

Contemporary Irish Gothic Drama: the Return of the Hibernian Repressed during the Rise and Fall of the Celtic Tiger

Coinciding with the rise of the Celtic Tigerⁱ in late twentieth-century Ireland, playwrights responded in increasingly charged and experimental ways to the rapidly shifting economic and cultural transformation the nation experienced during that period. Martin McDonagh – admittedly London-raised of expatriate Irish parents – was the first amongst this school to receive international attention, with Conor McPherson and Marina Carr following hot on his heels, and thence a steady stream of others, including Enda Walsh, Mark O’Rowe and Abbie Spallen. Whilst McDonagh’s darkly satirical oeuvre parodies cultural insularity and paranoia in the West of Ireland, McPherson, Carr and O’Rowe in particular turn to the mythic past to imbue the industrialised and economically booming ‘present’ (of late 1990s and early 2000s Ireland) with a folkloric presence that refuses to wither and die. In this essay I want to place a number of these playwrights together and to read their work through a particular generic lens that seems to have been elided from the substantial body of analysis in the field: that of the Gothic. While Laura Eldred has written on the Gothic and Horror modes (in fact conflating the two) in relation to McDonagh, there is surprisingly little Gothic analysis of the other writers, despite the plethora of Gothic themes, plots, characters and conventions evident in their work. Reviews of their work and interviews with these playwrights may centre on discussions of ghosts, folklore, the refusal of the past to die in an industrialised present and such unmistakably Gothic terrainⁱⁱ, and yet the scholarship surrounding the dramatic corpus of these writers tends to fall instead to questions of space, language, gender, violence and landscape. Conversely, there is a rich scholarly corpus focussing on the Irish Gothic as a

literary phenomenon, stretching back to the early eighteenth century with writers like Robert Maturin, Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker and thence on to William Carleton, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats and Elizabeth Bowen. And certainly there are scholars who have more recently added Irish dramatists to this list, with Sinéad Mooney arguing a strong case to read key texts in Samuel Beckett's dramatic and literary corpus as Gothic, and Anthony Roche discussing the impact of such plays of "spiritual and emotional crisis"ⁱⁱⁱ as the (Gothic) examples in mid-late twentieth-century playwrights' work. Such texts in Roche's study include Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979), Tom Murphy's *The Gigli Concert* (1983) and Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985).

Whilst debate rages in certain circles as to what constitutes an Irish Gothic tradition^{iv} and whether imposing canonical status upon it is even possible or desirable, very little of this discussion focuses on twenty-first century writing, and certainly not upon writing for the stage. The aims of this essay are thus twofold: to argue the case for a contemporary Irish Gothic theatre 'school' (whose primary proponents I will identify as McDonagh, McPherson, Carr and O'Rowe); and to place this contemporary 'school' in conversation with the Irish Gothic literary corpus identified by the scholarship of Terry Eagleton, Seamus Deane, W. J. McCormack, Jarlath Killeen, Christopher Morash, Richard Haslam, Sinéad Mooney and David Punter. The resulting intention here is to open up a fresh way of reading and comparing contemporary Irish playwrights that allows us to place their work into sharper focus when it comes to comparing them to each other as pre-eminent writers of the millennial period.

Defining the Gothic

Whilst widely considered a slippery term to pin down, most Gothic theorists agree on some central tenets that define the mode in a general sense. These include notions of a haunting of the present by the past; a psychological return of the repressed that erupts into the present during crisis; themes of entrapment, excess, transgression and the Uncanny, all of which tend to play out in a setting or landscape associated with these values. For Fred Botting, this frequently translates to a narrative where modernity itself is the site of the haunting and which is under threat by a past whose values refuse to subside into obscurity. He writes:

Gothic condenses the many perceived threats to these values, threats associated with supernatural and natural forces, imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption. If not a purely negative term, Gothic writing remains fascinated by objects and practices that are constructed as negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic.^v

Jerrold E. Hogle concurs and attaches Kristeva's reading of the abject to Freud, in which "the return of the repressed familiar in 'the uncanny' [is] based on a more fundamental human impulse that also helps us to define the cultural, as well as the psychological, impulses most basic to the Gothic"^{vi}. The abject incorporates the elements of the self being disowned or 'thrown off' because their ambiguity threatens to dissolve a coherent and rational sense of self-perception. According to Hogle,

Whatever threatens us with anything like this betwixt-and-between, even dead-and-alive, condition, Kristeva concludes, is what we throw off or 'abject' into

defamiliarized manifestations, which we henceforth fear and desire because they both threaten to re-engulf us and promise to return us to our primal origins. (7)

For Jeffrey N. Cox, when these themes or generic approaches are explored in the typical Gothic novel, they are furnished with a range of ‘appurtenances’ – locations, settings, stock characters and ‘conventionalised situations’ – that make the genre apparent to the reader. In the late eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century Gothic novel or play, these include “the almost obligatory castle and its resident villain, but also dungeons, monasteries, bands of robbers, gloomy forests, supernatural or monstrous creatures, rain-swept seacoasts, madwomen, suits of dusty armour, and mysterious strangers”^{vii}. Cox identifies three predominant ways in which these material appurtenances can be interpreted in order to produce meaning, and these incorporate the psychological approaches outlined by Botting and Hogle, above. They include: a system of identifiable semiotics that produce a “closed and self-coherent system of atmospheric signs” that can be used to define the Gothic (6); a psychological reading of texts at thematic level in which the Gothic is read “as a fantasy that uncovers the desires repressed by modern culture” (7); and a political level of interpretation where the Gothic storyline or plot is read as allegory for contemporary cultural crises/fears/tensions in the external social order. The example Cox provides is the French Revolution, and how the abiding European fear of dissolution of the (monarchic) state was alluded to via metaphor in the plots of Gothic novels and plays in the 1790s-1820s.

Cox goes on to provide a rich history of the transition of the Gothic novel to the stage in the same period, elaborating upon ways in which these plotlines, appurtenances and devices were enacted upon the stage as increasingly large scale spectacles – usually

melodramas – and a theatre of sensation designed to shock and titillate audiences of the time. He is one of the few ‘generalist’ (as against region- or nation-specific) Gothic scholars to focus upon the Gothic *theatrical* tradition. I turn now to an analysis of the ways in which Cox’s tripartite definition (material appurtenances and semiotic signifiers; psychological analysis; and political myth and allegory) can be applied to the Irish Gothic literary corpus.

