

ABSTRACT

TURNEY, AARON D. The (De)Evolution of the Irish Anti-hero from Oisín's Fabled Isle to McDonagh's Lonesome West. (Under the direction of Mary Helen Thuente.)

There is a constant, observable conflict in 20th century Irish drama between traditional pagan Irish values and those imported first by Christian missionaries and later by English invaders. Often, dramatic works of this period portray a single character confronting those forces that represent modernity. The character's heroism usually remains obscured by modern standards because he appears in the form of a tramp, an outcast, or even a violent criminal. But the motif is clear: characters such as these are heroic in the traditional Irish sense because they stand as resisters to foreign values that threaten their culture. In the contexts of the plots these characters are not stock heroes, but instead are anti-heroes alienated by events and circumstances and judged by modern standards. Such works do contain clearly defined heroes/heroines who operate according to accepted modern values. The rebellious, shocking, or violent behavior of the anti-hero or anti-heroine is put in juxtaposition.

The project begins with an analysis of the Oisín and St. Patrick legend as the cornerstone emblem of the tug-of-war between Irish tradition and foreign modernity, highlighting the divergence in both the language and the values of those characters. The motif established with the Oisín and St. Patrick tale (the motif in which the invasion of the imported god with foreign values threatens preexisting Irish values recurs in Irish drama throughout the 20th century. My intention is to show that the characters, such as Oisín, who can not fit the mold of modernity, also *must* not. In their inability to adapt, they stand as misfits in their own time, but also as preservers of an Irish tradition that predates colonialism and only lingers in the fringes of modern Irish society. And there is

your anti-hero: not always palatable to the audience (who may be caught up in the immediacy of dramatic events), but always true to dreaming and mythmaking as well as rebellious in behavior, language, verse, or song.

The political intensity of the 20th century is portrayed in generated works of drama that often are reducible to that same heroic/anti-heroic motif. My project will follow a (flexible) chronology of works that will show the (de)evolution of this anti-hero motif beginning with Oisín, followed by characters of J.M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, Brendan Behan, and finally Martin McDonagh. My intended focus is on the anti-hero's life in a relative vacuum, with a specific focus on dialectical expressions, rebellious, even violent behavior, and a general propensity to misunderstand, if not ignore altogether, modern conventions. To clarify, the term "(de)evolution" is appropriate because the characters, as the century progresses, become increasingly antisocial in their sentiments and behavior.

The (De)Evolution of the Irish Anti-hero from Oisín's
Fabled Isle to McDonagh's *Lonesome West*

by
Aaron Daves Turney

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

English

Raleigh, North Carolina

2007

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Carmine Prioli

Dr. Jon Thompson

Dr. Mary Helen Thunte
Chair of Advisory Committee

BIOGRAPHY

Aaron Turney is descended from ancestors some of whom were good, some of whom were not, but were mostly all both good and not good. He was born in a hospital during times that were desperate for some and not for others. He grew up living in many places where people were either happy or not or in between. He currently lives in a house with his wife and children. He and his wife are uncommonly happy but of course worry about the children and the children's future all the time while the children scarcely understand that there's any worry in the world at all. He recognizes the perfection in that. Aaron seeks beauty in family, art, and nature, and ugliness in many things. Most troubling to him is that there is great passion in so few and debilitating smallness in so many, himself included.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction -----	1
Chapter I: Oisín to Synge—the Origins of the Irish Anti-hero-----	4
Chapter II: Nationalism's Pieties—Prison, Purgatory, and Murderin' Hate---	20
Chapter III: McDonagh's West—Lonesome but Living-----	42
Conclusion -----	53
Works Cited -----	55

“You are still wrecked among heathen dreams.”

—St. Patrick to Oisín in W.B. Yeats’ *The Wanderings of Oisín*

Introduction

There are countless instances of conflict in twentieth century Irish drama between traditional pagan Irish values and those imported first by Christian missionaries and later by English invaders. This conflict is often manifest in a single character who plays against those forces and subconsciously treats modernity as hostile and predatory. These characters’ heroism remains inverted by modern values; he or she appears in the form of a tramp, an outcast, or even a violent criminal. But the motif is clear: characters such as these are heroic in a traditional Irish sense because they choose the personal/local over the institutional/colonial. They engage in dreaming, song, poetry, storytelling and mythmaking as an expression of resistance to the foreign elements that threaten their culture. These characters are anything but stock heroes. Instead they are aliens in their own environments, resistant to mores and/or circumstances defined by modern values. Often the anti-hero is cast beside a clearly defined hero/heroine who operates within the accepted parameters of modernity and often makes sacrifices which clearly appeal to modern values. The anti-hero, then, is juxtaposed to the values of society; his or her behavior is boorish, comic, and shocking. Identifying the essentials of Irish tradition is a famously tricky undertaking, but much can be gathered by examining the manifestation of outcast characters in the drama of the century. Anti-heroism is a natural ingredient in any literature that professes to be “Irish.”

Augusta (Lady) Gregory, W.B. Yeats, Edward Martyn, Maud Gonne, all visionaries of both the turn-of-the-century Irish literary and nationalist revival produced deliberate literary works based upon native myth as a vehicle for advancing the revolutionary agenda. These

figures were sometimes at odds philosophically within their circle, their ideas ranging from pacifism to borderline radicalism. As did their nationalist predecessors, these authors assumed that reviving characters from Irish mythology while uplifting “the temple of Irish domesticity, the sacred origin, the mystery of mysteries (Frazier 44)” was a practice useful in unifying “native” Irish people and bolstering nationalist sentiment. With earlier plays such as Yeats’ *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) or Gregory’s *Rising of the Moon* (1907), simple and identifiable Irish peasant characters did heroic things in the name of Ireland. The authors connected ancient myth with more contemporary events in order to pique nationalist interests in their Irish audiences.

The stated interest of the Irish nationalists at the turn of the twentieth century lay in preserving Irish tradition and removing colonizing forces. But by 1922, the turn of events that led Ireland into civil war proved that nationalism had evolved into as much an emblem of modernity as the Black & Tans who attempted to extinguish the Irish rebellion. “The occupier who seemed to have gone left behind a ghost in every mind and machine” (Kiberd/Irish Writer 184). What began as an attempt at spiritually illuminating an obscured native culture had instead fueled a dangerous blaze. Nationalism at large gained momentum, grew, and then fragmented into what many found to be a repressive religious and cultural environment. Moreover, the Nationalist movement had become unviable as a means of preserving traditional Irish values. The endeavor for a revival of Irish tradition was really an attempt to unify the Irish people under one flag. To that purpose, the revival was a flop, but did inspire an historic literary movement. What ensued amounted to a catch-22: nationalist writers tried to invent a peasant class which in truth never existed in order to support a new government which would have never even been conceived of by real Irish peasants in the first place.

Intertwined with Gregory's and Yeats' nationalist sentiments was a sincere desire to restore pride in the traditional, the bardic, the mythic; i.e. the "incorrigible genius for mythmaking" (Gregory 433) into a proud Irish society. But a similar catch-22 reared its head: so many generations of Irish life had passed since the last seanchai had been laid to rest that the lines between traditional and modern were sketchy at best. What nationalist poets and dramatists attempted would be as difficult as trying to revive bardic tradition today by broadcasting on cable television with Irish Spring commercials every quarter hour. Declan Kiberd describes Lady Gregory's and Yeats' predicament well:

"Those who wished to defend ancient values under the new conditions had to evolve new, experimental forms in which to protect those priceless things; and those who welcomed modernization often felt obliged to cloak their new ideas in the forms of tradition...(T)hese were the two major ways of coping with the onset of modernity" (Classics xii)

Twentieth-century Ireland, had no way to return truly to antiquity. The concept of an Irish revolution aided by a new nationalist movement led by Anglo-Irish poets is an excellent example of Kiberd's "new ideas cloaked in the forms of tradition" as could be found. Moreover, that concept is about as starkly "modern" as they come. At best, Irish writers of the twentieth century could hope to tell about their world as it actually was, creating characters who upheld traditional Irish values in less epic ways. These are the characters who serve as the anti-heroes.

The twentieth-century Irish anti-hero is born of Irish myth and modern Irish history. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John M. Synge revived more bardic characters who exemplify an Irishness that is at once timeless yet realistic. As mid-century approached, Sean O'Casey and Brendan Behan used similarly bardic characters to illuminate Irish tradition while also indicting political and cultural forms of corruption in post-colonial Ireland. And finally, contemporary playwright Martin McDonagh creates characters who exist in a quaint hell that is the fringe of a

commodified, post-modernized west of Ireland. All their central characters, while of questionable practical value in their own societies, stand as emblems of an Irish trope: the deliberate, imaginative dreamer who rejects the bleakness of his contemporary world in an attempt to preserve tradition. Such characters are stricken by peculiarities (blindness, poverty, alcoholism, etc.) and exist on the fringes of a society that they view as impenetrable and corrupted. As the century progresses, newer and greater complexities infiltrate the social landscape necessitating devolution of the pathologically antisocial anti-hero character.

Chapter I: Oisín to Synge—the Origins of the Irish Anti-hero

In the Mythic is the Traditional

Oscar Wilde famously said that “Illusion is the first of all pleasures.” While Wilde may have coined a phrase that is cleverly universal, these words indeed go to the heart of the “Irish traditional values” question. Is twentieth-century Irish culture too diluted to be considered an organism of traditional values? Are those values pagan or Christian? In order to explore these questions, one must seek the source, the fork in the road, the moment in storytelling history at which pagan Ireland acquiesced, the moment when St. Patrick the Christian claims victory over the pagan Oisín.

Much of the underlying cultural tension revolves around the question whether traditional Irish values are Christian or pagan. In Yeats’ version of the Oisín legend, *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889), the answer to the question is squarely *pagan*. *The Wanderings of Oisín* is rather edgy considering the era of increasingly puritanical Christianity during which it was published. After all, how can one aggrandize the Pagan without vilifying the Christian? But lifting up the pagan is exactly what Yeats’ Oisín tale does. A few years later, Lady Gregory also penned an adaptation, *Oisín and St. Patrick*, which is thematically identical to Yeats’ version. The chief

difference between the two is that Yeats' version is written in strict verse, drawing more on an ancient epoch while Gregory's capitalizes on the comic futility of Oisín's predicament. In any case, a troubling paradox emerges from the Oisín tale: the hero of Christendom, Christ, represented by the harsh, puritanical St. Patrick, attempts to stamp out the last remaining Fenian figure, Oisín. The tale turns out to be nothing more than a back-and-forth volley of incompatible values. Complicating things further, it is not the perfection of Christian mercy that is illuminated in the tale. Rather, St. Patrick is seen as the villain and Oisín the victim of a foreign cultural value system.

In *The Wanderings of Oisín*, the storytelling in which Oisín indulges not only exemplifies but exacerbates the very cultural irritation that the original story was intended to extinguish. That is, the tale was originally designed to quell any residual native anxiety over the question, *what has happened to Finn and the Fianna?* The answer being, "On the flaming stones, without refuge, the limbs of the Fenians are tost" (Yeats 45). To satisfy the Christian sensibility, the God of Grace, the God of St. Patrick, has proven more powerful because he easily defeats Finn, and more generous than Finn because, unlike Finn, he guarantees salvation. At the same time, the tale may satisfy the pagan sensibility. With Finn, although mighty, overpowered by a new king, nothing seems amiss in terms of ancient mythological systems of power. But native Irish conceptions of power and generosity are favorably compared to those of Christianity. Unlike Christ, Irish folk heroes were great warriors and bearers of riches to those who showed their allegiance. "The two most characteristic elements of the Oisín-Patrick dialogues are the defiance by the doughty old pagan of the Christian religion, and his lamentation over his abject state...he is hard set to believe Patrick when the saint tells him that Finn is in hell suffering torments"

(Alspach 853). In the tale, neither St. Patrick nor Christ is any great warrior or ring bearer. The Fianna are simply dead and gone to hell through withering time, not climactic battle.

This tale thus uncovers the most significant paradox beneath the surface of modern Irish culture: the Irish are a deeply Christian people and the Irish are a deeply Pagan people. Ireland has been faithfully Christian for far too long to recover its original pagan identity fully; yet Ireland has been from the furthest reaches of history too Pagan to eject such elements from its traditions. This paradox is a defining difficulty for anyone trying to ensnare the elusive phantom of a “true” Irish tradition.

