfway out the windscreen of me Anglia a mile away there.⁷⁵

Right after that we are presented with a fight, which is broken by none other than Mairtin returning to the house. He acts like a completely different person even defending Mick. We even find out that the skull is a scheme constructed by Thomas who wanted to arrest him so bad he dug up Oona's bones and created a crack on her skull. All he did was only for a job promotion, which is quite dishonest for a policeman.

Alcohol plays an important role in this play. Just like Ray's messages fueled *The Beauty Queen's* story forward, so does Poteen here. "*Poteen breakfast and poteen suppers is all I ever see consumed in this house.*"⁷⁶ Oblivion is usually associated with alcohol. In this

⁷⁵ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

⁷⁶ Ibid.,

cultural context, however, the characters use alcohol as a means for remembering. They use it to rediscover the darker elements long lost in the past and use them for mischief. Poteen is a powerful way to stir up old guilt. With some people it fuels the most destructive human instincts. All then quickly boils up to a point where murdering a wife or a neighbor becomes the norm.

Family life is portrayed negatively here. Mary has grandsons who seem to have some loyalty towards her as the main authority figure, but without having any influence on their lives. Younger grandsons refuse to show respect to their parents by calling them '*the get*'.⁷⁷ Mairtin proves this right by saying what he used to reply to his own mother: "*You're the get that should know, Mam.*"⁷⁸ He then goes on describing the mistreatments and violent abuse he has to live with from a father who "*took his belt off to you for no reason at all eight times a week.*"⁷⁹ This provides a negative image of fathers as well as the thought of a cruel childhood.

Text of *A Skull in Connemara* is usually, when compared with other McDonagh's drama works, described as one of the weaker ones. It is mainly because it lacks original plot and character set, which are all typical for the said author. Overall the text is quite morbid and most of the play is centered on a cemetery and crushing dead people's bones for fun.

A Skull In Connemara lacks the focus of deeply complicated loathing between relatives and close friends that the other two plays in the trilogy are centered on. From this, it is comparatively lighter. The relationships, however, do remain a tremendous driving force. Mick's relationships with Mary and Mairtin Hanlon perfectly clarify the help and harm, pros and cons of the gossipy small village.

4.3. The Lonesome West

In *The Lonesome West*, McDonagh combines both methods of scene changing, but keeps the thought of the play being mostly in one area true. The majority of the play takes place again in a kitchen (for the purposes and practicality of a scene it could be considered as a living room too) of a rural house, for seven acts, except one act where father Welsh-Walsh-

⁷⁷ "Get." Urban Dictionary. Accessed 01 Aug. 2016.

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Get&defid=688672>

⁷⁸ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*,

Welsh is near the lake. At the beginning, we meet brothers Coleman and Valen Connors who are returning from their father's funeral, being followed by a young father Welsh. Then we are informed that a policeman named Thomas Hanlon was found dead, drowned in a lake. The fourth scene brakes the pattern, because we are moved to a lake bank where Welsh talks to a young girl named Girleen, who is in love with the young parson, but she keeps it to herself. We find out about her love much sooner in a letter from Pato in *The Beauty Queen*, where he writes to his brother; "*The one to poor Girleen you can give to her any time you see her, it is only to tell her to stop falling in love with priests.*"⁸⁰ Another position switch comes with a letter in the fifth scene where father Welsh reads his letter to the Connor brothers.

The Lonesome West is the only play in the whole trilogy where true drama overflows, compared with the other two. First dramatic experience comes in scene two, where Coleman takes his brother's plastic figures collection of saints on a plate and puts it into the turned on oven and leaves. Another shock comes after Welsh's letter, when we find out that Welsh's killed himself. In the letter, Welsh tasked brothers with clearing the old wrongs they had with each other and forgiving each other. That, however, only sparked following confrontation of the two, because their temper doesn't go along well with opening old wounds. Brothers eventually find out, that the greatest tragedies in their life are their own doing and they hurt each other since they were little boys.