The Irish Gothic

Terry Eagleton and Seamus Deane are prominent among the group of scholars referring to the work of Robert Maturin, Sheridan Le Fanu, Bram Stoker, William Butler Yeats and Elizabeth Bowen as ‘Protestant Gothic’ fiction with Eagleton considering noteworthy the fact that these Anglo-Irish writers “should have exhibited such fascination with madness and the occult, terror and the supernatural” when they belonged to a social class which “habitually chided the Catholic masses for their infantile superstition”^{viii}. As will be discussed shortly, religious sectarianism underpins Irish parsing of the Gothic vocabulary in a way that contrasts starkly with the more secular literary and theatrical traditions of nations like Australia, New Zealand and Canada. But for Eagleton, “Protestant Gothic might be dubbed the political unconscious of Anglo-Irish society, the place where its fears and fantasies most definitively emerge” (187). Primary amongst such fears in fin-de-siecle (and pre-Partition) Ireland were political and social annihilation. An apprehension of violent besiegement at the hands of the Irish Catholic majority was a plausible one. Eagleton is worth quoting at length when he discusses the fertile Gothic conditions existing for writers in the Protestant Ascendancy a century ago:

There are good reasons why the political unconscious of nineteenth-century Ireland should have been rather more turbulent than most. Violent, criminal, priest-ridden, autocratic, full of mouldering ruins and religious fanaticism, it was a society ripe for Gothic treatment, having much of that literary paraphernalia conveniently to hand. And if Irish Gothic is a specifically Protestant phenomenon, it is because nothing lent itself more to the genre than the decaying gentry in their crumbling houses, isolated and sinisterly eccentric, haunted by the sins of the past. (188)

Aligning with Cox's political-mythological level of Gothic thematic analysis, Sinéad Mooney reads Eagleton to contend that he "adapts Frederic Jameson's concept of the 'political unconscious'" to analyse the Protestant writers' corpus:

At its simplest, this is to argue that the Anglo-Irish supernatural stories, with their evocations of aboriginal guilt, demonic familiars, and spectrally besieged houses, and the preying on a helpless victim of an unseen but deadly threat, condone the displaced expression of the social and cultural anxieties of a beleaguered and paranoid minority.^{ix}

Jarlath Killeen also notes the strength of the Catholic Gothic tradition in Irish literature, including William Carleton (a late-life convert to Protestantism), Oscar Wilde, and the occasionally Gothic James Joyce. There are thus both pro- and anti-Catholic forces at play within the Irish Gothic compendium, but leaving aside this fraught question of religious perspective, Killeen identifies some key tropes spanning the literature constituting this tradition/mode that are of critical importance when it comes to reading the work of the contemporary playwrights being focussed upon in this essay.

Firstly and, in some ways most importantly for a theatre study, focussed as theatre so frequently is on representations of (both real and imaginary) space in (an actual theatre) space, is the question of Gothic landscapes and settings in Ireland. Killeen identifies Ireland's 'Celtic fringes' as uncanny space for English writers. As 'wild' and 'uncivilised' remote spaces (my descriptors, not Killeen's), "the Celtic fringes were not only configured as repositories of all that which England wished to deny and banish (the irrational, the superstitious, the perverse, the Catholic, the cannibal), they also became a kind of zone of atemporality, a place of the primitive and atavistic which the modern world had not yet touched"^x (2006). There is a (perhaps unconscious) process not only of demonization of Catholicism in general, and the Irish in particular taking place here, but a concomitant infantilising ethnographic project at play as well. Perhaps this orthodoxy (of dehumanising the Catholic/Irish Other) at the hands of *English* writers creates an association with the Gothic that contemporary Irish playwrights and their biographers are still hesitant to embrace and name as Gothic. This is not a supposition that is easy to support with hard and fast evidence, but nonetheless adheres in my mind as a legitimate point of conjecture.

Killeen does, however, pose the question that, while this *English* representation of Irish landscape and culture as Gothic-monstrous Other makes sense, why would Irish Protestant – or indeed for that matter Catholic – writers choose to represent Ireland utilising similar imagery and language? "To Gothicise [Irish space]," Killeen reasons, "was to risk making a monster of themselves" (2006). By way of answer, Killeen argues that by the end of the eighteenth century, Ireland has become 'home' for Protestants who had "accepted Irish ethnicity and nationality and attempted to reconfigure it as a positive rather than a negative marker of identity" (2006). Killeen quotes Christopher Morash to conclude that

Rather than accept the version of Ireland as Gothic, the traditional narratives of Irish Protestants attempt to find ways of destroying this image: the Irish Gothic is a riposte to a Celticist project which almost invariably celebrated the survival of the past in the present (often in racial terms), a narratologically produced demand for a stake to be driven in the heart of all that confounds the project of modernity, particularly when that agent of resistance is the blood of an ancient race unaccountably flowing through the veins of the present (Morash qtd in Killeen, 2006).

So the English Gothic tradition is being conscripted here to decorate, embellish and perpetuate internal sectarian tensions in the Irish nation state. Presumably using the same logic, the Gothic becomes a mode for Catholic writers to reverse the negative stereotyping, or to reconstitute the Irish landscape in a folklore, language and spatial coding that is indigenous rather than imported. There is arguably a postcolonial Gothic project at play here.

Concluding his comprehensive historical overview, Killeen suggests that applying an eighteenth-century literary project to a twenty-first-century condition of cultural modernity may not work, in which case the Gothic threatens to become extinct as a literary mode. He ponders that when understood as “a form of perpetual hesitancy” – that is, a cultural condition in which attachment to the past is placed in perpetual juxtaposition to an immersion in a modern present and future – the Irish Gothic “may not be altogether possible in Celtic Tiger Ireland since it appears that the Irish have finally made a choice and rejected the hyphenated mind of the past. Gothic Ireland,” Killeen concludes, “now exists only as a tourist virtual reality” (2006).

And yet the Gothic, as expressed in the *dramatic* works of McDonagh, McPherson, Carr and O’Rowe, is positively booming in the economic heyday of late 1990s and early 2000s Ireland, and shows no signs of abating in the wake of Global Financial Crisis collapse and the retreat of the Celtic Tiger. It would appear that there is a clear disjunction between what is occurring in theatres and in prose fiction in Ireland at this time (assuming here that Killeen is correct and that the Gothic novel is a rarer commodity than the Gothic play)^{xi}. In order to lay claims to a renaissance in the Irish Gothic as a theatrical form – or mode, or even by now, it might be said, tradition – in millennial Ireland, I turn now to a reading of key texts within these playwrights’ oeuvres to identify the Gothic within them and to offer some analyses of their differing cultural agendas.