What Yeats and Gregory most revived with their adaptations of the Oisín legend was an Irish anti-hero trope that had been in a fitful sleep through centuries of colonization. The Oisín legend produces the motif of the outsider, the dreamer, the resistor, the character who bears an allegiance to tradition that will not succumb to modernity regardless of the cost. In the end of *The Wanderings*, Oisín replies to St. Patrick’s bid that he should “kneel and wear out the flags and pray for your (his) soul that is lost,” with “When my life and body has ceased,/I will go to Caoilte, and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan, Lomair,/And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast” (45). Anti-Christian/anti-modernity or not, Oisín is heroic because he rejects that which threatens the essence of his cultural past; he is anti-heroic because he is a heathen misfit in a modern Christianized world. There is something unquestionably noble in Oisín’s stated preference to go to hell to be with his ancestors rather than be assimilated into a cultural pigeonhole with which he is spiritually misaligned. Clearly the richness of detail in Oisín’s laments is to be laid against the drab and skinny platitudes of his conqueror, St. Patrick.

Unmistakable is both Yeats’ and Gregory’s portrayal of St. Patrick as one-dimensional, caustic, even evil. In Yeats’ *Wanderings of Oisín*, Oisín the pagan is clearly the sympathetic

character. Yeats allows Oisín to describe in immense detail all the beauty, glory, generosity, and strength in his world of tradition. Of the total 927 lines in *The Wanderings*, 905 are spoken by Oisín. The remaining 22 lines are reserved for the bearer of the “crooked crozier” to chastise our hero in the most stereotyped clerical fashion. Patrick’s first lines show the utter insensitivity of the Christian missionary to the traditions of his targets for conversion:

“You who are bent, and bald, and blind
With a heavy heart and a wandering mind,
Have know three centuries, poets sing,
Of dalliance with a demon thing.” (Yeats 1)

Immediately Oisín launches into a moving descriptive lament of his displaced culture mentioning “innumerable spears, horsemen with their floating hair, barley, honey, wine, merry couples dancing, the white body that lay by mine, deer, baying hounds, burial mounds.” In addition, Oisín invokes “passionate Maeve,” who is still found on “the dove-grey edge of the sea/A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode/On a horse with a bridle of findrinny.”

To which St. Patrick replies flatly:” You are still wrecked among heathen dreams” (Yeats 1)

The dialogue between St. Patrick and Oisín is emblematic of the cultural pressures that Christianity put on Ireland. It is no accident that the St. Patrick character is unpoetic, unimaginative, harsh, and menacing. Certainly Patrick’s banal retorts are to be compared with Oisín’s richness of story. In later dramas, the Oisín trope reemerges as a collectively inherited subconscious ideal manifested in a form that is unmistakably familiar: the form of the outsider, a degraded, decrepit tramp who lives in a fantastic world of illusion, song and story derived from a vibrant past.

Almost from the outset of the Irish drama revival, John M. Synge reacted to the (seemingly) disingenuous gesture of totally idealizing the Irish peasant in order to generate a

political effect. Synge's characters embodied less allegorical value, flaunted real human flaws and spoke in careful, overly authentic language with "that stilling and slowing which turns the imagination in upon itself" (Yeats 407). Among the complexities of Synge's plays was his development of common anti-heroic characters, those who like Oisín resist Anglicized modernity regardless of social cost. But unlike Oisín, Synge's characters claimed no direct family ties to Irish mythological figures. Audience reception of the characters' frankness and baseness ran the gamut. Some, such as critic Joseph Holloway, predictably took a puritanical stance accusing Synge of "stor(ing) those crude, coarse sayings from childhood and now present(ing) them in a play" in his 1907 production, *The Playboy of the Western World*. Others such as George Roberts, founder of the National Irish Theater Society, recognized the valuable authenticity of natural wit, calling it "the finest [play] ever written if you had only the wit to see it" (Holloway 456). Synge's Irish anti-hero stood as a reaction to the idealized peasantry of Yeats and Lady Gregory, but also revived an ancient motif, rekindling some very traditional tensions in audiences.

Although driven by motives more or less in line with those of his nationalist contemporaries, Synge approached the Irish identity question from a more objective angle. Upon the suggestion of Yeats to go to the Aran Islands, Synge discovered an Ireland that in many ways was indeed the land of the ideal peasant that Lady Gregory and Yeats so desperately sought to revive. But Synge's works were less politically charged than those which Gregory, Martyn, and Yeats had originally cultivated (such as Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon* or Yeats' *Cathleen ni Houlihan*). This fact granted Synge some license to show his characters as not only traditional, but also less than ideal. Yeats himself notes Synge's dedication to the authenticity of his characters: "The only literature of the Irish country people is their songs, full often of extravagant love, and their stories of kings and of kings' children...Mr. Synge, indeed, sets

before us ugly, deformed or sinful people, but his people, moved by no practical ambition, are driven by a dream of that impossible life” (Saddlemeyer 55). Here Yeats acknowledges that Synge’s characterization of less-than-ideal Irish folk is an important step in identifying and preserving Irish tradition by departing somewhat from the epic and dealing more with the local and the personal.

Synge’s early work *Riders to the Sea* (1904) deals rather directly with the push and pull between imported and traditional values without engaging in any outright exposure of nineteenth century Irish peasant shortcomings (as he does in later works). In the play, the character Maurya concerns herself with a “Christian” burial for her departed sons, but the pagan force more than lingers when Aran burial tradition takes hold of the ceremony, therefore indicating the immutable power of tradition. What Synge manages to do with *Riders* is raise the question of Irish tradition by showing just how commingled the pre- and post-pagan forces have become. In the decades of drama that follow, we see more frequent appearances of characters unable to exhibit the smooth, almost unconscious melding of two belief systems that Maurya does. Instead, characters emerge who are like Oisín, faltering under incompatible cultural forces, experiencing social disenfranchisement, and finishing as consummate rebels to outlander influence.

Synge’s Christy Mahon (*Playboy of the Western World*, 1907), revives the anti-hero trope in more contemporary terms. Now, rather than was the case with Oisín, who had only the foreign Christian platitudes of the arrogant St. Patrick to contend with, the new savage outsider now faces an entire village of burgeoning modernity. The folks of *Playboy*’s late nineteenth-century Mayo have embraced all of the elements of materialism and shallow piety that have resulted from centuries of post-pagan Christian and English influence. From the ambitious

Widow Quin to the spineless Shawn and his absentee overseer Father Reilly, the village structure is put to a cultural test when faced with the outsider Christy's command over their imaginations. Christy's emergence from the ditch represents the organic, the non-institutional. Use of the dreamer/beggar character is central to Synge's anti-heroes. In *Playboy*, the relative dramatic mystery created by a character's detachment from the society that sets the play in motion is necessary in order for the playwright to illustrate the process of exile from and reemergence into that society. Synge finds it important to blur the line between the modern heroic, the Christy whose strength and power earn him respect in bourgeois Mayo, and the anti-heroic, the bardic Christy who possesses imaginative super-strength and "can tell as many lies as four men" (Synge 100). Audiences find it impossible not to celebrate the Christy who ultimately chooses to wander in the opposite direction of a material, modern existence.

The more detached from bourgeois society Christy remains, the more traditional he remains in the bardic sense. Pegeen Mike's comparison of Shawn to Christy is of central importance: "Wouldn't it be a bitter thing for a girl to go marrying the like of Shaneen, and he a middling kind of a scarecrow, with no savagery or fine words in him at all? (Synge 111). Pegeen's thoughtful affections for "savagery" and "fine words" indicate a subconscious connection that the contemporary bourgeoisie have to mythmaking. But the pressure of modern law infiltrates the scene and Michael, Shawn and Pegeen subdue Christy to take him to the peelers. At the play's end, it comes clear that Pegeen's aversion was never to Christy's willingness to commit patricide; rather, fear of retribution for involvement in the act itself drives the locals' actions. Once Christy's guilt of deed is removed at the end, Pegeen is again drawn back to his savagery, lamenting "Oh my grief...I've lost the only playboy of the Western World" (113).

Synge's *Well of the Saints* (1905), places little distance between his character Martin Dougl and Oisín. As with the Oisín, a somewhat suspect cleric offers something to our decrepit beggar/outsider that he neither wants nor for which has practical use. As with Christy Mahon, the more detached Martin remains from modernity, the more spiritually secure he is. Synge draws upon a story told to him during one of his visits to the Aran Islands about a blind man who regains his sight after being blessed by water from an ancient well. Immediately cultural collision takes place as the well, a glaring symbol of pagan femininity and renewal, is overrun by the saint, a symbol of both the masculine and of Christian proselytization who claims the well's water as holy. The common asset of sight is treated ironically as a burden on the central beggar/outsider anti-heroes, Martin and Mary Dougl. Without sight, the characters are free to envision an ideal world, devoid of ugliness and toil. They are connected with nature as opposed to the modern burgeoning middle-class society that surrounds them. Since the illusory world is preferable to the dreamer/beggars, the deliverance pushed upon them by both the saint and Christianized society is no more a gift than St. Patrick's offer of salvation is to Oisín.

When we examine an excerpt of Oisín's description of Tir na nÓg, we find that it has all the fantastic brightness of Martin Dougl's illusory world he has created through his blindness:

“And there came out after that a hundred beautiful young girls, having cloaks of silk worked with gold...and after that a great shining army, and with it a strong beautiful king, having a shirt of yellow silk and a golden cloak over it, and a very bright crown on his head. (Gregory 2)

Compare Oisín's language to Martin's as he (just as Oisín) describes his fantastic world to the Saint, an agent of the imported Christian god:

“Isn't it finer sights ourselves had a while since and we sitting dark smelling the sweet beautiful smells do be rising in the warm nights and hearing the swift flying things racing in the air, till we'd be looking up in our own minds into a grand sky, and seeing lakes, and broadening rivers, and hills...” (Synge 90)

And then,

“It’s a good right ourselves have to be sitting blind, hearing a soft wind turning round the little leaves of the spring and feeling the sun, and we not tormenting the dirty feet is trampling the world.” (Synge 93)

In both cases, the use of bright language, idyllic Irish setting, and pagan images such as gold, sun, sky and feminine beauty evokes a positive, idealized image of pre-Christian Ireland. The parallel is even more significant in that Martin’s speech expressly deconstructs the grandeur of Catholic/post-pagan society by showing the Saint’s deed as one that destroys ideal beauty and facilitates only toil and hunger (as in Gregory’s *Oisín and St. Patrick*) The Saint’s gift only gives Martin and Mary a view of *torment* and *dirty feet trampling the world*. Having regained his sight, Martin works for Timmy the smith who begins, “killing [Martin] with hard work, and keeping [him] with an empty windy stomach in [him], in the day and in the night” (Synge 83). Similarly, in the Lady Gregory version, Saint Patrick also never gives Oisín enough food to fill him up:

“And one time [Oisín] said: ‘They say I am getting food but God knows I am not, or drink; and I Oisín, son of Finn, under a yoke, drawing stones.’ ‘It is my opinion you are getting enough,’ said S. Patrick then, ‘and you getting a quarter of beef and a churn of butter and a griddle of bread every day.’ ‘I often saw a quarter of a blackbird bigger than your quarter of beef,’ said Oisín, ‘and a rowan berry as big as your churn of butter, and an ivy leaf as big as your griddle of bread.’ S. Patrick was vexed when he heard that, and he said to Oisín that he had told a lie.” (Gregory 4)

And then, "My grief that I ever took baptism; it is little credit I got by it, being without food, without drink, doing fasting and praying." (Gregory 7)

The above reference to the baptism reiterates the symbolic Christian drowning of Irish primitive power. The meaning of the water archetype (cleansing, purity, and femininity) becomes perverted by the baptism thus destroying the ideal of the archetype itself by converting it into the

Christian archetype which in this case stands for invasion, authority, and the masculine overthrow of the original feminine symbol.

In the Gregory tale Saint Patrick's dialogue becomes increasingly ironic. Saint Patrick continually talks down to Oisín's wonder-filled description of Finn's great generosity, compassion, power, by wielding empty pieties,

"Leave off fretting, Oisín," said Patrick, "and shed your tears to the God of grace. Finn and the Fianna are slack enough now, and they will get no help for ever." "It is a great pity that would be," said Oisín, "Finn to be in pain for ever; and who was it gained the victory over him, when his own hand had made an end of so many a hard fighter?" "It is God gained the victory over Finn," said Patrick, "and not the strong hand of an enemy; and as to the Fianna, they are condemned to hell along with him, and tormented for ever. (Gregory 3)

The Saint speaks similarly to Martin Dougl:

"If it's raggy and dirty you are yourself, I'm saying, the Almighty God isn't at all like the rich men of Ireland; and, with the power of the water I'm after bringing in a little curagh into Cashla Bay, He'll have pity on you, and put sight into your eyes." (Synge 67)

In effect, Saint Patrick and the Saint of the well have said the same thing to each hero: *The Christian God is here to claim Ireland; He'll forgive you as soon as you see things as you are told to see them.* The resistance of this proposition is heroic regardless of the characters' more immediate incompatibilities within their respective societies. In fact, the incompatibilities become the essence of the heroism itself. In both stories, the saints are deliberately depicted as ultra-condescending agents of assimilation who mock the traditions of pagan Ireland. Synge almost certainly has his saint character make such a reference to "rich men of Ireland" to remind readers of the richness and generosity of Finn and other like pagan kings. The anti-heroes, in their resistance, are mocked for being dreamers and rendered beggars.