The Lonesome West can be compared with the previous plays in terms of verbal disputes. Unlike the other two, here we encounter many dramatic situations that go far beyond the line of words. Brothers shoot at each other, push and even fight each other with a knife and we find Coleman melting his brother's figures. These figures ultimately hurt Welsh too, when he inserts his hands into the molted plastics. The only calming moment is when Father Welsh talks with Girleen on the lake bank. This is disrupted subsequently by his suicide. *The Lonesome West* does not reach over as much as Maureen's transformation to her mother, but there is a similar pattern. The desire for a change that never happens ends the whole Leenane trilogy. Welsh bet his own soul for the redemption of the two brothers and for a while it really looks like they could reconcile, but all hell breaks loose again and both brothers seem to be destined to fight each other forever.

Story of *The Lonesome West* belongs to McDonagh's category of small plays. It contains only four characters and except one scene they occupy only one shared space during

⁸⁰ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

the plot. These four characters are key for *The Lonesome West*, especially brothers Coleman and Valene. They both live together even in their adulthood and from their cohabitation arise many conflicts often from “petty”⁸¹ causes.

Dialogues between the brothers are short, straightforward and since it is mainly arguing it leads to fast alterations between them. They fluently shift from verbal quarrels to fights in which they do not hesitate to aim a shotgun or threaten with a knife by putting it on one another’s throat. The verbal exchange can be in moments perceived as rather simplistic, when one of the brothers keeps nodding to the other one’s ideas whilst repeating the same thing over.

Coleman: Sure that fella’s pure mad.

Valene: He’s outright mad.

*Coleman: He’s a lube...*⁸²

On the other hand it is in a way a special moment when the two brothers agree with each other and we can see a glimpse of a family type relationship.

Speeches given by the priest are usually longer and more coherent – with its contents it is more like preaching to the brothers about their behavior. In other cases they may be considered as more of a soliloquy. Welsh Walsh Welsh seems to have this undying sense of responsibility (although it literally died with him in the end) for the brothers, even though he finds out about the fact that their father’s death was not an accident. It was an act of murder “surprisingly” because of a petty reason⁸³.

Father Walsh is the most important character of the Leenane trilogy, being the only character appearing in all three plays at least being mentioned in stories. He is a thirty-five year old representative of catholic faith, who seems to have lost his own faith and switched it for alcoholism and depressive relationships with other people from the village. The residents have no respect for this man. They prove it by laughing even at his first name when they read his suicide note. The even the thought of it is quite morbid, but on the planks of a theatre it creates an awkwardly funny situation.

⁸¹ That is coincidently a spot on description, since one of the most serious pranks was Coleman cutting the ears off of Valene’s dog

⁸² Martin McDonagh. *Plays: I*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

⁸³ Their father was laughing at Coleman’s hairstyle, so Coleman took their shotgun and blew their father’s head off

Coleman: (pause) Did you see 'Roderick' his name is?

Valene: (snorts) I did.

Coleman: (pause.Seriously) We shouldn't laugh.

*Valene: Nods. Both pull serious faces.*⁸⁴

His surname is a chapter on its own. Since the first mention of his name we are presented with an ongoing but unintended joke. Is it “Father Welsh Walsh Welsh”⁸⁵. The root of this name problem lies within its similarity with the name Wales, which refers to a place as well as a language. Both of these are very distant and certainly very Non-Irish.

In the first two plays from the trilogy is Welsh portrayed as a character that deserves to be spoken about with respect. In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and even *A Skull in Connemara* we find out that he is not a hard man to make angry, because he is capable of hitting his pupils without hesitation, laying justice upon them in a way. Ray mentions in *The Beauty Queen* that he “punched Mairtin Hanlon in the head once, and for no reason. [...] Although, now, that was out of character for Father Welsh. Father Welsh seldom uses violence, same as most young priests.”⁸⁶ In *A Skull in Connemara*, on the other hand Welsh is presented as the one holding the budget in bingo and allows later Mary to play the game, ignoring that her family members forbade her doing so. The young priest is the one who orders Mick to dig up the seven years old remains of his dead wife and physically punishes Mairtin by “a back-fecking-hander.”⁸⁷ This Father Welsh has nothing in common with the acting character appearing in *The Lonesome West*.

Reason for this ‘change’ might be the fact that Father Welsh was a figure that was not included in the first written version of the last play. His adding can be attributed to the director Garry Hynes.⁸⁸ *A Skull* and *The Beauty* originally had four characters each. *The Lonesome West* had only three, but McDonagh rewrote the play so that this matter was fixed.