Identifying the Gothic in Contemporary Irish Playwrights’ Work

Whilst debate may rage amongst some literary scholars as to the evidence of a Gothic tradition in Ireland where, to quote Richard Haslam, “sacred knowledge and rules” must be demonstrated as having been “handed down”^{xii} from generation to generation, there is actually solid circumstantial evidence to suggest that contemporary Irish playwrights have done their homework. Their influences (Gothic and otherwise) are broad and deep, ranging from indigenous Irish literary figures to twentieth-century American cinema and Classical Greek and Roman theatre. Synge’s ghost looms large over McDonagh’s early plays and while McDonagh is on record as downplaying the influence theatre has had on him, he readily acknowledges the influence of twentieth-century film directors and screenwriters on his work^{xiii}. McPherson’s corpus provides an almost textbook approach to discussion of the Irish Gothic. His 2011 play *The Veil* is a quintessentially Gothic dramatic text, set in a big

house in 1820s rural Ireland, evoking the landscape, the era and the cultural politics of Maturin accordingly. Carr, like McPherson, draws upon pre-Christian Irish folklore to gothicise her Midlands dramas, but her literary antecedents are Greek and Roman as well as Irish. Her characters speak like Synge's but her plots channel Euripides on more than one occasion^{xiv}. As Cath Leeney and Anna McMullan state, "[w]e are only beginning to respond to the distinctive voice of contemporary Irish theatre. Genealogies and connections suggested here include J.M. Synge, Teresa Deevy, Samuel Beckett, Edna O'Brien, William Faulkner"^{xv}. Speaking of the broader contemporary Irish theatre movement of which Carr is a crucial part, Leeney and McMullan suggest that "[t]here will emerge many more perspectives and evaluations, connections to be made and explored"^{xvi}. The Gothic connections are the ones that I seek to tease out and solder here. Whilst an entire monograph could be dedicated to the topic, and the discussion of indicative texts could stretch to a score (spanning the entire gamut of McPherson's and Carr's corpuses), representative texts I will focus on in this essay are McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996), McPherson's *The Weir* (1997) and *The Veil* (2011), and Carr's *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998). These texts not only traverse the millennial cusp, they also bookend the Celtic Tiger's rise and retreat. McDonagh's play (as with the entire trilogy of which it is one part) satirises the dogged refusal of 'old' superstitious, Catholic Ireland to wither and die; *The Weir* and *By the Bog of Cats...* examine the ghosts from an ancient Ireland that roam the Celtic fringes in the face of globalisation and modernity; and *The Veil* – the only 'post-Tiger' text in the case study – returns to a previous period of Irish national trauma to explore an unsettled nation's legacy of invasion and haunting. The collective impression here is of a compendium of Gothic works that point to a period of millennial introspection and reflection for a troubled nation poised anxiously on the

brink of modernity – an economic precipice that promises financial and psychological independence from the colonial past, yet also threatens rupture and a kind of annihilation of indigenous identity and beliefs.

McDonagh occupies a complex position within this discussion of contemporary Irish Gothic theatre. Whilst the plays housed within his two regional Irish trilogies^{xvii} activate actual topographies, the faithfulness and authenticity of their characterisation has polarised critics over the years. José Lanfers provides a summary of critics who accuse him, amongst other things, of “trivializing Irish politics and perpetuating Irish stereotypes”^{xviii}. Words like ‘defective’, ‘empty’, ‘misogynist’, ‘prejudicial’ and ‘racist’ strew Lanfers’ survey^{xix}. Others, according to Lanfers, see dark truth in the cultural cliché, or even something “quintessentially Irish – a dark humor that is both sad and uplifting; a story embodied by a furtive, yet honest imagination; and the ability to poeticize language in a manner that is the culmination of centuries of telling a good story” (Michelle Adam qtd in Lanfers^{xx}). Interestingly, in the examples Lanfers provides, the harshest censure comes from English commentators. McDonagh’s legendary arrogance doubtless adds fuel to the fire^{xxi}. Aleks Sierz disputes McDonagh’s claim to be theatre-ignorant, claiming that his plays display evidence of a familiarity with “most Irish playwrights from Boucicault to John B. Keane, from John Millington Synge to Tom Murphy. You only have to read the opening scene of Keane’s *Sive* to see its influence on McDonagh”^{xxii}. His canonical familiarity and the accuracy of McDonagh’s depiction of regional Ireland notwithstanding, what I find interesting is Lanfers’ claim that in his use of national stereo- or archetypes, McDonagh’s project is ultimately one

of debunking of national myth and identity, particularly as regards nostalgia for an idyllic past. It is partly in relation to this claim that their status as Gothic plays is also problematic.

In *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, (henceforth *TBQL*) we see all the hallmarks of regional 'Oirishness' and a sense of being tethered to the past that is evident in the remainder of McDonagh's published plays. There is also a strong enough sense of the psychological return of the repressed, horror-fuelled claustrophobia and (whilst it never slips into the numinous) personal haunting to claim the play, as Laura Eldred has, as Gothic. Like many of McDonagh's plays, *TBQL* slips readily from genre to genre – even internally – causing it (and practically all of his plays) to be defined in umbrella terms as postmodern hybrid. Fintan O'Toole reads *TBQL* as “pre-modern and post-modern at the same time”^{xxiii}; Sierz sees an admixture of “savage irony and surreal humour” wrapped up in a tightly scripted well-made play (220); Landers reads it as “postmodern dramatic satire” (10); Eldred sees it as a dark comedy that in its latter stages dog-legs suddenly into “the blood-soaked realm of horror and the gothic”^{xxiv}. Never purely one form, this sense of generic hybridity lends itself well to the Gothic, which in turn embraces hybridity as a native state of being.

In *TBQL* we see a repressed, mature-aged spinster daughter (Maureen) murder her curmudgeonly mother (Mag) with a stoking-iron after Mag thwarts her daughter's chance at marriage and escape from the house outside Leenane. The sense of Maureen's entrapment (in unwanted monastic celibacy, in a co-dependent relationship with her lying and malevolent mother, in a small house on a plot of land on the top of a hill on the *outskirts* of already-rural Leenane, in a present that is already strongly tethered to the past) is a decidedly Gothic one, connecting strongly with the Irish Gothic literary example and definitions outlined earlier in this essay. There is a strong sense of the grotesque and the monstrous, not only in the

construction of the malevolent Complian-devouring Mag and her murderous (and allegedly mad spinster daughter), but also in the piece's depiction of implicitly Catholic habits of sexual abstention, alcoholic indulgence and the Irish emigrant's unhappy sense of cultural dislocation abroad. Nicholas Grene identifies elements of the grotesque in the language itself, "a cartoon-like gleefulness in this, a grotesque excess in the language that actually reduces its shock value by taking it out of the realm of the real" (301). The following exchange is typical, and illustrates not only the gleeful vulgarity of the language, but also the simmering sexual repression that occupies the home, and the loveless relationship between mother and daughter. Pato has just spent the night with Maureen, and daughter is intent on rubbing the sexual conquest in mother's face. Pato is fixing Mag a cup of Complian as Maureen enters in a bra and slip and sits provocatively astride Pato's lap:

PATO (*embarrassed*) Maureen, now...