Like Christy Mahon, Martin Dougl makes his entrance into the play as a body utterly detached from society. It is no accident that both characters emerge into action from the

periphery of the rural ditch (or *gap*). Likewise, there is equal significance to both characters reverting their position back to the fringes when given the opportunity to operate in modern society. Doul retains spiritual purity through his choice to embrace the illusory world inhabited with the help of his blindness. What transpires when Doul regains his sight is that he is forced to see the world in all its bleakness and is effectively robbed of his identity. Realizing the empty promises of the Saint, who touts the world as the glorious creation of the Almighty, and his sight as something fulfilling, Doul chooses to re-lose his sight in order that he may reconstruct his original world of illusion thus evading the evangelical transformation from the traditional to the modern.

Kate Powers not only recognizes the Doul-Oisin connection, but further suggests that the Christian miracle would equal destruction for Doul: “Mary [Doul’s] ‘The Lord protect us from the saints of God!’ sums up the major irony...the Christian society with its Patrician heritage, in a mock enactment of the Patrick-Oisin struggles, has tried so hard to save Martin that it has almost destroyed him; the only beneficial miracle for the Douls is the one they can create themselves” (Casey 114). The miraculous resides in the personal rather than the institutional.

The skepticism toward clericalism that permeates both Oisin tales, *Playboy*, and *The Well of the Saints* inevitably generated controversy surrounding these authors and their criticisms of the clergy and the clergy’s effect on traditional Irish spirit. But Synge gets his points across without making the indictment so stark. Perhaps Synge’s most brilliantly subtle wisecrack against the diluting power of clerical rule comes in *Playboy*. In scene I, we see Shawn Keogh, prudish and cowardly, squirming out of his coat and fleeing the scene in fear of reprisal from the local priest. His future father-in-law stands holding the empty coat only to say, “Well, there’s the coat of a Christian man. Oh, there’s sainted glory this day in the lonesome west” (77).

Synge blends this sardonic tone all the more masterfully with irony in Act III of *The Well of the Saints* when a woman bearing the name “Mary” screams in desperation, “Lord protect us from the saints of God!” (89). In this scene, not only is the comedy raised to a level of ferocious irreverence, but Synge at the same time is able to illustrate the institutional perversion of what was once a symbol of the feminine in Ireland, *the well*. The Saint intends to use the very elixir from the traditional Irish symbol of healing as a weapon against Martin and Mary in order to give them sight to observe the world in Christian terms. As an argument against Martin’s dissatisfaction with the loss of his imaginary ideal world, the Saint rebukes him harshly: “May the Lord who has given you sight send a little sense into your heads, the way it won’t be on your two selves you’ll be looking—on two pitiful sinners of the earth—but on the splendor of the Spirit of God” (Synge 71-2). The rather banal rebuke has a caricature-like quality, that of the platitudinous priest who defers all subjects of talk to the royal glories of God Almighty. Skelton describes best what Synge sets forth with this scenario and how it captures the overarching theme of the play: “In this way Synge points to the dangers inherent in reforms contrived by those who do not understand the society whose ills they are attempting to ameliorate” (55).

Synge’s portrayal of an Irish people who are exceedingly imaginative springs not from some outlander political ideal. Rather, his own experience with the folk of the Aran Islands transcended any modernity of his spirit and gave him a true connection. To Synge, there was a purity to be conveyed by their experience. Synge said of the Arans:

“There is hardly an hour I am with them that I do not feel the shock of some inconceivable idea, and then again the shock of some vague emotion that is familiar to them and to me.” (Skelton 26).

To Synge, the true heroic amounts to the purity of the imagination, the primitiveness of the dreams of the uncorrupted Irish soul. His beggar character, Martin Doul, is postured to preserve the Irish soul by being stripped of contemporary identity through his blindness.

Synge's mastery of subtle turns in language that match turns in the states of characters is at its best in *Playboy* and *The Well*. Like Christy Mahon's increased poeticism that coincides with his growing agency, liberation, and power, Martin Doul undergoes similar turns, but in a reversed order. Having established significant differences between the spiritual viability of the sightless and sighted Martin Douls, Synge uses shifts in Doul's language between the three acts (specifically between when he is either sighted or blind), a process that mimics those plot shifts.

In Act I, we are introduced to a Doul who, sightless and spiritually personal, traditional and free, speaks and acts in a more natural, emotional manner. Synge's parenthetical stage directions are revealing: At different points throughout Act I, Doul's character is directed to speak *plaintively, with his natural voice, with mock irony, piqued, putting out his hands in the sun, crying out joyfully, and teasingly, but with good-humor*. Also Doul's dialogue begins with a lyrical quality that he maintains throughout the first act. His very first couple of lines are as good an illustration as any: "You were at length plaiting your yellow hair you have the morning lost on us and the people are after passing to the fair of the clash," or "I'd be destroyed in a short while listening to the clack you do be making, for you've a queer cracked voice..." (59). These lines are filled with rhyme such as *length/plaiting, after/passing/clash, and clack/crack*. The lines also possess a rhythmic quality as in "queer cracked voice" or "you have the morning lost on us and the people are after passing to the fair of the clash." Not only is this type of wonderfully over-authentic dialogue a signature quality of Synge's plays, but is also reminiscent of the poetry with which Oisín describes his traditional culture.

Notice that Doul's language in Act II deflates considerably after he has taken the gift of the Saint, regained his sight, and been reduced to hunger and toil. Here, Synge shifts Doul's stage directions from a contemplative (spiritual) form to a deliberately physical (non-spiritual) form. The parenthetical directions invent a Martin who is *moving uneasily, horrified, bitterly, seizing, passing behind, drawing back, speaking quickly, standing afar, turning round, and rousing himself with an effort*. Furthermore, when Martin has his sight his dialogue is uncertain, unpoetic, and at moments even tremulous and groveling. Note when he is asking Molly Byrne not to embarrass him:

“[turns round, sees Mary Doul, whispers to Molly Byrne with imploring agony] Let you not put shame on me, Molly, before herself and the smith. Let you not put shame on me and I after saying fine words to you, and dreaming...dreams...in the night.” (Synge 80)

This particular speech is important for what is found therein, but also what immediately follows. First, the dreamer, failing at coming to terms with his quick baptism into modernity, speaks in almost telegraphic terms (as opposed to the flowery language of the first act). Notice especially Doul's failed attempt at entering into the lyrical or poetic mode and instead stumbling, suitably, over the words *dreaming* and *dreams*. As a note of finality regarding Doul's loss of poeticism, he ends the failed attempt with a terribly out-of-place *in the night* indicating his sheer grabbing for straws. The second and more significant element of this passage is found in what follows immediately:

“[He hesitates, and looks round the sky] Is it a storm of thunder is coming, or the last end of the world? [he staggers towards Mary Doul, tripping slightly over tin can] The heavens is closing, I'm thinking with darkness and great trouble passing in the sky” (Synge 80).

The second half of this speech becomes utterly poetic with language such as *the last end of the world*, *the heavens is closing* and *darkness and great trouble passing in the sky*. The shift is easily explained: this is the moment of the play in which Doul suddenly goes blind again.

Synge has literally used a split, single paragraph to show the relationship between the imaginative poet/dreamer and his separation from mainstream society.

If Martin Doul, like Oisín, is to represent the resistance of the collective Irish imagination against the parochialism of the invading church, his knocking the holy water from the Saint's hands stands out as a final gesture of heroic defiance against the onslaught. Since the Saint has robbed the well and claimed its waters in the name of his God, his "miracle" is exposed as little more than a robbery and dilution of a once coherent tradition.

The skepticism toward clerical power as a power-grabbing institution certainly pervades both plays in a similar spirit as the Oisín tale. As examples, note Mary Doul's desperate plea, "Lord protect us from the saints of god" (Synge 90) or Oisín's accusative "I would soon be looking at [Bearná da Coill] than at this troop of the crooked croziers" (Gregory 10). Without being explicit, the authors can indicate suspicion of the church by creating characters who, from a plot standpoint, become justified in seeing the clergy as invasive croziers.

These references to the clerical corruption of traditional Ireland are too many to be coincidence. Furthermore, it is worth revisiting the dynamic between Oisín and Saint Patrick as a source motif for these references to the clergy. The dialogue between the two, while not irrefutably comedic, has the elements of a Vaudeville bit. What essentially transpires in part III is a string of dialogue in which each character establishes that he will never gain the capacity to comprehend the argument of the other:

And S. Patrick took in hand to convert Oisín, and to bring him to baptism; but it was no easy work he had to do, and everything he would say, Oisín would have an answer for it and it is the way they used to be talking and arguing with one another, as it was put down afterwards by the poets of Ireland:—

Patrick. Oisín, it is long your sleep is. Rise up and listen to the Psalm. Your strength and your readiness are gone from you, though you used to be going into rough fights and battles.

Oisin. My readiness and my strength are gone from me since Finn has no armies living; I have no liking for clerks, their music is not sweet to me after his.

Patrick. You never heard music so good from the beginning of the world to this day; it is well you would serve an army on a hill, you that are old and silly and grey.

Oisin. I used to serve an army on a hill, Patrick of the closed-up mind; it is a pity you to be faulting me; there was never shame put on me till now...It was a delight to Finn the cry of his hounds on the mountains, the wild dogs leaving their harbours, the pride of his armies, those were his delights.

Patrick. There was many a thing Finn took delight in, and there is not much heed given to it after him; Finn and his hounds are not living now, and you yourself will not always be living, Oisin."

Oisin. There is a greater story of Finn than of us, or of any that have lived in our time; all that are gone and all that are living, Finn was better to give out gold than themselves.

Patrick. Au the gold you and Finn used to be giving out, it is little it does for you now; he is in Hell in bonds because he did treachery and oppression.

Oisin. It is little I believe of your truth, man from Rome with the white books, Finn the open-handed head of the Fianna to be in the hands of devils or demons.

Patrick. "Finn is in bonds in Hell, the pleasant man that gave out gold; in satisfaction for his disrespect to God, he is under grief in the house of pain.

Oisin. "If Faolan and Goll were living, and brown-haired Diarmuid and brave Osgar, Finn of the Fianna could not be held in any house that was made by God or devils.

Patrick. "If Faolan and Goll were living, and all the Fianna that ever were, they could not bring out Finn from the house where he is in pain.

Oisin. "You say, Patrick of the Psalms, that the Fianna could not take out Finn, or the five provinces of Ireland along with them. I have a little story about Finn. We were but fifteen men when we took the King of Britain of the feasts by the strength of our spears and our own strength. (Gregory 6-7)

This wonderful *my-god-can-beat-up-your-god* routine epitomizes the essential equality and utter incompatibility among and between myth and modernity. The scenario is all the more madcap because it takes place during Oisin's forced baptism/conversion—a conversion that is made possible by centuries of Oisin's aging and weakening. By persistence and simple slogan slinging, the clerics manage to oust the heathens.

As the twentieth century progressed, these simpler tales of culture struggle between a clever, traditional, storytelling people and their less imaginative, pompous Christian colonizers seemed quaint as political factions, republican motives and historical outcomes became more violent. A new set of nationalist and religious pieties corrupted the Irish political landscape providing playwrights with new manifestations of modernity for their characters to criticize, ridicule, and most of all, resist.