Thanks to this addition it is safe to say that this trilogy, being connected almost only by the fact that it all happened in Leenane, got an important binding element.

⁸⁴ Martin McDonagh. *Plays: 1*. London: Methuen Drama, 1999. PDF.

⁸⁵ Ibid.,

⁸⁶ Ibid.,

⁸⁷ Ibid.,

⁸⁸ Lonergan, Patrick. *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), 162.

4.4. The Lonesome West live performance

Being the only play from the Leenane trilogy currently available to see on the boards of the Czech theatres, *The Lonesome West* is sadly the only play that can be compared with its literary original for the purposes of this thesis.

The person behind directing, translating the play for the Czech audience and also acting in this play is Ondřej Sokol. It is nice to take into consideration all these facts when comparing the live performance to the original, because from the way the play is performed it should be possible to find out how the translator, while being also a director, understood the original material and whether he decided to alter the final picture in some ways. It is certainly fair to say that translating the play to later direct (working on *The Lonesome West* meant for Sokol his directional debut) it and then finally play in it too is a daring action.

The Lonesome West was a success from the very beginning here in the Czech Republic. That explains why it is still being played to this day. There's a Bachelor thesis focusing specifically on the critical reception of the play here. Lenka Smrčková mentions in it that the young director hit exceptional success with newspaper titles like *'Theatre miracle in The Drama Club'* or *'The Event in The Drama Club'*⁸⁹. Apart from general description of the play because of its uncommon topic and mostly unknown author McDonagh, these reviews mainly praised Sokol's sense for precision and depth when working with his acting colleagues both from the point of actor as well director.

Fifteen years from its premiere, *The Lonesome West* still feels like something new and special. The environment of *The Drama Club* personally seems to be the perfect place to stage this play. The auditorium is spacious enough to fit about a hundred and fifty people with about thirty people on the small balcony above. That ensures a more homely, maybe even intimate experience from seeing the play, which means a proper setting for an *in-yer-face* play. With the combination of excellent performances by actors it created a great atmosphere during times of laughter with same intensity as scenes with arguments, fights or even father Welsh's letter monologue.

⁸⁹ Lenka Smrčková, *"Critical Responses To Ondřej Sokol's Plays in Činoherní klub"*. Bachelor thesis. Praha: Univerzita Karlova. Filozofická fakulta. Katedra Divadelní vědy, 2015. s.17.

The stage, for such a small place, is designed very cleverly. Using full potential of the space available, the stage doesn't even need to be moved or altered, even though there are completely different environments in the play – a kitchen/living room and a lake shore. It has been done by making the main room on the stage, but at the same time there is a second floor with a boat wreck setup on the room walls. By aiming the stage lights, the second floor is dark and it doesn't interfere with the scene. The only thing necessary to switch to a different location is just to switch the lights, which is very practical.

McDonagh's texts have very characteristic elements. Sokol, who as a director translates the texts he wants to stage, deals with these elements on a professional level and follows the original. There are many obstacles that are dealt with well. Numerous references to British TV series or events from the 2nd half 20th century Britain are transferred inconspicuously and do not interfere with the overall perception of the story. Since the environment is supposed to capture a typical rural Irish countryside, conversations are strongly influenced by the local dialect. These elements are adjusted for the Czech language well, even the parts, where characters seem to think over some made up words or are not sure about a certain expression. The way the text is processed makes it seem very authentic to the countryside way of life, even when transformed into a different language.

Actors also have a merit on the authenticity. Both brothers Coleman and Valene (played by J. Dulava and M. Taclík) portrait the characters with great skill. Taclík, playing Valene, is the younger, more straightforward and more naive of the two. He is also the funnier, partly because his comical portrayal of a furious statue collector. Dulava's Coleman, on the other hand, represents pure cynicism, mixed with a decent dose of violence. They both work together well, creating a great atmosphere, even though there is death and violence everywhere they seem to step in. Ondřej Sokol in his role of father Welsh gives an excellent performance as well. It makes viewers think about Welsh's inner fight. At first it looks like he has doubts about his faith, but later on in the play it becomes more of a fight with himself. Girleen is played by Sandra Černodrinská, who has taken the role well and created an interesting character, mixing sort of a 'rednecky', sarcastic personality, which does not look too complex on a first sight. Later on she reveals her feelings for father Welsh that were hidden until the point where father Welsh died. All actors give excellent performance and have a good chemistry together, creating an interesting, funny and dramatic story.