MAUREEN: Careful enough, cos we don't need babies coming, do we? We do have enough babies in this house to be getting on with.

Maureen kisses him at length. Mag watches in disgust.

PATO: Maureen, now...

Maureen: Just thanking you for a wonderful night, I am, Pato. Well worth the wait it was. *Well* worth the wait.

PATO: (*embarrassed*) Good-oh.

MAG: Discussing me scouled hand we was before you breezed in with no clothes.

MAUREEN: Ar, feck your scoulded hand. (*to Pato*) You'll have to be putting that thing of yours in me again before too long is past, Pato. I do have a taste for it now, I do... (27/8)

There is a craven disregard for civility demonstrated here and a Gothic excess in the transgression of normative social-sexual boundaries. When the regional dialect – the almost cartoonish ‘Oirishness’ is layered on top of the speech and action, the piece becomes satirical not only of a domestic situation, but of a region and its reputedly incestuous mindset. As Eldred argues, “these characters [in various of McDonagh’s plays] could be read as monstrous because they challenge traditional, de Valerian definitions of a nationalist, Catholic, Gaelic-speaking, rural Irishness. McDonagh loves to parody the Gaelic Romantic vision of Ireland” (116), and does so in order to force his audience “into identification with, and often qualified sympathy for, characters who destabilize traditional ideals of Irish national character” (16). One example of Catholic parody in *TBQL* includes the characters’ inability to remember the local priest’s name (Welsh? Walsh?) who reappears in *Lonesome West* and confesses there to being a “terrible priest” who runs “a terrible parish” (*Lonesome*, 135). As O’Toole summarises it, “almost everything that gave old Ireland its sense of self is gone. The Church is falling apart. Religion is a spent force” (xiv). The ‘culture’ that the characters imbibe on daytime television is Australian (soap operas *The Sullivans*, *A Country Practice* and *Sons and Daughters* are ubiquitous), and most of the younger generation in *TBQL* dream of escape to Canada or Boston.

In its macabre solipsism, the West of Ireland becomes mythical space – the Celtic fringe Killeen identifies – the rottenness and corruption at the heart of which implies a fragmentation of Irish identity itself. The lack of fealty and affection between Mag and Maureen – between mother and daughter – could well be read as a metaphor for internal self-loathing and corruption, an extension of the same disdain we see reserved for Father Welsh, the cumulative impression of which is a portrait of grotesque Celticist abjection. As the

metonymic space in which this abjection is played out, the West is (according to Sierz) “deconstructed with meticulous attention to detail. Scenic beauty becomes constant rain, folksy charm is really inbred ignorance, the old-fashioned village is isolated and full of hatred, and the family a nest of vipers” (224). We will shortly see a similar mise-en-scene constructed in Carr’s work, but to very different political ends. It is in this desire to embrace modernity by expunging all nostalgia for the past (outlined by Sierz and Laners) that I find McDonagh’s status as a Gothic playwright a more problematic one than that of Carr, Machperson and, to a lesser extent, O’Rowe. According to the definitions of the Gothic offered and discussed earlier, part of the Gothic project involves the past/repressed returning and erupting into the present as a form of cultural crisis and catharsis – certainly a haunting – but the objective is not necessarily to excoriate the past and expunge it altogether in order to live in a pristine version of (post)modernity. In traditional Gothic texts, the past can never be sloughed off entirely and, indeed, in the work of Carr and McPherson in particular, a mythic, folkloric past is one that refuses to die and be vanquished even in the heyday of the Celtic Tiger and in its twenty-first century wake. I agree with Eldred when she reads McDonagh’s oeuvre as one in which the Gothic is strategically co-opted as a mode in repeatedly similar ways in order to parody violence and national identity formation. The Gothic is a part of the whole here, but it is not necessarily the dominant lens through which McDonagh’s rich Irish theatrical legacy might ultimately be read. For that, we need to turn to McPherson and Carr.

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In comparing McPherson’s and McDonagh’s representation of Irishness (particularly in relation to rural idylls and mythic pasts), Nicholas Grene treads across ground that is uncannily similar to the Catholic versus Protestant Gothic agendas in eighteenth and

nineteenth-century literature that Killeen negotiates with such dexterity. This is not to reduce McDonagh and McPherson to religious sectarian projects; rather it is to highlight similar impulses to honour or repudiate an adherence to the Celtic past that can be seen in their work. As Grene declares, “[w]hat is most interesting in McDonagh and McPherson’s work is the contrasting versions of Ireland the plays dramatize and the varieties of the Irish imaginary reflected in their reception”^{xxv}. McPherson’s take on the rural west is “much less jaundiced than McDonagh’s” (302). “His imagination of the rural pub in *The Weir* is a construction of those occasional city boy’s visits to his Leitrim grandfather, as McDonagh’s Leenane may be assumed to be the product of enforced family holidays in Connemara” (302). Presumably McPherson had a better time of it than McDonagh - the result, inevitably, of an upbringing in Dublin rather than London. McPherson’s project is more closely aligned to the postcolonial Gothic practice of honouring pre-imperial indigenous mythology and attachment to landscape than is McDonagh’s anti-nostalgic iconoclasm. Where McDonagh’s agenda mirrors that of the nineteenth-century Ascendancy Protestant Gothic agenda of demonising the aboriginal or the Catholic Irish monstrous Other (and, again, this is not to suggest that McDonagh marches in lockstep with anyone else’s ism, Sectarian or otherwise), McPherson’s is to ‘write back’ to empire, as it were, from what we might describe as a postcolonial Gothic Hibernian perspective. Read together, we see opposite sides of the Gothic millennial bridge that is the focus of this essay being played out – one of which seems to want anachronistic Celtic superstition vanquished, and the other of which sees the folkloric past as a force that refuses to be annihilated in a booming modern present.

There is none of McDonagh’s heightened tone or sense of parody at play in McPherson’s Celtic fringes. If anything, the tone is naturalistic – even Realist – until we get

to the parts about ghosts. Grene reads the pub in rural County Sligo or Leitrim as standing “at the edge of the modern world” both geographically and temporally. It is “a last dying vestige of an older community” that has access to folkloric memory within its DNA (304). If categorising it in any dramatic genre at all, Grene aligns it with Synge’s *Aran Islands* pastoral in its “inheritance of oral folklore” and its status as “late descendant of the Celtic Twilight” (304). It is through this same inheritance that I read the piece as a paradigmatic example of the millennial Irish Gothic.