Chapter II

Nationalism's Pieties—Prison, Purgatory, and Murderin' Hate

The fringe anti-hero figure such as those rebelling in the Oisín myth and Synge's not-so-idealized peasant world dons a new guise as the century edges on. In the decades that followed, works such as Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1954) dealt with what Ronan McDonald refers to as a period of "politically derived suffering: the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, the Civil War ..." events taking place in the "sanctimonious, priest-ridden new state" (136). Indeed, like Oisín, the anti-hero as depicted during the period from the Easter Rising through the post-Civil War Free State was still faced with bothersome clergy whose corruption is hardly refutable. But the hold of an increasingly puritanical Church at this time was only one of several elements contributing to the nation's sorrows. Factions of diehard Republicans dissatisfied with the Free State treaty declaring part of Ireland to be a part of the British Commonwealth brought civil war to the new state. The appearance of labour unions meant new expectations of treatment and compensation for a precariously established, uneasy middle class. But to the anti-hero figure, as with Synge's, Yeats' and Gregory's anti-heroes from previous decades, all of these new political elements of

change (nationalism and socialism particularly) merely equal the latest manifestation of the insidious menace to Irish tradition.

Juno and the Paycock clearly indicts all political and clerical forces. Those social and political values criticized in the work are patently *un-traditional* in the Irish sense. “It is worth stressing that the hostility to nationalist rhetoric displayed in the Trilogy is often indistinguishable from a distaste for politics as a whole...the socialists in *Juno* are as deluded and conceited as the nationalist braggarts” (McDonald 138). The nationalism pushed to the forefront of the urban Irish landscape in the 1920s exhibited a platitudinous shallowness reminiscent of Oisín’s St. Patrick’s blunt religious conquest. Those spiritual powers seen in *The Rising of the Moon* and *Cathleen ni Houlihan* had been hijacked, harnessed to militant politics producing the world we view in *Juno*.

The play shows the character Juno as a heroine figure whose troubles and remedies remain fixed to post-pagan sensibilities. Juno is driven to sorrow through the politically incited murder of her son and plunged into disgrace and obscurity via her daughter’s illegitimate pregnancy and the surrounding society’s predictably puritanical reaction. O’Casey’s plot suggests the church and the state are on the first hand morally interchangeable; and those forces that would “liberate” Ireland have become fragmented, blurred, and dangerous. But most importantly in terms of anti-heroic behavior, all of these tragic forces must be recognized as either direct or indirect results of English/Christian influence.

Captain Jack Boyle, the “Paycock,” is O’Casey’s essential anti-hero. Boyle enters *Juno* in a similar manner as Synge’s anti-heroes. He tramps into the stage from the fringe of his society, only his “snug” is an urbanized version of the rural ditch or “gap” (as in Christy Mahon’s and Martin Dougl’s cases). O’Casey clearly establishes the Oisín motif by introducing his character

as an outsider who wastes away his days dreaming of a mythical past. Boyle's memory of a semi-contrived, embellished, and vague past sustains him in the manner of Oisín, Christy, or Doul. His alcohol-ravaged brain and "injured" body function as a vehicle from which a traditional Irish spirit must survive by spinning stories with mythic gusto.

The trope of the character as a dreamer/beggar is key to the process of spiritual preservation of O'Casey's anti-hero. Boyle's state of dreamy idleness and cockeyed philosophy is threatened when the bourgeois illusion of wealth is dangled before him. Just as Doul does with the illusion of sight, Boyle succumbs to the enticement only to discover tacitly that the social integration associated with his new status has robbed him of his spiritual purity. For a brief period, Boyle tests the waters of anglicized bourgeois modernity only to return to his original state. Boyle's rejection of modernity is indicated by his refusal to embrace any aspects of modernity as the inheritance proves nil. At the end of the play, Boyle returns to philosophizing about the state of the world in surroundings that act symbolically. Hence the last scene where Boyle remains contemplating his famous "chassis" in an empty apartment (the rejection of bourgeois materialism) with the blinds down (the death/rejection of an idealized nationalism parading in the street below).

Like those anti-heroes before him, Boyle resists institutional forces. Like Oisín, Christy, and Doul, Boyle dreams to maintain a connection to a past that relates to the personal. His connection with the personal is threatened by the political, clerical, and social class powers that surround him and stand to dissolve the personal (tradition) and replace it with conformity (modernity). We can compare Boyle to Synge's Doul, who is placed in direct juxtaposition to the Saint character who robs the ancient pagan symbol, the well, of its healing water and claims both water and the well in the name of the foreign deity. While the Saint is obviously not meant

to be the sympathetic character, he is still the hero in the Christian sense because he defeats the pagan. In *Juno*, Boyle's wife Juno is far more sympathetic, a fact that only complicates matters for contemporary audiences. Juno, who has taken the masculine role in the family (masculinity being associated with modernity) and reminds Boyle of her "slavin' to keep the bit in your [his] mouth, an' you gallivantin' about all the day like a Paycock" (210). Stock browbeating words such as "slavin'" and "gallivantin'" align Mrs. Boyle with the Saints who browbeat their subjects with similarly unimaginative verbal assaults. By modern terms, Boyle is a deadbeat, but by sheer resistance, Boyle is heroic in successfully deconstructing the institutional, reducing it to the personal, at which point the personal is allowed to remain akin to the traditional.

In a classic Falstaffian manner, Boyle's patent disregard for the bleakness of his surroundings "insulate[s] him from the world of terrible realities by living in an illusory world of fantasies..." (Harrington 507). For O'Casey, the Falstaff logic works with Boyle because the character, like Falstaff, is at liberty to imply things about his world that more heroic characters (such as Juno) might not be able to. Boyle's attitudes of blatant transgression, love for drink, and even outright deceit are the same. Certainly critics have made the connection between Falstaff and Boyle more than once. Boyle's insulation, while posturing him as an inert and even pathetic character, also postures him as the only true resistor to the puritanical, Christianized, war-torn, colonial/post-colonial debacle that is his country.

Directly comparable to the shifts from the natural and the lyrical I have pointed out in Synge's dialogue, O'Casey's Boyle shows similar shifts in linguistic delivery that coincide with his perpetual hangover manifesto in the first act and his "sophisticated" bourgeois hosting in the second. As a stark example of Boyle's artist/dreamer dialogue in Act I, note the lyrical quality of the line:

“work, work, work for me an’ you; havin’ us mulin’ from the mornin’ til night, so that they may be in betther fettle when they come hoppin’ round for their dues! Job! Well,

let him give his job to wan of his hymn-singin’, prayer spoutin’, craw thumpin’
Confraternity men!” (218)

For illustrative purposes, I have transferred the above into verse:

*Work, work, work for me an’ you;
havin’ us mulin’ from the mornin’ til night,
so that they may be in betther fettle
when they come hoppin’ round for their dues!*

*Job! Well, let him give his job to wan of his
hymn-singin’, prayer spoutin’, craw thumpin’
Confraternity men!*

Curiously, Boyle’s little speech easily passes as poetry, and actually pretty decent poetry.

Boyle’s description of life at sea is equally lyrical:

“Ofen, an’ ofen, when I was fixed to the wheel with a marlin-spike, an’ the win’s blowin’ fierce an’ the waves lashin’ an’ lashin’, till you’d think every minute was goin’ to be your last, an’ it blowed...an’ as it blowed I ofen looked up at the sky an’ assed meself the question—what is the stars, what is the stars?” (O’Casey 218)

And in verse:

*Ofen, an’ ofen, when I was fixed to the wheel
with a marlin-spike, an’ the win’s blowin’ fierce
an’ the waves lashin’ an’ lashin’, till you’d think
every minute was goin’ to be your last,
an’ it blowed, an’ as it blowed
I ofen looked up at the sky an’ assed meself the question
—what is the stars, what is the stars?”*

Again, Boyle’s dialogue becomes wonderful lyric poetry delivered in authentic dialect with a clear dreamlike and emotive disposition.

In Act II, Boyle has acquired some of (via borrowing against) his £2000. In this act, his dialogue takes a poetic nosedive; in its place comes empty bourgeois airs. In fact, in his state of

newly infected consciousness, Boyle is compelled to actually having a go at poetry writing of which the result is as follows:

“Shawn and I were friends, sir, to me he was all in all
His work was very heavy and his wages were very small
None bettther on th’ beach as Docker, I’ll go bail
‘Tis now I’m feelin’ lonely, for today he lies in jail.
He was not what some call pious—seldom at church or prayer
For the greatest scoundrels I know, sir, goes every Sunday there.
Fond of his pint—well, rather, but hated the Boss by creed
But never refused a copper to comfort a pal in need.” (O’Casey 236)

This utterly failed attempt at some characterization of a modern Dublin man on Boyle’s part actually becomes a representation of Boyle’s own most shallow attributes which have come to the surface as he embraces a modern bourgeois existence. His painfully trite “Shawn” likes to drink, dislikes church, and hates to work—and thinks people ought to be generous with their friends when it suits them to be so. The painstakingly forced straight rhymes and forced clunky rhythm, the laughable word choice, and totally banal subject matter morph into an absolute caricature of the moneyed Boyle in the throws of his insipid spiritual void. Boyle’s hand at poetry is clearly included to indicate his temporary divorce from the traditional, the natural, and the personal. As with Synge’s Martin Dougl, the process comes full-circle; once Boyle squanders all his borrowed money and loses his inheritance, he regains his traditional identity and returns to the more poetic language of the dreamer in the final scene of the play.

Development of the Irish anti-hero would be incomplete without some direct criticism of the clerical establishment and its corrupt representatives. O’Casey’s characters say subtly ironic things which, in turn, speak volumes about controversial subjects is irrefutably present in *Juno*. O’Casey shows us Captain Jack’s rather cynical or even tenuous understanding of Christianity when he describes Jerry Devine as “not like a Christian at all” because he neither curses nor

drinks. It's hard to imagine that this isn't a direct tribute to Michael Patrick's (*Playboy of the Western World*) "coat of a Christian." Even the Paycock's foil, Joxer, who is characteristically devoid of wisdom on any level, can recognize and expose the clergy as a front for money grabbing. In Scene II, Joxer indicates his skepticism toward the clergy by noting Father Farrell's newfound respect for the recently moneyed Boyle, "He'll be stoppin' you often enough now; I suppose it was "Mr. Boyle" with him" (O'Casey 225). Joxer's uncharacteristically insightful comment is actually more telling than it may seem. Remember, we have Captain Jack who has recently been robbed of his traditional spirit and begins to embrace the very materialism he would otherwise reject; but now his counterpart, Joxer (who has not become moneyed), becomes the substitute representative of the dreamer who resists the same institutions so recently resisted by Boyle.

As a further indication of Irish problems in the case of Boyle, an association between clerical power and money is introduced. Boyle's spiritual purity has been corrupted by his inheritance only to have both his spirit and money simultaneously descended upon by the clergy. In Boyle's case the criticism is brought to a new level because there emerges a blur between the Church's interest in its subject's soul and his inheritance. Most telling is Father Farrell's relative disinterest in Boyle's soul prior to the inheritance. Father Farrell's objective was to get Boyle gainfully employed. While this appears on the surface to be a kindness on Father Farrell's part, it is too much a coincidence that his personal interest in Boyle increases with Boyle's net worth.

In *Juno*, Boyle's gesture of examining and contemplating his last sixpence is similar to Dougl's gesture with the holy water. The chief difference is found in the institutions being deconstructed (in Boyle's case it is anglicized bourgeois values and in Dougl's case forced Christian conversion). Frayne points out, that Boyle, "enjoys his false credit to the last, and he

goes off with Joxer to the pub to spend his last coins on the drink. Juno is left to bear all...but she is capable of handling such burdens” (18). What is happening is that O’Casey is formulating for us a dialectical scenario similar to that of Martin Douli and the Saint. Frayne argues that Boyle, who is “more than a little bit like Ireland, is the prisoner of his grandiose illusions...in his imagination, he has always seen himself as a great man” (16-77). Without dispute, Juno, who is left to win the bread for an outcast family and mourn the death of her son comes out as the heroic figure. But Juno’s heroism has nothing to do with any type of spiritual victory. “Moral freedom, or aspiration, as pronounced by Juno, is not discovered in and through conflict with economic and political forces. Dramatically speaking, it is their byproduct; chaff is their primary consequence.” (Deane 150) Appropriately, this “chaff” is the summation of the very system Boyle rejects.

Indeed, for practical contemporary purposes, Juno shows all the character of the hero. The dialectical opposite found in Boyle is thus magnified. Boyle remains detached from the political, clerical, and social forces that continue around him. The members of his family, with a tidy combining of plot and theme, dispel the contemporary illusions created by labour (as shown between Mary’s striking and Juno’s ceaseless toil/low wages), nationalism (with Johnny’s murder), and religious Puritanism (as illustrated by Mary’s quick removal from society). All the while, Boyle remains somehow central, like the very ground the characters share, as one-by-one the other characters fall prey to the rotted fruits of an utterly flawed modernity. Remember that the final curtain falls on Boyle for a specific reason. Kilroy reminds us that “O’Casey does not end the play with Juno. Maintaining the anti-heroic theme and contrapuntal rhythm of the whole work, he concludes on a tragicomic note by contrasting Juno’s heroic condition with the Captain’s mock-heroic condition...even in his drunken raving he remains a magnificently

grotesque anti-hero” (102). It is the purity of Boyle’s spiritual posture rather than the unorthodoxy of his behavior that credits him. He remains true to his own brand of imaginative philosophy and is thus associated, not with modernity, but with tradition.