That brings me to a comparison of experience from reading and seeing the play. Overall, reading the play was much more dramatic and darker than seeing it live. The scenes with brothers fighting, Welsh putting hands into the melted plastic are good examples of drama in *The Lonesome West*, where live performance of these scenes enables the viewers to absorb the emotions with more senses than just reading skills and imagination, because the actors add “*something extra*” to it. This ‘*something extra*’ is the main difference between the experience from reading and seeing it. The live performance made a great difference in some scenes where McDonagh’s drama is very specific. It is laughter in the most inappropriate scenes. A good example for one of those situations might be a scene where brothers read Welsh’s letter to them. When discussing his first name Roderick, the reading experience was rather sad and full of grief, but seeing the live performance created a rather awkward situation that was very funny. That was the most significant difference. Seeing laughter in awkward, sad or even violent situations (a scene where Coleman was popping chips bags with Valene’s head while fighting) is achievable only through experiencing the play the way it is supposed to be experienced – seeing and hearing it live.

5. Conclusion

The primary aim of this bachelor paper was to analyze the Leenane trilogy of a renowned Anglo-Irish playwright Martin McDonagh. Specifically, it concerns plays *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Skull in Connemara* and *The Lonesome West*.

A time preceding the In-Yer-Face era was first introduced to provide a kind of historical background for further work with the topic of British theatre in the 20th century. This was followed by direct description of In-Yer-Face theatre and its main pillars it stands on. Working with literary sources of professionals dealing with this topic for over 2 decades proved to be effective in making strong basis for the subsequent analysis. Eamonn Jordan's *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories* provided enough information on McDonagh's work. Patrick Lonergan's *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh* holds some interesting information about the reception of McDonagh's work and it worked as a counterside for Eamonn's book. They both worked as an excellent source for finding out McDonagh's origins. I also relied on Ondřej Pilný and his book *Irony & Identity in Modern Irish Drama*. He is a leading force and a teacher in the Irish studies faculty in Prague. This faculty also produces a journal called *Litteraria Pragensia* containing interesting articles about Irish drama or transcripts from conferences of some renowned experts that also proved helpful. Aleks Sierz, who is an expert critic that wrote the most complete study to the date on In-Yer-Face theatre so I relied with basically everything on his work *In-yer-face Theatre*.

The following part answers the question of McDonagh's depiction of Irish community in the Leenane trilogy. Some general points are considered first, because they are shared by all of the plays and then the focus moved further on to the analysis of individual plays. Being so young, it is necessary to give McDonagh credit for creating so entertaining and fluent trilogy. Right after their respective premieres the plays were a blast, catapulting McDonagh into the spotlight. These plays take place in Leenane, an Irish countryside west of Ireland. McDonagh picks his placement carefully, drawing from his own experience with Leenane. He creates his own that has nothing to do with the real one, at least concerning the people.

The whole trilogy is distinguished by the unity of place and plot. Each of the plays has its own coherent plot, but also its own set of characters, consisting of four members, specific to each play (except father Walsh-Welsh, who appears in various references in the first 2 plays). It makes it an interesting case of narrative, combining events or characters either

appearing in the future, or calling upon them to the past. There is a specific atmosphere and the feeling of certain coherence of the story is reflected in the spaces of scenes.

The Beauty Queen of Leenane deals with an interesting topic of a desire for a change that will never occur. This will, however, be revealed to the readers in the end, because unlike other stories that have a straight predictable plot the future of *The Beauty Queen* can be speculated but the fate of Maureen can definitely not be anticipated. Relationship of the main characters Mag and Maureen depicts a disturbing image. They engage in situations that are mostly full of quarrels, vulgarisms and mutual harm, which escalates from mental to physical harm. Maureen pouring boiling oil over Mag's old wrinkly hand to downright torture her must be a sight to see. Pato Dooley, Maureen's desired lover shows us through his work engagement in England relations between Irish and English 'colleagues' which gives an interesting insight on the mentality and hatred of the two nations towards each other.