McPherson announces *The Weir*’s setting as ‘the present day’ in his stage directions, but this is a present where the faeries and the ‘old folk’ still walk their ancient migration routes from location to location in the West, even when modernity (and ‘modernity’ is close to a thousand years old in this sense) in the form of settlement of the land has disrupted access to these paths and routes. Indeed, there is evidence of this thematic project at work in the title of the play itself. Helen Heusner Lojek points out that one of the photos on the wall is of the Electricity Supply Board dam “built on the River Shannon as part of the rural Electrification Scheme that began at the end of the 1940s”^{xxvi}. Lojek points out that the characters are aware that the dam brought electricity to the area, “so the photograph of the weir, which irrevocably changed the Shannon’s flow, has implications for the impact of industrialisation on Ireland’s national identity” (45). There are Gothic touches to the otherwise realist set design alluded to: aside from the photo of the weir, there are black and white snapshots of, amongst other things, a ruined abbey conjuring classic eighteenth-century literary and dramatic Gothic locales, for example. The derelict pub is populated by loners – all men – in Jim, Jack and Brendan. The evening ale is an antidote to social isolation and loneliness. As Brendan says of the end of the holiday season, “You’d feel the evenings

turning. When they'd be leaving. And whatever about how quiet it is now. It'd be fucking shocking quiet then. (*Short pause.*) You know? (*Pause.*)" (13). These silences are theatrical and important; not Pinteresque in the sense that they may be pregnant with menace, but theatrical in the sense that they establish an ambience of solitude and an aching loneliness or unease that McPherson frequently attaches haunting to in his plays. In *Shining City*, for instance, there is a suggestion that it is in grief and heartache that the central characters are receptive to being visited, occupied or haunted by the spirits of the deceased. In *The Weir*, the haunted newcomer, Valerie, is from Dublin and has arrived in the country to recover from an at-first unspecified *weltschmerz*. She is taken to the local pub by 'man about town' Finbar and as the night wears on, the men entertain her and each other with local ghost stories by way of geographic and cultural orientation. The landscape itself is an active agent here, with ancient ruins acting as monuments to a mythic past:

FINBAR: They [German tourists] do come up. This'd be the scenic part of all of all around here, you know? Em. There's what's? There was stories all, the fairies be up there in that field. Isn't there a fort up there?

BRENDAN: There's a kind of a one.

VALERIE: A fairy fort?

FINBAR: The Germans do love all this.

BRENDAN: Well there's a ...ring of trees, you know.

FINBAR: What's the story about the fairy road that... Who used to tell it? (21)

The mythic past is operating as tourist spectacle for foreign visitors here, and the men seem dismissive of the stories – Finbar appears never to have visited the site discussed in the above

exchange – and yet their yarn-spinning is compelling and the examples of haunting become stronger as the night wears on. We get the sense that despite their slightly embarrassed off-handedness, the men (other than ‘modern man’ Finbar) actually believe these stories. As Grene argues, “the recovery of these half-disbelieved folk-stories in the almost derelict pub allows for a progression that brings the uncanny lore of the past forward into the contemporary present” (307). Lojek also concludes that “The diminished impact of both fairies and priests is evident. But the inhabitants retain a worldview that is not exclusively literal and nonsacred, and their sense of their home allows for the continued existence of the marvellous, a quality that McPherson has celebrated in numerous interviews and program notes” (57).

It transpires that Valerie is the most haunted by ‘the marvellous’ of all. She is quite literally haunted by her dead daughter – she has received a telephone call from her soul-in-limbo. The city girl trumps the rural men, in a sense; but as Grene also argues, what we see here is a dissolution of the distinctions between city and country, and between past and present. There is a Gothic uncanny palimpsest at play in this equation as the living and the dead, the past and the present co-exist in the “betwixt and between” world described in Hogle’s reading of the abject. As Grene concludes:

Loneliness, desolation, sexual perversion, mortality are human [and, I would argue, typically *Gothic*] experiences common to rural and urban life, the past and the present. What the remote pub setting makes possible is the expression of these experiences in the code of the uncanny which there still retains some degree of authority. (308)

If the rural west of Ireland still allows the past to reside uncannily with the present in *The Weir*, in *The Veil* McPherson takes the audience back to an 1828 setting in a similar region of the country (this time to a “fine old house in the Irish countryside” (8), which would appear to exist somewhere in the same Sligo-Leitrim region, or perhaps further south in Roscommon or Galway), where the characters in the play’s present are also haunted by ghosts of the aboriginal Irish past. It is the most ‘historical’ of McPherson’s plays and (at the time of writing) also his most recent, and I read the historical unsettlement – the O’Connell era with its insurgent upheaval – as a timely metaphor for millennium era Ireland, where we see a nation again on the brink of radical transformation and in which the colonial past threatens/promises to be sloughed off.

As in *The Weir* and *Shining City*, a condition of unsettledness proves optimum for metaphysical occupation. The malaise in *The Veil* transcends the personal, though; this is an Ireland that is unsettled and primed for revolution. For the first time in one of McPherson’s plays, we see a socio-political historical framework underpinning the action, though interestingly it is again a scenario where modernity is intruding upon the rural west, and where the repressed (past) returns to countervail the incursion. Local revolutionaries have destroyed a bridge that connects the house to nearby townships, and the housekeeper Mrs Goulding quotes revolutionary Irish political figure Daniel ‘The Liberator’ O’Connell over drinks: “Well, as Mr O’Connell said in his speech at Loughferry – ‘It will take a strong draught to blow back the veil of confusion!’” (47). Presumably this metaphoric veil of political confusion is the eponymous one referred to in the play’s title.