It is worth mapping out in more detail the transformation Captain Jack undergoes in *Juno*. I have already indicated that Boyle’s acquisition of money is likened to Doul’s acquisition of sight, but the effects of Boyle’s transformation take on a slightly more subtle shape than those of Doul’s. In Act I, Boyle expresses his traditional, individual spirit partly by dropping offhanded opinions of the local clergy, “D’ye know, Joxer, I never like to be beholden to any o’ the clergy...the clergy always had too much power over the people in this unfortunate country...If they’ve taken everything else from us, Joxer, they’ve left us our memory” (O’Casey 217). Once this skepticism is established, O’Casey is also careful to establish Boyle’s disposition as a dreamer who exists in a vague but glorious past. Boyle describes to Joxer how “them was the days” when he (Boyle) was a great captain on the high seas witnessing things that “no mortal man should speak about that knows his Catechism” and then looking up to the heavens dreamily asking himself the question, “what is the stars?” (218). This state of imagination-driven reality in which Boyle functions is facilitated by the same two major forces that facilitate Martin Doul’s reality: one being a contemporary society in which the bleakness is unbearable to the dreamer, and the second being an “out” from that society through some sort of debilitation real or feigned.

By Act II, Boyle has inherited the money and his spirit has already begun to be soiled by the very contemporary ideals he has previously shunned. This comprises the sub-tension in the play hidden beneath the obvious plot tensions with the contemporary characters. Take particular note of the overtly symbolic plastic flowers that immediately fill their tenement. While

comically realistic in terms of an upstart from the tenement class, the flowers do also represent the artificiality of the Irish state. Like the turn toward an anglicized Ireland, this act of masking the bleakness equals Boyle's first signs that he has abandoned the purity which had once sustained him spiritually. Additionally in Act II, we witness a predictable change in Boyle's attitude toward the clergy. The dreamer Boyle, who so recently wanted to distance himself from the clergy, suddenly jumps to Father Farrell's defense when Joxer criticizes: "You're seldom astray, Joxer, but you're wrong shipped this time. What you're sayin' of Father Farrell is very near to blasfemy. I don't like anyone to talk disrespectful of Father Farrell...the priests was always in the van of the fight for Irelan's freedom" (O'Casey 225). Boyle's *post-money* comments about the church are especially telling. In Act I, the clergy that was responsible for the overthrow of Ireland leaving Boyle with "nothing but [his] memory" becomes (in Act II) the clergy that "was always in the van of the fight for Irelan's freedom."

It is easy to piece together the connection between the change in social status and the change in attitudes toward the institutions that define the society. Boyle's particular statement in Act I in which he characterizes the clerical overthrow as a phenomenon that leaves a man with nothing but his memories warrants additional scrutiny. Here a complete picture of the Irish collective cultural memory upon the chopping block is vividly constructed. By Act III, O'Casey has caused the characters who orbit the central Boyle to burn up in his atmosphere of spiritual purity thus illustrating the bankruptcy of modern Irish society that they respectively represent (e.g. Jerry Devine's de Valera-like judgment of Mary's defilement or Johnny's fatal diehard-ism). Each empty piety associated with modern sociopolitical conditions is systematically exposed and questioned. And the Captain remains in a blissful oblivion that is a stark representative of the nearly forgotten Ireland pulsating quietly in the most obscure synapses of civil war Dublin.

The anti-hero ideal in the cases of both Doul and Boyle reaches a crucial state of advancement in the conclusion of each play. Both characters, like Oisín, exhibit a behavioral persistence that suggests a devolutionary process in the achievement of total anti-heroism that is associated with self-destructive behavior. Through imagined justifications, a mock celebration of human vanity, and a true celebration of the resilience and the boundlessness of imagination, Captain Boyle is able to transcend his bleakest surroundings (in this scene, an empty tenement with “blinds down”) and become Ireland’s heroic martyr:

“BOYLE: [*subsiding into a sitting posture on the floor*]. Commandant Kelly died ... in them ... arms ... Joxer ... Tell me Volunteer butties ... says he ... that *I* died for Irelan’!” (O’Casey 254)

The switch from “he” to “I” (italics on the above “I” are mine) indicates a connection to Martin Doul and even Oisín himself. Captain Boyle’s embracement of Commandant Kelly’s dying words are no more the product of reality than are Boyle’s claims that he had done his “bit” in Easter Week and that he could always join a “flyin’ column” because of his imagined experience. But most important is the symbolic martyrdom that Boyle undergoes by becoming the Commandant Kelly figure. Because the death is both symbolic and a product of imagination, the character is allowed to die over and over again. The persistence with which Boyle clings to the imagination is chiefly what mimics Oisín and Doul. After all, Oisín’s and Doul’s “real” worlds have been destroyed through the invasive actions of their respective saints. Oisín puts forth his final statement in the story in the form of a rejection; he rejects Saint Patrick’s demand that he succumb to the power of the Church which by Saint Patrick’s report has destroyed the Fianna. Oisín says to Saint Patrick, “My story is sorrowful. The sound of your voice is not pleasant to me. I will cry my fill, but not for God.” (Augusta 12); or in Yeats’ version, of course, “I will...dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast” (45). Comparably, the

final scene of *Juno* is a result of Boyle's personal choice to endure hell rather than exist in the modern world.

Boyle's recognition that the whole world is in chaos is similar to Oisín; in turn, Boyle continues his illusion and resistance by inventing a romantic, illusory subtext even for his last sixpence, "The last o' the Moheicans. The blinds is down...Joxer...the blinds is down!" (O'Casey 253). Of course the irony here is that even Boyle doesn't know exactly what he is saying as he refers to the blinds (a signal to passers by that a death has occurred within the household) or when he wonders cursorily where the furniture has gone. The final scene secures the total deconstruction of Boyle's contemporary Dublin where he cannot live but within his imaginings. In addition, Boyle's "last of the Moheicans" comment, while on the surface an innocent and ignorant popular culture reference, actually describes the coinciding events of his running out of money, his return to illusion and his return to native purity. Without the money, he escapes the bourgeois, the lawyers, and the clergy, thus returning to the one thing that sustains him as a true holdout of Irish bardic tradition, his imagination. Boyle, in effect, identifies *himself* as the last of the natives.

Notice that these anti-heroes do not function as such without some notable impediment such as blindness, poverty, old age, drunkenness, that acts as an insulating agent. For the outsider/dreamer, the impediment becomes a means of protection from mainstream expectations. In the case of Martin Douli, his blindness shields him from the follies of his society. As Price puts it, "Although it is not Martin's sin that has brought his blindness again, he has endured experiences and acquired knowledge that temporarily soil his soul and body. Yet in this extremity, when all else is lost, his imagination sustains him; it creates a fierce picture which

gives him some compensation and prevents his disintegration” (151). The killing of the imaginary world that has sustained the character is equal to the act of “soiling” the Irish soul.

As much is true with the Paycock. Boyle suffers from Price’s *acquired knowledge that temporarily soils his soul*. Here emerges a question of infinite regression—that is to ask, is the impediment the cause of the situation, or the situation the catalyst for the impediment? Just as it is difficult to identify concrete cultural origins that sustain a collective Irish imagination, it is difficult to determine whether the cultural attributes are the result of an inherent Irish spirit or that the Irish spirit is the result of cultural attributes, especially those exacerbated by an unwelcome colonial presence. Either way, one fact remains luminous through these characters: their peculiar manifestations of the Irish cultural character conflict with outside forces that must be resisted for true anti-heroism to exist. As a matter of relation to another of Boyle’s impediments (perhaps his chief one), alcoholism, the statement made by Boyle’s dreaming counterpart Doyle (*John Bull’s Other Island*) becomes almost a direct reference to Boyle himself, whose imagination has left him to “sneer” at those who would face reality, “Imagination’s such a torture that you can’t bear it without whiskey” (Shaw 85).

There is a genuine archetypal experience in the “Paycock” character. The Paycock is not simply comic and therefore shallow in comparison to the play’s other heroes. While we may rightly enjoy Captain Boyle’s and his “butty” Joxer’s high jinx as both hilarious and pleasingly predictable, our strict attention is subtly called to the at once tragic and symbolic turns which, if acknowledged, underscore the chief function of the Paycock figure. As Captain Boyle makes his clear denouncement of his son and his daughter (‘Oh, a nice son, an’ a nice daughter, I have’ [Juno, 78]), the dramatic tension is trebly exacerbated. O’Casey shows such purpose in this turn as to reveal three significant personal reservations. At the surface we can assume an authorial

comment is being made as we witness first-hand the utter derailment of the nationalist movement illustrated by an effective combination of Johnny Boyle's cowardice followed by his cold-blooded murder. We also witness the utter hypocrisy that accompanies the "Christian mercy" of the church as we see Mary doomed to live in agonizing ostracization and obscurity because she, like Ireland herself, has been defiled by an English invasion via her fornication with Bentham. The Paycock has lost and rejected both Johnny and Mary, the respective emblems of the new state and the post-pagan church; he is neither interested in nor capable of functioning in his world. The Paycock's rejection of his children represents a rejection of those modern forces that have possessed and then destroyed his same children. Boyle's inability to commiserate comes from his total exorcism of modern bourgeois values. O'Casey's motive here is to present a more native character who, while dysfunctional from a plot standpoint, remains deliberately disinterested in modernity; hence Captain Jack's rejection of all manifestations of Irish nationalism, Church influence, and labor movements. Bernard Benstock points out that with the "Paycock" character (a type present in works other than *Juno*), "O'Casey delights in underscoring for the Irish character" (19). Benstock refers to O'Casey's creation of the "Paycock type" in Jack Boyle's predecessor Seumus Shields (*The Plough and the Stars*), and the characters' tendency to denounce modern institutions by expressing unrelenting suspicions. Where we have Boyle's rejection of Church and nationalism, we also have Shields (appropriately named) rejecting the landlord figure, Mr. Mulligan.

Of course, O'Casey hadn't cornered the market on dramaturgical illustrations of the bankruptcy of Irish nationalism. Showcasing chronic Irish political problems was no new idea for dramatists in the period from the Easter Uprising of 1916 and the frustrating civil conflict between "Die-hard" republicans and Free-State supporters. Following that civil war, the cycle of

destruction, division, and national strain went on, as did the stubborn uncertainty over a traditional Irish identity.

Works such as Yeats' *Purgatory* (1938) and Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1954) continue the anti-hero devolution using elements political and allegorical, but also bringing in increasingly shocking instances of mariticide, parricide, and filicide. Along with the devolved, ever more antisocial behavior of anti-hero characters, came experiments in the surreal and the absurd. *Purgatory*, while composed to function on an allegorical level, broke new ground in analyzing Irish identity and its liminal existence with transgression committed both on and by the native people. Published the last year of Yeats' life, *Purgatory* also betrayed a more weathered, less idealistic Yeats, certainly a different Yeats from the days of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Considering the dramaturgical device of repetition of symbolic events, the placement of *Purgatory* in the Irish drama timeline makes it reminiscent of *Playboy* (in which the repeated bludgeoning of Old Mahon becomes symbolic of repeated reemergence of Irish bardic tradition in the throws of burgeoning middle-class values), yet precursory to *The Quare Fellow* (in which repeated emergences of Gaelic language and song are subdued by institutional forces and then reappear as recycled symbols of a persistent collective spirit).

Yeats' trope involves two symbols of ancestry/posterity (father/son) doomed to witness the defilement of a pristine "house" by a shifty outlander. But to Yeats, the shifty outlander is only half to blame; the lady too is complicit. Donald Pearce expounds upon Yeats' disillusionment of his once idealized tradition. To Yeats the "systematic destruction by the Irregulars was not just the destruction of admired property but the fall of a whole culture. Still, he knew that the great houses had themselves been half-responsible for that fall" (73). But disillusioned or not, Yeats creates the grittiest anti-hero to date. The century of drama had met

with deadbeats and father-slayers, but never a filicidal beggar whose effort to break the chain of national torture is only met with more agony and history repeated. Ultimately, though, Yeats' statement shows some resignation: the attempt to break the chain of cultural pathology may be futile, but must be attempted regardless of its magnitude. Thus reemerges a nationalist at heart who echoes Joyce's notion that Ireland is doomed to repeat the past. As the father character, the outsider/beggar/storyteller in *Purgatory*, Yeats too is "crying out against the desecration by vulgar hands of something held to be sacred, or at the least, supremely noble. If, as I propose to do, one takes this "something" to be Ireland (in the special sense of the land of Yeats' desire)" (Pearce 70), *Purgatory's* filicide is to be seen as the ultimate act of sacrifice in the name of something larger than the individual; it is quite a departure from the quaint martyrdom of the young Michael of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.