Time is considered to be chaotic and uncertain. Being introduced to a kitchen set into a 1960s vibe, then be offset by a 1980s show and then be presented a 'this just in' news that is clearly from 1990s (let us take the catholic abuses scandal as an example) is surely distracting. Upon closer reading, however, we find out that Ray tells us himself with his story about his swing ball set. The trilogy is set in the year 1989 Leenane, but this is the only time that mattered.

A Skull in Connemara shares the depiction of a small modest rural house. Whole play is bursting with black and morbid humor only disrupted by an insult or some innuendo to hurt. This black mood is secured by the placement of cemetery. Alcohol is a motivator and fuel here and the 'traditional family life' gets a nice bashing too. The young generation is considering the parents as stupid and old. Instead of the older generation redeeming themselves the relationship is negated by stories of abuse from parents. Relationships of the main characters here perfectly clarify the help and harm, pros and cons of the gossipy small village.

With the last play the story felt the same, but different as well. Yes, there are again 4 main characters and yes, there is one main modest room that is the central for the play. But plot wise this is something different. *The Lonesome West* does not reach over as much as Maureen's transformation to her mother, but there is a similar pattern. The characters encounter many dramatic situations that go far beyond the line of words – brothers Colemans push and fight each other and they do not hesitate to aim a gun at one another.

The analysis shows that McDonagh's Leenane trilogy is very hard to identify, describe and interpret. Irish community here is described as a bunch of bad tempered, aggressive, violent, selfish, intolerant and gossipy people who think about their own self interests. Their hatred reaches over the borders. There are hints dropped throughout the plays that relationship of England and Ireland is at a freezing-point. The only relatively positive character representing hope for better tomorrow and actually attempting to save someone eventually kills himself, because there seems to be no other way than to kill himself and sacrifice for a good cause. This good cause is a hope for the salvation of the two brothers that may never reconcile. The only way out of their -now meaning all characters of the trilogy- desperate situation is love, which is unfortunately a rare commodity in this region.

6. Resumé

Irská komunita byla v posledních padesáti letech často cílem, nebo spíše zdrojem různých autorů. Pochází odtud několik spisovatelů, kteří jsou považováni za nejlepší všech dob. V tomto období padesátých až šedesátých let se také začaly objevovat počátky nově vystupující divadelní vlny, již čerpala z absurdního divadla a tzv. kuchyňského dramatu. Tato vlna nastoupila naplno v letech devadesátých, kdy také byla pojmenována jako In-Yer-Face. Tenkrát také vznikla trilogie zasazená do krajiny rurální irské vesnice, kterou napsal tehdy mladičkový začínající spisovatel Martin McDonagh.

Centrem zájmu této bakalářské práce je tedy McDonaghova Leenanská trilogie, v našich krajích též nazývaná Connemarská. Jejím cílem je analyzovat, jakým způsobem McDonagh zobrazuje irskou komunitu v jednotlivých hrách Leenanské trilogie, jimiž jsou Kráska z Leenane, Lebka z Connemary a Osířelý západ. Během analýzy je pozornost věnována také podobnostem s divadlem In-Yer-Face. Zmíněn je tu i motiv neurčitosti času a další.

První kapitola představuje vývoj britského dramatu od 50. do 90. let, kdy byla světu představena nová divadelní vlna zvaná In-Yer-Face. Tento vývoj britského divadelního dramatu posledních padesáti let, jak by se také kapitola dala nazvat, podkládá autor práce knihami autorů, jako jsou Patrick Lonergan, Eamonn Jordan, Patrick O'Mahony, Aleks Sierz a český zástupce irských studií na Pražské fakultě Ondřej Pilný, jenž je zároveň editorem časopisu *Litteraria Pragensia*, který uveřejňuje zajímavé články a záznamy z konferencí expertů irského dramatu. Kapitola také obsahuje informace o rozvoji divadelní scény a okolnostech, ať už ekonomických, sociálních či politických, které do značné míry tomuto rozvoji pomohly.

Konec úvodní kapitoly je několika slovy věnován McDonaghovi samotnému. McDonagh je zde jako autor uveden do kontextu dramatického a společenského prostředí. Je zde popsána jeho tvorba ve spojení s devadesátými léty a již plně aktivní vlnou In-Yer-Face. McDonagh je mnohdy s touto vlnou spojován, a to z několika důvodů. Jeho hry začaly vycházet v době, kdy divadelní scéně vládla zmiňovaná vlna In-Yer-Face, a zároveň jeho hry jevíly známky podobnosti s touto vlnou, aniž by se jednalo o záměr autora.