In this play, modernity arrives in the form of enlightenment politics, a quintessential trope in the Gothic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth European literary

movements. Reverend Berkeley (a defrocked Anglican priest) and Charles Audelle (a philosopher) arrive at the house ostensibly to chaperone the seventeen year old heiress, Hannah, to Southampton in England for an arranged marriage that will save the estate from bankruptcy. Their ulterior motive, however, is to investigate the house's well-known metaphysical activity – its occupation by ghosts – and to understand, even to harness, the psychic ability that Hannah has demonstrated. Berkeley and Audelle are Enlightenment philosophers, arguing that 'man's' ability to reason places 'him' above other animals, but alongside (rather than below) God. "We *are* God...isn't that wonderful?" Berkeley declares as he persuades Hannah to participate in a hitherto unchristian séance (71). The séance unleashes paranormal forces – for Hannah a glimpse of her own unhappy future, for Audelle a visitation of the ghost of a child he has abandoned – that in turn forces the play's crisis as the truthfulness of the family's dire pecuniary circumstances and their deep unpopularity as landholders – the depth of their collective cursedness – among the local community is confronted. The overall result is a veritable checklist of Gothic appurtenances, identified in the household of troubled and/or grieving occupants (Lady Lambroke, Mrs Goulding, Berkeley and Audelle are all widowed), who occupy a haunted house, in an unsettled rural constituency in a nation that is on the brink of political turmoil. McPherson returns to the theme of the mythic past being alive in the Celtic fringe that he explored in *The Weir*. Again, the characters openly discuss the hauntedness of the landscape. Audelle declares, "Well, Hannah, while the city of London will present the ghoulish at every corner, a true doorway to the eternal seems to demand the spiritual quietude and awesomeness as only desolate places such as Ireland possess" (44). The entire nation is ripe for haunting in this equation. Grandie, the elderly and ostensibly demented dowager, provides even greater historical context to the

nation's present political turmoil when she describes the corruption of Christian colonisation of Ireland. It is a demythologising of Catholic Ireland in favour of a pagan past that

McPherson is traversing through Grandie's Act One speech:

St. Patrick was a gold prospector! Did you know that? I didn't. They found gold all up in the hills around Cavan and Monaghan. St. Patrick came with the good book all about Jesus Christ. That's how they always come, you see, and he said to everyone, 'These gods you have are no good,' apparently. He said he'd tell them all about this better God he knew all about – a very meek God you see, and while they were all busy praying for this terribly meek God, called Jesus Christ who was dreadfully meek, St. Patrick took all the gold away! (63)

Later, after the séance has unleashed supernatural forces that seem to occupy her and provide her with direct access to ancient knowledge, Grandie describes the effects of Christian colonisation upon the aboriginal faiths of the island in more detail and is worth quoting at length:

The king I met who had mirror eyes. I met him out there on the path one morning just as it was getting bright, and he told me all about the people who lived here thousands of years ago. Thousands of years before St. Patrick even. Before anyone. The very first people who lived here. They used to hunt in the forest and they caught fish in little boats down off the shore. They were very gentle people, he told me. But then different people came you see. They came up over the sea from the south. They were farmers. They had a different god and they came here and they chopped down the trees so they could graze their cattle and do you know what they did? They killed the

hunters! Yes! They made big tombs, and they burnt all the hunters' families and they put them in there so their gods would protect them from the hunters, because they were still afraid of them, even after they had killed them! (119)

The closing image in the play is of Grandie staring up into the mirror in the conservatory, presumably into the mirror eyes of the faerie king she communes with. The audience is left to assume that the aboriginal ghosts of Ireland are still alive, still haunting the land, perhaps generating the spiritual malaise that is gripping the troubled nation, evoking a cultural memory of colonisation that is *mirrored* in the English occupation of the play's present, but which in fact reminds the audience of waves of invasion and occupation that stretch back to prehistory. McPherson uses the postcolonial Gothic here to remind contemporary audiences of this multi-tiered history of colonisation that still presumably haunts the modern Irish nation state. 1828 O'Connell era Ireland is being viewed through the prism of 2011; the contemporary (London)^{xxvii} audience has seen the Celtic Tiger rise and fall and is able to read the past in parallel with the economic and cultural turmoil of the millennial present.

* * *

Marina Carr's dramatic oeuvre frequently occupies a Midlands terrain. It abuts McPherson's and McDonagh's Celtic fringe, but occupies a more central space within the Irish landmass. Here, the bog becomes an archetypal topographical signifier of Carr's Gothic themes. Leeney and McMullan's edited collection of essays provides comprehensive analysis of "the competing discourses around Carr's work" (xix), discourses which engage with Carr's theatrical lineage and inheritance, the role of gender in her oeuvre, audience reception of her plays in (Ireland, Continental Europe and North America), postcolonial analysis, and topical

analyses of the carnivalesque, the grotesque (Bourke), the mythical and the macabre (Martinovich). It is in these last two discussions that Bernadette Bourke and M K Martinovich come as close as anyone in this authoritative collection does to naming Carr's milieu as *Gothic*.

For Martinovich, the eponymous bog in *By the Bog of Cats...* (taking that work as an exemplar of Carr's thematic preoccupations and theatrical approach) is an ancient liminal space "which is the threshold between the living and the dead, the natural and the unnatural. The bog is not only a haunted liminal space, but also a psychological space...^{xxviii}"; it is, for Martinovich, a representation of purgatory on earth. Lojek similarly reads it as "one of those swampy areas famous for preserving odd fragments of the Irish past and posing real dangers in both past and present, particularly for outsiders" (69). Here we are already in deeply Gothic terrain as Hogle's 'betwixt and between' space is conjured, and all three of Cox's tripartite components (the semiotic, the psychological and the political) of Gothic analysis are applicable to a reading of the bog (and to the play more broadly writ). The ancient landscape is topographically ambiguous – it is neither firm ground nor lake – and is rarely occupied as a site of human habitation. Hester Swane is the central character – socially ostracised, with 'tinkers' blood', sexually irrepressible and psychologically unpredictable. She is aligned with the numinous in this sense, with Xavier (the grandfather of her child) describing her own mother (and thus her genetic inheritance) in the following metaphysical terms:

I used to see her outside her auld caravan on the bog and the fields covered over in stars and her half covered in an excuse for a dress and her croonin' towards Orion in a language I never heard before or since. (294)

She is both Gothic heroine and anti-hero embodying as she does the role of both wronged woman (sexual victim) and vengeful agent. The bog is her terrain; it is a landscape to which she is deeply spiritually attached – indeed, a curse tethers her fate to that of the black swan that lives there. The (equally Gothic) Catwoman prophecies Hester needs to leave the Bog of Cats or be ruined by it:

CATWOMAN: [...] Then why don't ya lave? If ya lave this place you'll be alright. That's what I came by to tell ya.

HESTER: Ah, how can I lave the Bog of Cats, everythin' I'm connected to is here. I'd rather die. (273)

As well as being a place to which Hester is inextricably linked, the Bog is a location imbricated with complex folklore (both indigenous and, in Carr's hands, intertextually predetermined in relation to the Medea myth); it is a site of illicit sexual activity (adulterous behaviour and alternative marriage arrangements); it is a site of haunting (where, in Martinovich's description, the Ghost Fancier, "an Irish Grim reaper, suggests the dead living among us, a mainstay of Irish folk tradition" 121); and it is ultimately a site of infanticide (Hester kills her daughter Josie rather than see her 'adopted' by her biological father and his new bride).