Although there is strong evidence of a disillusioned Yeats he continues, with *Purgatory*, to call on mythic tropes as a means of idealizing the actions of his filicidal character. The realization that the old man must kill his own son is directly related to Cuchulain's own such realization. It warrants examining then the motives of the filicide since they are, in all their unpalatability, heroic in a larger sense. Cuchulain's actions amount to a reaction of the order imposed by Conchubar. It is "Conchubar's desire for rational social order versus Cuchulain's will to retain his personal sense of freedom" (Flannery 422) that results in the almost happenstance act of filicide. Yeats carefully constructs a beneath-the-surface timeline within the play. Each plot event coincides with an historical event beginning with the 1891 death of Parnell followed by the boy's birth (Aug 10, 1922) which matches the establishment of the Free State. These events are crucial to the play's structure and explain much about the Old Man's filicide if he is indeed to be considered allegorically. If so, then the "Old Man...is the first

consequence...a nation in Yeats' eyes given to huckstering, denying its origins, hampered by ignorance, at best mourning over its lost heritage" (Torchiana 426).

One element of Irish anti-heroism heretofore not discussed is that he or she embodies the Joycean notion that Ireland is doomed to repeat its history over and over. All of our anti-heroes thus far have purposely repeated their behavior with thematic effect, whether it be repeated rejection of a saint, reversion into blindness, repeated killing of the same father, or killing the son only to repeatedly watch on helplessly as the sins of the past play over. So along with the persistence of anti-heroic behavior comes the bitter truth that accompanies: there appears no true victory for the anti-hero himself.

Behan's *Quare Fellow* contains elements of repeated behavior and reiteration that are certainly less bleak than those in *Purgatory* considering the tragedy of the play. At a glance, *The Quare Fellow* showcases Behan's anti-death penalty sentiments, a curiosity considering Behan's known background with the IRA and that he had been "previously convicted for Republican violence in both England and in Ireland" (Greene 158). But the anti-capitalist theme is simply the most accessible to the audience and scratches only the surface of authorial intentions. True enough there is an autobiographical element for Behan, who did one of his prison stints at Mountjoy (by all estimations the prison in the play) and did become friendly with a doomed prisoner. But *The Quare Fellow*'s confronts controversy while all the while lamenting Ireland herself as "a place of rapture and futility" (MacInnes 518). The intensity produced by bringing endless high jinx and sardonic exchanges between prisoners to an eerie, silent halt projects onto the audience a very real anxiety which at the play's end is more tragic than comic. Behan takes what is the most controversial symbol of the institutional (prison) and reduces all of its purpose to the sad destruction of the personal (one silenced rural Irishman). Richard R. Russell describes

the symbolic value of the Quare Fellow character by such a summation, “While on one level *The Quare Fellow* is a ribald polemic against capital punishment, on a more subversive level, it is also an insiders expose of the collision between residual British imperialism and the vanishing world of Gaelic Ireland” (73).

Worth unpacking is Russell’s reference to *The Quare Fellow* as “subversive.” While it is no great surprise for a republican such as Behan to engage in behavior that may subvert colonial power, Behan’s method of constructing the play becomes so dirge-like and so wrenching, that it could spark sympathies all the way to Downing Street. In this way, *The Quare Fellow* illuminates Behan’s strong artistic abilities, his anti-British stance, as well as his capacity for human sympathy. As an additional element, the play incorporates something usually associated not with anti-heroic behavior, but with conventional hero behavior, martyrdom. The Quare Fellow’s martyrdom is the final act that truly subverts the foothold of British presence because it plays on pre-internalized Christian sensibilities related to sacrifice, yet ignites the imaginations of an Irish audience that will be inevitably touched by the death of a silenced, Gaelic-speaking native. Examining the Quare Fellow’s crime, fratricide, causes critics immediately to harken back to Synge’s *Playboy*. Similarly, the tale of the deed rather than the deed itself floats at the surface of *The Quare Fellow*, allowing the character many of the privileges of imagination enjoyed by Christy Mahon. Also reminiscent of preceding anti-heroes is the Quare Fellow’s existence on the fringe. Not only is he on the fringe of the outside world as a Kerry boy living the rest of his days in a prison; he is also on the fringe of the prison microcosm as the phantom death row inmate. The fact that the Quare Fellow is the quintessential misfit draws the most striking parallel between him and the marginalized traditional Irishman. Behan’s work shows his “taste for [and] sympathy with all who failed to fit approved social and political categories”

(Greene 163). “Those who fail to fit approved social and political categories” reminds us at once of Oisín, Martin Douli, and The Paycock.

Having established the symbolic value of the central, but silenced, Gaelic-speaking character, it becomes necessary to examine the other characters in the prison and how they orbit about the central character and his imminent martyrdom. We see two major functions of the other characters: One, they each operate symbolically to advance the central dirge for rural Irish tradition and language; second, they bring tropes such as language and song into play that we have seen used before in the development of the Irish anti-hero motif.

The play’s opening scene establishes a pattern of resistance not just to black and white institutional rules. For example, the play’s opening line “SILENCE” is cleverly unspoken as if uttered by the insidious and faceless institution itself. Simultaneously opening the play is the “punishment cell” inmate singing about the very institution that commands his silence. This initial image is well designed to affect the audience’s imagination rather than to state the obvious. Our character, devoid of name, face, liberty or escape still possesses a voice. Equally significant is that the character chooses to use his voice to form the song:

*To begin the morning
The warder bawling
Get out of bed and clean up your cell,
And that old triangle
Went jingle jangle
Along the banks of the Royal Canal. (256)*

Immediately following, as if prophesied by the singing prisoner, the triangle sounds and the warder begins yelling; the institutional silences the personal generating a subtle but unmistakable tension between the two. From the outset, we see the anti-hero motif being constructed as the institutional norms are deconstructed. The character (in the form of his voice) emerges from a

dark chasm of otherness such as Christy's ditch or Boyle's snug. The character is a criminal, setting him apart from the mainstream. He is even set apart from the microcosmic mainstream within the prison because he is receiving solitary confinement, confinement within confinement; he is doubly an outsider. The motif of the outsider character, engaged in the personal (in song), pigeonholed by the institutional, but persistent in defiance is unmistakable.

The opening character's voice is silenced by the threat of the guard, but only temporarily. Immediately, a reference to Dunlavin (a prisoner's surname) evokes the historic executions of the 36 suspected members of the United Irishmen following their 1798 uprising in County Wicklow. In the first thirty seconds of the play, the invocation of traditional and nationalist spirits has been clearly delivered. From this moment forward, there is little chance for the play to be solely an indictment of capital punishment. Dunlavin, by merely bearing the name, has planted the seed in the audience's imagination. Behan is careful here to immediately reduce the Dunlavin character back to the traditional and the personal by having his first lines be anything but institutional:

There are hands that will welcome you in
There are lips that I am burning to kiss
There are two eyes that shine...
In my little grey home in the West. (257)

Dunlavin's entrance has dual function: he evokes thoughts of political struggle and British atrocities while singing about his "little grey home in the West." But each operates as a tributary of the other. The little grey home in the West is the object the United Irishmen sought to defend in their uprising. Dunlavin's anti-heroic behavior is quickly undercut, however, by his reference to the Quare Fellow as a "real bog-man" and "Silver Top" as "a cut above meat-choppers" (258). It becomes apparent that Dunlavin does not embrace the organic as emblemized by the Irish bog;

rather, he embraces the modern emblemized by the manufactured silver-topped cane. Further compounding Dunlavin's departure from tradition is his obsequiousness toward Holy Healey, making his plea for "a letter to the room keepers after I [he] go out, for a bit of help with the rent" (Behan 274). The only characters who retain Irishness are those who suffer to practice its traditions. Dunlavin is exposed as as much a caricature as an agent of tradition.

The Quare Fellow deliberately recycles the pattern of recurring symbolic battles between Irish language or song and institutional authority. The singing prisoner and Dunlavin are simply the first and most accessible examples. Prisoner C, the young Kerry boy may only carry on his conversations in Gaelic with the warder Crimmin in secret; thus Crimmin, a citizen in good standing is reduced to the same measures of a prisoner if he wants to speak in the native tongue. There is no place in the institution for Gaelic traditions of song or language, a fact stated and restated by the basement prisoner, Prisoner C, Crimmin, and most of all, The Quare Fellow.

The Quare Fellow makes an interesting anti-hero because he undertakes almost no action in the play. His passivity is not entire; his few movements conveyed in the play are significant. The Quare Fellow sends only a single message among all the dialogue in the play; that message is to the young Kerry boy, Prisoner C, whom the Quare Fellow "heard singing and after he was sentenced to death he sent over word he'd be listening every night around midnight for him" (292). Behan is also deliberate in making an issue of the Quare Fellow's choice of rashers and eggs, an unmistakably traditional Irish meal, a repeated one to include his last meal. The other characters marvel at how a man who could have any meal he desires would make such a choice; the answer is clearly that he is resisting to the death. The Quare Fellow represents what Behan fears may be the very end of the Gaelic cultural rope, a single, silenced, and doomed man living out his last days the object of talk, myth, and outsider scrutiny. It is only fitting that he would

seek his last tastes of his traditional culture while he awaits snuffing out by the institution of law in an Irish Free State that “didn’t change anything more than the badge on the warders’ caps” (269).

In order for Behan to perpetuate the hope that the Gaelic language and tradition, no matter how subdued, will always survive, the temporary silences are inevitably followed by the reemergence of the traditional Gaelic voice either song or Irish language. Throughout the play, the basement prisoner is silenced three times, but always resumes. Note that at the play’s end, focus turns to the different reactions of the lags and the screws to the execution, but the final image is that of the same persistent Irishman, still confined to his fringe within the fringe, out of sight in the punishment cell, temporarily robbed of liberty, face, and escape, yet still mocking the institutional by exercising imagination, voice, and song. Here Behan asks us to consider the survival question in regards to Gaelic tradition. While Behan’s “anti-colonial drama may best be characterized as a tragedy, as befits its theme of the demise of the Munster dialect of Irish, which is represented metaphorically by the Quare Fellow’s execution” (Russell 92), there is no mistaking the instrumentality of the character’s (anti) heroism to those “anti-colonial” and “tragic” tones Russell describes.

Amidst the cyclical nature of anti-hero behavior during the early and mid century, our anti-heroes exist in an Ireland of ever-shrinking quaintness with traditional values increasingly marginalized, and newer foreign forces occupying Irish landscapes. Our anti-hero, if he or she is to survive, must apply old methods of resistance such as irreverence, drunkenness, and the blurring of fact and myth to new forms of cultural infiltration. Martin McDonagh, as he writes in the last decade of the twentieth century, provides us with characters who suffer in rather advanced stages of antisocial pathologies.

Chapter III: McDonagh's West—Lonesome but Living

By the time Martin McDonagh is creating anti-hero characters, Ireland has felt the effects of a shrinking world. Massive emigration has depleted major native human resources. Tourism, and pop-culture have infiltrated an economically depressed West. McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* trilogy (1996) treads the blurry line that divides the modern from the post-modern, and the realistic from the absurd. "In *BQ*, McDonagh creates a generic hybrid, blending elements of classic realist, Irish nationalist, and angry young man drama. Furthermore, I argue that this hybrid form determines and is determined by a complex, historically-contingent, postcolonial Irish experience marked by exile, diaspora, and internal strife" (Diehl 99). As with the earlier dramas, audiences observe in McDonagh's plays, an Irish hanger-on, so stripped of hope, yet somehow fiercely resistant to modern values. McDonagh's characters are shocking and desperate enough to represent some final breath of subversiveness.

Beauty Queen's characters' demeanors are so irreverent and violent, and their aversion to modernity so seemingly pointless and arbitrary, that there is almost a sense of total burial of Irish tradition. While still solid anti-heroes, McDonagh's characters also represent the furthest divergence from the idealized peasant of a century earlier. McDonagh's Ireland is a continuation of an increasingly hellish liminal space; the inverse of an idealized Ireland is laid out as a devolved hand-to-mouth existence in both a language of violence and violence itself. In this manner, a series of symbols of the Irish past are destroyed. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* trilogy offers us a surreally dark corner of late twentieth century Irish humanity characterized by utter cynicism, complete denial of accountability, and lingual/physical violence. McDonagh barrels into the bleakness of the irreparably postmodern Irish situation.