V poslední kapitole je definován termín In-Yer-Face. Úvod se zabývá etymologií původního významu termínu. Autorem použitých zdrojů je Aleks Sierz, který tento termín zavedl a rozšířil. Dále je věnována pozornost významu termínu v odborných slovnících pro ilustraci současného pojetí. Závěr kapitoly zmiňuje první použití výrazu v divadelním kontextu přímou citací kritika.

Závěrečná podkapitola teoretické části se věnuje samotnému divadlu In-Yer-Face. Nejprve je představeno obecné pojetí a tradiční znaky tohoto druhu divadla. Tyto informace jsou opět podloženy zatím nejucelenější studií tohoto tématu od Alekse Sierze. Ten mimo jiné uvádí, že mezi jedny z prvních her patří například *Blasted* nebo *Shopping and Fucking*. Ty jsou už jen svým názvem přinejmenším provokativní. Dle Sierze lze tento směr divadla rozdělit na dvě větve, tzv. „hot“ a „cool“ divadlo. Dělí se podle úrovně, s jakou zachází do extrémů, např. v zobrazování témat, která jsou tabu nebo nepříjemná pro běžného diváka. Divadlo označené „cool“ je méně drastické, protože je zjemněno oddalujícími prvky jako humor či širší obecenstvo. V závěrečném odstavci je McDonaghova tvorba přiřazena do „cool“ dramatiky.

V úvodu analytické části práce jsou nejprve shrnuté body společné všem třem hrám. Následně je každá z her individuálně rozebrána a závěrečná kapitola uzavírající celek popisuje zkušenosti a srovnání dramatického zpracování s literární předlohou.

V první kapitole analytické části jsou uvedeny faktické poznámky o vydání jednotlivých her. Prvotina *Kráska z Leenane* měla svoji premiéru 1. února 1996 v Galway. Tamtéž je následující rok uvedena premiéra i zbylých dvou her. *Lebka z Connemary* byla uvedena 3. června a *Osířelý západ* o týden později. Za hry byl McDonagh několikrát oceněn. Celá trilogie se dočkala uvedení i v Čechách, kde slaví v současné době velké úspěchy. V neposlední řadě je zde krátce popsáno prostředí Connemarského regionu, který je ve skutečnosti vyhledávanou turistickou oblastí pro svou krásnou přírodu, ale i vzácné hrobky. Navíc zde panuje tradiční vesnická nálada, která zůstává neporušena městským ruchem.

Dále jsou analyzovány texty Leenanské trilogie. Všechny hry se vyznačují jednotou prostředí a dějové linie. Hry mají minimální počet postav, takže každá má své pevné místo a jasný účel. Vše na sebe přesně navazuje a propojuje i věci budoucí. Dalšími motivy, které jednotlivé hry spojují, jsou brutalita, sobeckost, egocentrismus, ale i jistý druh izolace, ať už na vesnici nebo v sobě samém. Atmosféra her je popisována jako intimní, jelikož velká část her probíhá v malém uzavřeném prostoru.

Kráska z Leenane se zabývá velice zajímavým tématem nesplněné touhy po změně. Toto téma se však ukáže kompletně až na konci, kdy se čtenář dozví o smutném konci hlavní postavy Maureen, která se přetransformuje do své matky a zaujme tak její postavení místo toho aby odešla a začala nový život. Mezi Maureen a matkou Mag je zde vyobrazen znepokojivý vztah. Dvojice se neustále dostává do konfliktů, které dokonce eskalují z násilí psychického na násilí fyzické, když Maureen záměrně popálí matčinu ruku horkým olejem. Ve hře je také zobrazen nesnášenlivý postoj Irů a Angličanů vůči sobě navzájem. Kterákoli zmínka o Anglii je následována nějakým úšklebkem či narážkou.