In noting just how closely related the Gothic and its near cousins the Grotesque and the Carnavalesque are, Bernadette Bourke's analysis of *By the Bog* is extremely useful. Where earlier works like *The Mai* and, according to Bourke, *Portia Coghlan* embrace the mythic in a grotesque form, *By the Bog* "goes beyond the boundaries of grotesque imagery and launches us into the bizarre world of carnival itself"^{xxix}. By way of definition, Bourke offers:

The traditional carnival is a form of transitory madness, a tumultuous other world which is real while it lasts, but when it ends, is succeeded by order. ... However, Carr's version does not allow for such neat closure, but gyrates out of control leading to devastating consequences, and precluding the restoration of any by a 'botched' sort of order.^{xxx}

This carnivalesque resistance to restoration plays out in the piece's denouement when, after the wedding between Carthage and Caroline, rather than unity and 'completion' we see an upturning of the moral order. Channelling the Medea myth, Hester kills her daughter (Josie) and tells Carthage (as he carries the girl's body offstage):

Ya won't forget me now, Carthage, and when all of this is over or half remembered and you think you've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie hostin' ya. (340)

With this additional layer of haunting, however, we are firmly in the territory of Botting's Gothic excess here, dipping more absolutely into the realm of the supernatural than the grotesque or the carnivalesque usually do. The bog itself as the site of all of this grotesque/carnivalesque/Gothic irruption and excess is, to hearken back to Cox's tripartite analysis, a semiotic marker of the liminal world bridging the mundane and the numinous; and it is psychological space inasmuch as it is a materialisation of Hester Swane where (in Martinovich's words) "layers of Hester's psyche can unfold" (121). But, to link this discussion of Carr to that of McDonagh and McPherson, this is also political space. As Bourke summarises it:

Carr's protagonists live in the democratic Ireland of equal opportunities, yet find themselves trapped and marginalized. The presence of ghosts, the strong connection with nature which sustains and ultimately reclaims her tormented heroines – these ideas are linked to the concept of the earth as both grave and womb.^{xxx1}

In a key link to the political stratum of Cox's Gothic triptych, this is a material, (post)modern Ireland being depicted; but it is a modern nation whose folkloric past resides and refuses to die in the midst of an increasingly agnostic (even atheist) present. As Claire Wallace aptly concludes:

Ghosts, banshees, angels are seen to be part of a culture of belief which is non-urban, non-modern and, above all, natural to the writer. These beliefs which have largely been dismissed or forgotten in the modern age are reinstated by Carr as valuable to an understanding of identity and furnish the severe alternative world of her drama.^{xxxii}

Carr stands shoulder to shoulder in this sense with McPherson, utilising Irish folklore as each does as part of a postcolonial strategy to foreground the nation's aboriginal culture. Their missions may be similar – and I argue that both employ the Gothic as *one* lens through which to examine this folkloric tradition – yet their *modi operandi* are different. Where McPherson places his ghosts in a naturalist setting, either in the present (*The Weir*) or the past (*The Veil*), Carr favours the magic realism of the grotesque and the carnivalesque (Bourke) or the macabre end of the mythical spectrum (Martinovich) to furnish her gendered exploration of modern Ireland. Carr may not engage with McPherson's more recent exploration of the colonial past as he has done with *The Veil*. There are no references to Daniel 'the Liberator'

O’Connell or indeed, in *By the Bog* to any particular strand of Irish insurrection or anti-British insurgency. Her work is not ‘political’ in that sense. But there is an excoriation of Celtic Tiger greed and acquisitiveness at play here. Hester’s caravan on the bog is contested in commercial terms – Carthage Kilbride wants to buy the land from her; he and Xavier Cassidy are modernisers and developers in that sense (though through Hester’s eyes, Carthage is “a jumped up land-hungry mongrel but that Xavier Cassidy is greedier and craftier” 289). The genres that Carr’s work thus traverses and how *By the Bog* sits within them is more complex and contested than the analyses of McDonagh’s and McPherson’s theatrical corpuses, as discussed above. Leeney and McMullan summarise this difficulty when they state “[w]hile there are apparent elements of realism in setting, they are inhabited by mythical, larger-than-life presences that threaten to explode the parameters of realism with its focus on the material, the contemporary and the individual in relation to social, geographical and historical forces” (xvi). Carr’s dramatic genre may be hard to pin down across her full body of work (and time and space prohibit such a discussion here), but the Gothic undoubtedly runs as a strong aesthetic mode throughout it.

Conclusion

I am bringing the three playwrights into mutually-illuminating discussion here and naming them as practitioners engaged in the production of contemporary Irish Gothic theatre. They each do so in different ways, and the Gothic is clearly not the only lens through which one might read the commonalities that link them. To this mix we must add Mark O’Rowe and his urban Gothic flights of fancy, best depicted in *Terminus*.^{xxxiii} Here (as in McPherson’s *The Shining City* and *The Seafarer*) we see Dublin activated as the Irish Gothic city, or as *The*

Guardian theatre reviewer Brian Logan would have it, “a luridly compelling waking nightmare of Dublin as an eighth circle of hell. (np).” As with *The Seafarer* we see Satan invoked as a figure walking amongst the marginalised, the alcoholic and the disturbed. And where Carr conscripts specific figures of Irish folklore and places them in a contemporary setting (the Ghost Fancier being one example) via the Greek classics, O’Rowe’s demons also traverse the Dublin underbelly via Hades. Whilst space does not allow a fuller discussion of O’Rowe’s work and how it sits alongside McDonagh, McPherson and Carr, suffice to say by way of conclusion that *Terminus*, like *The Veil*, brings the theatre being discussed in this essay to the near-present (2007 and 2011, respectively) and allows us to make the claim that there is now a near twenty-year corpus of contemporary Irish Gothic theatre spanning the cusp of the turn of the twenty-first century. The topographical terrain being explored by these writers traverses Dublin and the ‘Celtic fringes’ in the West via the bogs and lakes of the Midlands; temporally, it spans a cutting edge urban and rural present, as well as a conservative pre-Celtic Tiger late twentieth century, and back to a pre-revolutionary nineteenth century. And the scholarship surrounding all of this work reiterates time and time again the debt of lineage these writers owe not only to their nineteenth and twentieth-century Hibernian literary counterparts, but also to Celtic folklore and Classical Greek drama. There is a diversity of approach, both dramaturgically and politically, on display amongst what I’m calling a ‘school’ of contemporary Irish playwrights. The corollary effect, however is of common ground in terms of their adoption of key Gothic tropes and appurtenances that collectively remind audiences of the ‘aliveness’ of the Celtic past in the present, and of the return of the nation’s indigenous repressed at a time when independent contemporary Ireland is embracing modernity and modernisation with unprecedented alacrity. Deane, writing of