Early on in *Beauty Queen*, the author sets the tone for the trilogy by insinuating that “the crux of the matter...[is]...the English stealing our language, and our land, and our God-knows-what...” (8). The usual historical context for Irish plays is disposed of quickly. Before either Maureen or Mag expound on this *crux*, it becomes a non-sequitur; they instead switch to how they’d be pleased if the Dublin murderer would do the other one in. They descend into the language of violence that is imperative to the behavioral anarchy of McDonagh’s Galway. The language and the corresponding behaviors grow increasingly hopeless, devoid of direction, and violent as the trilogy develops.

Language again is an important device in Irish drama. But the utter gratuitousness of oaths and cursing in McDonagh’s *Leenane* trilogy amounts to a new device altogether. McDonagh’s language of violence becomes incorporated into the physical violence which has drawn on violence of earlier works. The repeated use of “feck” and “fecking” resonates like the repeated thump of a blunt object. Anarchy of linguistic behavior facilitates anarchy of physical behavior. McDonagh’s Galway is so postmodern that there is hardly a moral differentiation between verbal and physical assault. The emotions associated with both are equal, marked by the same oaths and the same consequences, and inevitably lead to more lingual and physical violence. In McDonagh’s Ireland, one could just as casually regret shooting one’s father in the head as he could taking the piss out of Martin’s Mam’s meals. McDonagh’s Ireland is a violent revival of Beckett’s world in *Waiting for Godot*: liminal, bleak, purgatoryish/hellish. But McDonagh’s characters, gritty and hopeless as they are, are attached to somewhat more recognizable scenarios. His characters function as in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, but McDonagh’s absurdity is ironic in its direct relation to realistic character action and physical surroundings

The language of McDonagh's characters comes in the form of direct attacks often creative and connected to a violence which is not seen in the characters of earlier works. Instead, McDonagh's characters' incessant "taking the piss" is to be seen as a signal of cultural ill health and pandemic anti-social pathology. But in the anti-heroic sense, the language is also a newly heightened gesture of irreverence toward modern mainstream values and Christianity in a once pagan land.

Given his contemporary Galway, McDonagh's Father Welsh would be delighted to live in Synge's rather quaint world. Instead, an unchecked manifestation of centuries of cultural suffocation devolves into McDonagh's Galway. Father Welsh is set up as a failed voice of reason who ultimately comes to illustrate the variability and relative absurdity of reason itself. In *The Lonesome West*, the place over which "God has no jurisdiction" stands as a byproduct of the very population who have become so behaviorally anarchistic that they will tell the agent of God to "feck off and sling your sermons at Maureen Folan and Mick Dowd..." (174-5).

Just as the other plays I have discussed, each *Beauty Queen* play develops an anti-hero character in juxtaposition to a character who is heroic according to more modern sensibilities. *The Lonesome West* posits a clear anti-hero, Coleman, against two other characters, Valene and Father Welsh. While both of Coleman's foils function as separate symbolic elements, they are linked by a symbiosis. Father Welsh is, of course, a priest and is therefore easily identified as an opponent to traditional pagan values. But McDonagh develops Welsh with greater complexity giving the character two major functions which are at once symbolic and ironic. Father Welsh declares his own divorce from Christian values by first declaring his lack of faith in his flock: "Valene, you fecking fecker, ya" and then, "Feck. Two murders and a fecking suicide" (197). Father Welsh's expressions of despair and violence are mortally sinful; his succumbing to the

climate of faithlessness leads to his ultimate violent act committed against himself. The complexity of Welsh's suicide is compounded by its doubling as a Christ-like gesture. By killing himself but appealing directly (in his suicide note) to what he hopes are Valene's and Coleman's dormant Christian sentiments, Welsh sacrifices himself in order that the brothers might be saved. McDonagh finally offers us a clearly illuminated hero figure (in all its grimness). This culminating moment works on the blackest of black-comic levels: first, by committing suicide and enduring eternal damnation, Welsh has one-upped Christ himself who only endured mere physical death in order to offer salvation. Second, Welsh's gesture is lost on the very objects of that gesture. Neither brother understands repentance in the Christian sense.

In the closing of the final act, McDonagh reveals Coleman as his anti-hero in spades. While in earlier acts all indicators point to Coleman (through his patricide and his lack of Christian charity in any form), it is his final actions that separate him from Valene. Coleman reminds us of a value that Oisín himself also does in his glorifications of the Fianna. Coleman says, "Well did we ask him to go betting his soul on us? And what's wrong with fighting anyways? I do like a good fight. It does show you care, fighting does. That's what our sissy Welsh doesn't understand" (256).

While on the surface perhaps seemingly shallow, Coleman's characterization of Welsh's beliefs as "sissy" in many ways reiterates the core divergence between pagan and Christian values. Coleman's justification of fighting is simply a restatement of Oisín's lament to St. Patrick on the same subject, "O Patrick by your brazen bell,/There was no limb of mine but fell/Into a desperate gulph of love!" (Yeats 2). Both anti-heroes support the preservation of a warrior ethos by associating violence with love. Having made his traditional justification for

rejecting Christian pacifism, Coleman deconstructs modernity by systematically destroying its elements as we see in his next actions.

Coleman next destroys Valene's figurines of the saints (a gesture he has now made for a second time) in what is on the surface a gesture of fraternal anger but beneath becomes something else. If Coleman's original rejection of Father Welsh's offer of salvation indicates Coleman's native lack of Christian sensibility, then his smashing of the cheap figurines indicates his rejection of a culture of cheap idolatry. Additionally, the smashing of the cheap figurines also allows McDonagh to take a shot at late-twentieth-century Ireland's assimilation into an increasingly commodified macrocosm influenced by mass production and mass marketing. Coleman next proceeds to destroy Valene's most glaring symbol of modern bourgeois comfort, his great, orange "£300" stove. Coleman claims to be apologetic for all of these acts, but is careful to remind Valene that his regrets have "nothing to do with Father Welsh's letter" (256).

Now only a single modern obstacle stands between Coleman and his complete deconstruction of modern Anglo-Irish bourgeois society, Valene's insurance. Valene accepts Coleman's surprisingly sincere apology, but only conditionally. Valene reveals the condition: "Ah, the house insurance'll cover me figurines anyways. As well as me stove" (257). Coleman here replies that he "didn't pay it [the insurance] in at all...pocketed the lot of it, pissed it up a wall" (258). Upon his revelation, Coleman having successfully stripped himself of all modern ties, disappears into native obscurity. All of Coleman's actions are despicable by modern standards, but, by their sheer persistent stand against modernity, are heroic as with the traditional Oisín character.

McDonagh uses Valene's actions in the final part of the scene to contend with the true thematic value of Welsh's letter. Valene begins to burn Welsh's note, which would be more of

an anti-heroic gesture, but decides instead to display it on the wall beside the cross. Like the cross itself, the letter becomes a presence that to Valene (who has all along been the more materialist, modernized character) is never fully rejected or accepted. Valene's change of heart toward Welsh's sacrificial gesture is identical in half-heartedness to his original shows of faith. Moreover, the cross and letter mark the continuance of an often peripheral cultural presence that keeps Ireland in an uncomfortable limbo between tradition and modernity. The extreme ambiguity generated by Welsh's conflicting gestures is emblematic of Christianity's inability to reduce the Irish spirit to cut-and-dried standards of behavior and belief.

Welsh's final plea to Valene and Coleman (through the letter), becomes a surreal message from Hell, thin as the priest who writes it, that gets filed on the wall beside the long-rejected crucifix and the useless cultivating tools. Valene and Coleman, rather than reacting positively to Welsh's Christ-like gesture, descend, in deed, into an extended mockery of the confessional profession of faith. The placing of the letter next to the crucifix is significant as the characters' way of saying, *place this letter and locket over on the wall with the other rejected and forgotten symbols of moral foundation*. The conclusion of *The Lonesome West* offers viewers a play-by-play of just how ideals come to be on the wall of the rejected or lost.

If we compare McDonagh's anti-heroes to Synge's or O'Caseys, we observe a less dreamy, more dangerous set of pathologies; but they are no more subversive. At the essential level McDonagh's anti-heroes are comparable, appearing as updated, more drastic, more desperate versions of their predecessors. This devolution in McDonagh's Ireland is created largely by the introduction of a third cultural variable (Christianity and English colonization being the first two): post-large-scale emigration and American-influenced commodification. In O'Casey's Ireland, a man might flatter another just to pilfer him of a pint, but in McDonagh's

world, a man would water down his brother's Poteen for a lifetime and admit it only when it promises to exact maximum agitation from the victim. In McDonagh's Ireland the anti-heroes exist at what seems the end of their cultural rope. "In effect, McDonagh's play reflects a world in which Irish identity is systematically undermined and compromised by increasing forms of uneven globalization; the identity category is evacuated of meaning and, thus, works to destabilized the nation from within its once immutable borders" (Diehl 107). Diehl's *meaningless identity category* refers directly to post-colonial conditions that not only linger into late-twentieth-century western Ireland, but still dictate aspects of modern life that are critical to cultural preservation. Uneven globalization is certainly a topic tackled by more recent Irish playwrights, some of who focus on narrowing gaps of economic privilege rendering an outlook for Ireland that is not so bleak. Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (1997) provides us a group of characters who are comfortable with Ireland's more recently growing capitalist value as an exotic destination or a center of massive production power. The tragic but quietly incidental death of Naimh (*The Weir*) threads the play with an evocative reference to a disappearing pagan tradition, but make no mistake about the characters, they are moving on into modernity with a best foot forward.

McDonagh's Galway is, of course, primarily defined by its inhabitants and their fringes-of-civilization behavior. But he does take specific care to give the reader a clearly defined description of setting. In the opening of *Beauty Queen*, McDonagh includes an epitomizing array of both traditional and ultra-modern adornments: "(A) turf box...a small TV...and electric kettle...a crucifix...a framed picture of Robert Kennedy...and a touristy looking embroidered tea-towel bearing the inscription, *May you be half an hour in Heaven afore the Devil knows you're dead*" (3). McDonagh wants the audience/reader to know immediately the Ireland he aims to describe, the

Ireland summed up by the oldest and newest variables of Irish cultural identifiers such as the staple crucifix, the trite, chintzy tea towel (probably imported) that caricaturizes an iffy Irishness and illustrates the commodification of that caricature, the TV and the framed picture of Kennedy reminding of the America that continues to dilute Ireland through the importation of values and the emigration of people. There is no mistaking this snapshot setting. Most unsettling is that we know this setting is, unlike McDonagh's characters, unexaggerated. Heath Diehl indicates similarly McDonagh's immediate plunge into a situation that is no fantasy: "At the center of *BQ*'s dramaturgy is a strong commitment to realism. Indeed, at first glance, *BQ* appears to reproduce the classic realist form almost obsessively. The first scene of the play is a model in exposition and characterization" (99). Here Diehl recognizes that McDonagh, rather than creating some typified ideal rural Galway cottage, simply describes something real. The elements of setting provide immediate insight into the characters' states of being, thus allowing the dialogue and plot to follow with logical and believable fluidity. Similarly epitomizing elements of setting permeate throughout the trilogy, e.g. Mick Dowd's retired collection of traditional farm tools or Valene's absurdly shiny, orange stove. In the case of McDonagh's Galway absurdity and realism coexist. The West of Ireland, once idealized, has become hell on earth.

The significance of setting in terms of McDonagh's anti-heroes actually comes down to the placement of objects and the characters' relationships and reactions to those objects. Here we discover that the essence of McDonagh's trilogy has more of a connection with the symbolic than with the literal. In this, McDonagh's development of character behavior is akin to that of Yeats' *Purgatory*, Synge's *Playboy*, or Beckett's *Godot*. While McDonagh successfully treads the threshold upon which absurdity and realism overlap, but we cannot ignore the symbolic values of his characters' actions. As an example, the "graveyard shenanigans" in *A skull in Connemara* express a

double meaning encapsulating contradictory forces which operate together to create a single effect. Skull and bone smashing are McDonagh's deliberately dramaturgical deconstruction of all that is or seems Irish. In this action we observe burial symbolically undone and replaced with literal and permanent disposal. Mick and Mairtin are literally removing Ireland's past from the very ground. The two characters exhume and destroy peasants, nationalists, diehards, tenant farmers, hedge school teachers—everybody—from the ground. By this action the characters represent the flow of modernity while contradictorily representing fringe resisters to that same modernity by their disassociation from mainstream economic and Christian values. For added irony, their action mimics the characters' collective resistance to modern law; i.e. without the body of the Irish, there is no case for Ireland. With the bodily evidence erased, the past is dust at the bottom of the lake.