V trilogii je také viditelná jistá časová neurčitost či nezařaditelnost, ovšem viditelná je bohužel nejlépe převážně v Krásce z Leenane. Bohužel, protože se jedná o velice zajímavý rys této trilogie. Lze uvažovat nad tím, jestli tak autor činí záměrně, protože zmiňované události jsou pro něj něčím významné, či jsou pouze náhodně uspořádány, protože se udály v průběhu autorova života a prostě uvízly v jeho paměti? Nejprve jsou čtenáři uvedeni do vesnické skromné obývací kuchyně zasazené do šedesátých let, na to jsou seznámeni s televizním programem z let osmdesátých a pak formou novinek a drbů zjišťují zprávy o zneužívání dětí katolickými knězi, což je slavná táhlá aféra zasazující hru do let devadesátých. Při pozorném prostudování lze zjistit, že hra Kráska z Leenane je zasazena do roku 1989. Prozrazuje to Rayova historka o tenisovém míčku.

Lebka z Connemary sdílí s předchozí hrou zasazení do prostoru malé skromné kuchyňky/předsíně/obývacího. Celá je protkaná černým a někdy až morbidním humorem, který je pouze místy přerušen slabší urážkou nebo dvojsmyslem. Tato pochmurná nálada způsobená černotou humoru je ještě více umocněna dalším prostředím, v němž část hry probíhá, hřbitovem. V této hře také figuruje ve velké míře alkohol doprovázející hlavní postavy celou hrou. Je zde brán jako palivo pro další hádky, protože zde umocňuje primitivní pudy, mezi které patří, jak jinak než, násilí.

Rodinné hodnoty zde dostávají řádně na frak. Mladá generace vidí rodiče jako hloupé a staré nechápavce. Starší generace místo aby jevila známky pokusu o zlepšení, je odhaleno týrání ze strany rodičů. Vztahy mezi hlavními postavami zde také perfektně vystihují, jak prospěšné a bolestivé zároveň je roznášení drbů v malé vesničce, kde se samozřejmě nic nedá tajit.

Poslední hra Osířelý západ zapadá do popisu ostatních her a zároveň se trochu vymyká. Opět se setkáváme se čtyřmi postavami, opět je zde jedna hlavní místnost, ve které

se odehrává většina děje. Jaký je tedy rozdíl? Osirelý západ nemá tak hluboký dopad jako Maureenina přeměna na její matku, ale je zde jistý dodržený vzorec. Ve hře se setkáváme se spoustou dramatických situací, které vyústí mnohem dál než jen ke slovním šarvátkám. Bratři Colemanovi po sobě neváhají dokonce ani střílet, a to skutečnou puškou. V této hře se zdá být hlavním motivem nenávist a šarvátka mezi bratry. Na podkapitolu analýzy této hry navazuje poslední část, která věnuje pozornost živému vystoupení jako dalšího zdroje poznatků. Zde je věnována pozornost převážně způsobu, jakým Ondřej Sokol hru interpretoval, protože ji zároveň překládal i režíroval.

Konečná analýza ukazuje McDonaghovu Leenanskou trilogii jako velice nesnadno zařaditelnou, co se týká identifikace motivů, popisů a možných vnímání. Irská komunita je zde brána jako banda nervózních, agresivních, násilných, sobeckých, a ignorantských drben, které myslí jen na vlastní zájmy. Nenávist mezi národy je jasně viditelná na první pohled, protože každou chvíli některá z postav pronese něco, co jen ujišťuje o tomto postoji. Východiskem se zdá být láska, které v celé trilogii moc není. Skutky postav jsou následkem citové deprivace, ať jde už o zakrnělou lásku mezi matkou a dcerou, nebo o lásku bratrskou.

Grotesknost a černý humor, to jsou dva důležité aspekty McDonaghových her. Spojuje dohromady komické a tragické pocity a mezitím řeší vážné záležitosti jako je smrt, terorismus, vraždy, svoboda, víra. To vše s černým humorem někde poblíž.

Jediná relativně kladná postava, kterou je Otec Welsh (Walsh-Welsh?). Pokud pomíneme jeho problémy s alkoholem, doufá v lepší zítřky. Zmíněná láska k alkoholu se jeví jako jeho negativní rys, ale ta je podnícena deprimující skutečností, že se snaží napravit nenapravitelné. Tak moc se snaží spasit dvě, na první a vlastně i na druhý pohled, nespasitelné duše, že se uchýlí k jedinému, pro něj přijatelnému, řešení a zabije se v naději, že se hříšníci poučí. Dokonce se ani nedozvíme, jestli tento jediný hrdinský, avšak opět extremistický kousek, uspěl.

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