McDonagh's characters' gratuitous, almost pleasure-filled ravaging of the seventh commandment (taking the lord's name in vain) is a reiteration of Synge's Christy who, in his rather glorious recession into the fringes, bids all members of the middle-class bourgeois social structure "Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here" (146) as he sets out for a lifetime of "romancing and romping." The parricide, the suicide, the storytelling, all are mainstays of pagan myth which we see recycled in McDonagh's *Leenane*. They are on one hand "dramatizations of rural Ireland (that) topple over into representations which recycle rather than critique disabling images" (Richards 9), yet on the other hand are equally "an alert to the partial or selective seeing inaugurated by the emergence of the currently buoyant economy of the 'Celtic Tiger' Ireland" (Merriman 244). I realize that these two are contradictory, but cultural paradox is the heart of McDonagh's Ireland. However, it is appropriate for McDonagh to have it both ways considering that the paradox itself is among his chief thematic motives; his drama feeds on the same

“pathologies of a patriarchal bourgeois society which underwrote imperialism” (King 90) that inspired the robust pagan defenders of his predecessors.

What remains in the wake of McDonagh’s deconstruction is a more drastic and horrible version of the ever-present Joycean notion that Ireland has no future. McDonagh’s Ireland, too, has neither past nor future; instead, existence is rendered liminal in a hellish confusion. McDonagh’s Ireland as exemplified by the lot of *Beauty Queen*’s Maureen Folan, is a hopeless planet stuck forever between the abuses of England and the missed boat to America. A self-identified skeptic of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ publicity buzz, McDonagh, in a 2002 interview, stated an authorial interest in the Irish folks “who fall through the cracks” (Hoggard 91). Arguably, this describes the central characters of Synge, O’Casey and Behan as well.

McDonagh’s alienated characters equal the detached Ireland indicated by his settings. Their roots no longer break the ground and their bodies cannot connect with their surroundings. The settings in the trilogy indicate as much. The set directions in all three plays offer variations on one theme; the rejected, the lost, and the unattainable adorn the walls of all three homes. There is no indication of cultural improvisation or adaptability; rather, everything points to emptiness and loss. Maureen and Mag’s décor consists of a crucifix (the rejected), the framed portraits of the Kennedys (the unattainable), and a cheap towel with a trite Irish expression on it (the lost). Mick Dowd’s décor is as easily deciphered: the standard crucifix represents the rejected. The hanging scythes and farm tools (below the crucifix) represent the lost culture of the Irish peasant. Coleman’s and Valene’s farmhouse wall is a final variation on the theme (this variation brings open violence into the equation): the standard crucifix hangs deliberately below the formidable double-barreled shotgun representing not only the general rejection of Christian values (as seen in *Beauty Queen* and *A Skull in Connemara*), but a specific yielding to violence. The portrait of the black dog is certainly

Lassie and represents both general loss and, again, a yielding to violence. The row of plastic saints indicates a total loss of the substance of faith. Valene's obsessive hoarding of figures equals the perversion of Christianity; Coleman's repeated destruction of the saints not only magnifies the persistence of anti-hero behavior, but relates it directly back to preceding rejections of saint figures.

While the connections between Synge and McDonagh are quite likely in appearance, it is equally likely that, as I originally stated, these elements of not knowing the truth of the myth, the rejection of Christian ideals, and the deconstruction of every infiltrating modern value are paramount to all works of drama that posture the underdog Irish anti-hero against modernity. It only makes sense that a cultural takeover at least ostensibly sponsored by the values of Christian peace would be countered with a cultural defense that plays largely on a violent reaction to the values themselves. Understanding McDonagh's anti-hero as a devolved manifestation of Oisín requires consideration of the author's post-modern disillusionment. Unlike Synge and O'Casey, whose "shaped and lyricized dialogue adds dignity to the utterances of the poor" (Sternlicht 89). McDonagh's dialogue has markedly clear characteristics of post-modern confusion. *The Lonesome West* provides us with the starkest example of confused spiritual/cultural hierarchy by giving us a cursing, suicidal priest.

Like *Playboy's* Christy, who undergoes the metamorphosis from passive to active, McDonagh's characters operate with plunging levels of (un)sophistication within the greater flow moral expectation; their turns from passive to active come in the form of violent language to violent acts. As peasants they are perverse and as nationalists they can conceive of no allegiances. They are devoid of pieties altogether. McDonagh's characters continually reduce themselves to hand-to-mouth animalism and thus personify the absolute terminus of human cynicism/Irish humanity.

Specifically, the language of irreverence and violence that permeates the *Beauty Queen* trilogy advances the thematic force of repression-born anarchy. With McDonagh's characters,

the ends of the anarchy are not considered. Instead the worship of negativity and rejection of not only authority, but society, run continually. Interestingly, the values portrayed are those which transcend marking by political tags such as “nationalism” or “anarchy.” So many other works of modern Irish realism tell us stories in which the spiritual disappearance of the ideal peasant or the resistant traditional anti-hero is relatively tragic, yet quiet and incidental (e.g. Conor MacPherson’s *The Weir*, or Brian Friel’s *Dancing at Lughnasa*). Instead, McDonagh takes us into the bleakest reaches of anarchy where a Beckett-style hell becomes all hell unhinged and nearly every character has found, in his or her own voice, an increasingly disturbing and drastic way to resist and reject post-colonial exponents.

Conclusion

Considering all of our anti-heroes, socially unpalatable actions and crimes, it is not too difficult to map out a pattern of devolution. Where Oisín and Martin Doull show rejection of Christ’s agent thus reverting into the pagan, Christy Mahon enacts lying about, and then attempted, parricide. Regardless, Christy is no killer in the impious sense; he defends his autonomy by both story and deed; the story and deed both happen to include parricide, a subject of Irish oral tradition. Jack Boyle experiences total social dysfunction but maintains a fringe existence in a myth that is both self-sustained and self-sustaining. The characters of *The Quare Fellow* and *Purgatory* devolve into nameless symbols of blurred lines between sacrifice/martyrdom and cold-blooded murder; their settings are the bleakest microcosmic edges. Finally, McDonagh’s Galway breeds characters whose resistance is so born of post-modern apathy that there is no conscious connection to any tradition whatever. Rather, McDonagh’s Galway indicates the rope’s end to end all ropes’ ends: a setting in which characters are so ingrained with collective cultural frustration that their behavior becomes unmitigated violence.

What all the anti-hero characters share can be characterized as a stripping of collective cultural identity that leads to increasingly drastic anti-social behavior.

Tom Svensson, a PhD in Ethnography at the Ethnographic Museum, Oslo, who studies the Nisga'a of northwestern British Columbia, an Eskimo culture for centuries colonized, proselytized, and modernized, reiterates determinations implicit within the plot and character actions of our stock Irish anti-hero:

The meaning of traditional, locally anchored culture-specific knowledge is, for example, to lay stress upon and show distinctiveness, that which makes them unique in the world. This is vital for the internal discourse; it is, however, of decisive significance also in diverse arenas for cross-cultural interactions. To be meaningful such distinctiveness, ethnically defined, requires recognition from the outside, only then can ethno-political results necessary for cultural viability be attained...All peoples, or cultures, have traditions/customs which serve as guiding elements for commonly accepted conduct. Consequently, tradition can be viewed as a native category, but at the same time it is an analytic construct. (15)

Notably, Svensson asserts that cultural identity loses meaning if it lacks recognition from the outside. It is such a repeated lack of outside recognition that has so exacerbated the raw bitterness that flows within the collective Irish native spirit. Since cross-cultural interactions have come in the form of colonial and missionary aggression, these interactions have been the source of nothing but cultural obfuscations. Svensson is correct in labeling tradition as a *native category*; but centuries of both native and non-native analytic construct, even the native category itself is diminished. Both the existence and obscurity of our anti-heroes is well explained by Svensson's cultural phenomenon. Chiefly confusing to the Irish cultural collective consciousness is the lack of what Svensson terms (above) culture-specific knowledge. Because of 1500 years of multiple cultural interventions, the cultural collective that existed pre-Christianity does not even exist in a cohesive historical context. Rather, the cultural-specific knowledge embraced by those who profess their own "pure" Irishness is a product of

imagination. Ireland's literature, as we see in the case of the works I have discussed here, is unique in that it mimics lives of modern Irish folks and pagan roots.

The initial productions of all of these plays generated controversy. The Freeman's Journal said of *The Well of the Saints* that "the point of view is not that of a writer in sympathetic touch with the people from whom he purports to draw his characters." *Juno and the Paycock* endured similar indictments. The irony of the *Freeman's Journal* quote needs no explaining. While they have regularly wooed audiences with their borderline-caricature baseness and insolence, Boyle, Christy, and Dougl have also caused much controversy. O'Casey has been criticized as politically incoherent, Behan a convicted terrorist. Critics have labeled McDonagh juvenile; a writer whose heyday shall be naturally short lived. A chief failure of all of these criticisms is the lack of insight into the texts as literary phenomena born of socio-cultural questions relating to the fate of Irish tradition. Their characters' fervent disdain for political, national, or clerical orthodoxies connects them with pre-invasion Ireland. Like Oisín, these characters reject the purported power and glory of the institutions that would assimilate them. The audience, usually the bourgeoisie, are quick to highlight the characters' obvious shortcomings and ignore their more subtle energy and nobility. The anti-heroic characters sustain a culture continuity always in danger of being ousted by extra-cultural influences of every imaginable type.

Works Cited

Alspach, Russell K. "Some Sources of Yeats's the Wanderings of Oisín." *PMLA* 58.3 (1943): 849-66.

Augusta, Isabella. "Oisin and St. Patrick." Mockingbird Irish Resources page. Creighton University

Department of English: Omaha, NE. 20 Feb 2006

<<http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/english/micsun/IrishResources/oisinpat.htm>>.

Benstock, Bernard. Paycocks and Others : Sean O'Casey's World. Dublin; New York: Gill and

Macmillan; Barnes & Noble, 1976.

Casey, Daniel J. Critical Essays on John Millington Synge. New York: G.K. Hall, 1994.

Diehl, Heath A. "Classic Realism, Irish Nationalism, and a New Breed of Angry Young Man in Martin

McDonagh's "the Beauty Queen of Leenane"." The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language

Association 34.2 (2001): 98-117. .

Frayne, John P. Sean O'Casey. Vol. 73. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

Greene, Nicholas. The Politics of Irish Drama : Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel. Cambridge ;

New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Harrington, John P. Modern Irish Drama. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1991.

Hoggard, Liz. "Martin McDonagh: Playboy of the West End World." The London Independent

15 Jun. 2002: 88-92.

Kiberd, Declan. Irish Classics. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

---. The Irish Writer and the World. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Kilroy, Thomas. Sean O'Casey: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

O'Toole, Fintan. "Smashing the Bones of Poets." American Theatre 16.8 (1999): 48. .

Pearce, Donald R. "Yeats' Last Plays: An Interpretation." ELH 18.1 (1951): 67-76.

Price, Alan. Synge and Anglo-Irish Drama. London: Methuen, 1961.

Richards, Shaun. The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Russel, Richard R. "Brendan Behan's Lament for Gaelic Ireland: *The Quare Fellow*." New Hibernia Review 6.1 (2002): 73-93.

Schrank, Bernice. "Dialectical Configurations in *Juno and the Paycock*." Twentieth Century Literature 21.4 (1975): 438-56. .

Skelton, Robin. J. M. Synge. Lewisburg Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1972.

Sternlicht, Sanford V. A Reader's Guide to Modern Irish Drama. 1st ed. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998.

Svensson, Tom G. Knowledge and Artifacts—People and Objects, on Cultural Traditions and Research Based Collecting. Conference on Cultural Traditions in Danger of Disappearing in Contemporary Society. The National Complex "Astra" Museum, Sibiu, Romania. 26-30 September 2003.

Synge, J. M. The Playboy of the Western World & Other Plays. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Yeats, W.B. "The Wanderings of Oisín." Project Gutenberg Consortia Center. University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill, NC. 16 Sep 2007
<<http://www.worldebooklibrary.com/eBooks/WorldeBookLibrary.com/oisin.htm>>