Yeats' literary corpus, may well be referring to these contemporary playwrights when he says of Yeats' folkloric recuperative project:

Yeats has no intention of seeing the shefro and the banshee disappear into books. He wants to reintroduce them into Ireland (as well as into his own books), making them as far as possible the source of a new demographic surge in the pattern of the Irish population, more marked in the west than elsewhere but still fairly evenly distributed over the whole island – with the possible exception of the north.^{xxxiv}

As Miriam Haughton writes in relation to the timing of O'Rowe's plays, they correspond "to that of Ireland's speedy journey from being a traditional religious island-nation to a contemporary European Union Member State"^{xxxv}. The timing, in this sense, of the upsurge of the Irish Gothic on the nation's stages can surely be no accident.

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——. *The Seafarer*. London: Nick Hearn Books, 2006.

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——. *The Weir*. New York: Dramatist's Play Service, 1997.

ⁱ The 'Celtic Tiger' is the name colloquially used to describe the powerhouse economy of the Republic of Ireland during the late 1990s and early 2000s. 1995-2000 are regarded as the peak boom years, with 2008 being the year the economy officially contracted into recession.

ⁱⁱ See Helen Heusner Lojek's *The Spaces of Irish Drama*, for instance, for a discussion of McPherson's response to these sorts of questions in interview (Ch. 2 'Picturing a Changing Landscape', in particular).

ⁱⁱⁱ A. Roche. *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness*. (Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 1994) p. 106

^{iv} See Killeen's and Haslam's articles, cited below.

^v F. Botting. *Gothic*. (London, Routledge, 2010) p. 2.

^{vi} Jerrold E. Hogle. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2002) p.7. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)

^{vii} Jeffrey N. Cox. 'English Gothic Theatre'. *Cambridge Companions Online*. (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2006) p. 6. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)

^{viii} T. Eagleton. *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*. (London, Verso, 1995). p. 187. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)

^{ix} S. Mooney. 'Ghost writer: Beckett's Irish Gothic.' *Beckett and Ireland*. Ed. Sean Kennedy. (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2010). p.133. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)

^x Killeen's quotations are taken from his two articles published and accessed online in *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*. They do not have page numbers online, but all subsequent quotations will be referred to in brackets by the year of their publication. The articles are J. Killeen 'Irish Gothic: A Theoretical Introduction.' *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*. Issue 1 (2006) and 'Irish Gothic Revisited.' *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*. Issue 4 (2008)

^{xi} Certainly there are contemporary Irish novelists whose work does on occasion veer toward the Gothic – John Banville and Patrick McCabe being examples that spring to mind. Suffice it to say that nowhere in contemporary Irish literature do we see the depth and breadth – the *saturation* – of Gothic modes of expression that we see in millennial Irish drama.

^{xii} R. Haslam. 'Irish Gothic: A Rhetorical Hermeneutics Approach.' *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*. Issue 2 (2007): np.

^{xiii} Aleks Sierz writes: "But McDonagh claims to know little about theatre. 'I doubt I've seen twenty plays in my life,' he says. 'I prefer films.' He says he 'only started writing for theatre when all else failed. It was a way of avoiding work and earning a bit of money.' However typical of youthful arrogance, such flip comments can't disguise the fact that, as he says, 'I used to read lots.'" (McDonagh qtd in Sierz, 222).

^{xiv} Both *Portia Coghlan* and *By the Bog of Cats*...owe a debt as revenge tragedies to *Medea*; *Ariel* is, according to Leeney and McMullan, "loosely based on *Iphigenia at Aulis*" (xxi).

^{xv} C. Leeney and A. McMullan, eds. *The Theatre of Marina Carr: Before Rules Was Made*. (Kildare, Carysfort Press, 2003) p. xxvii.

^{xvi} *Ibid*.

^{xvii} The two Galway-area trilogies are set in or near the regions of Ireland McDonagh's parents hailed from (his father is from County Galway and his mother from County Sligo) and to which he used to return for family holidays. They are the Leenane Trilogy, which includes *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996), *A Skull in Connemara* (1997), and *The Lonesome West* (1997) and the Aran Islands trilogy, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1997), *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001) and *The Banshees of Inisher* (unproduced and unpublished).

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- ^{xviii} J. Lanfers. 'The Identity Politics of Martin McDonagh.' *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook*. Ed. Russell, Richard Rankin. (Hoboken, Routledge, 2007) p. 9.
- ^{xix} *Ibid.*, p.9-10.
- ^{xx} *Ibid.* p. 10. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)
- ^{xxi} Sierz alludes to a cockiness that clearly rankled with him and presumably with other observers of British theatre in the 1990s. McDonagh's self-comparison to Orson Wells and a claim to be "the greatest" and "attacking older playwrights of being 'so ugly' and 'really badly dressed' caused Sierz to conclude – prematurely, as it turns out, in 2000 – that "his sudden decline seemed like a comeuppance" (225).
- ^{xxii} A. Sierz. *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*. (London, Faber and Faber, 2001) p.222. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)
- ^{xxiii} F. O'Toole. 'Introduction.' *Plays One: The Leenane Trilogy*. (London, Methuen, 1999) p. xi. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)
- ^{xxiv} L. Eldred. 'Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic.' *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook*. Ed. Russell, Richard Rankin. (Hoboken, Routledge, 2007) p. 111. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)
- ^{xxv} N. Grene. 'Ireland in Two Minds: Martin McDonagh and Conor McPherson.' *The Yearbook of English Studies*. Vol. 35, Irish Writing since 1950 (2005): p. 299. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)
- ^{xxvi} H. H. Lojek. *The Spaces of Irish Drama: Stage and Place in Contemporary Plays*. (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p.44. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)
- ^{xxvii} The play premiered in London's National Theatre.
- ^{xxviii} M. K. Martinovich. 'The Mythical and the Macabre.' *The Theatre of Marina Carr: Before Rules Was Made*. Eds. Leeney, Cathy and Anna McMullan. (Kildare, Carysfort Press, 2003) p. 121. (All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and will be followed by a page number in brackets.)
- ^{xxix} B. Bourke. 'Carr's "cut throats and gargyles": Grotesque and Carnavalesque Elements in *By the Bog of Cats*.' *The Theatre of Marina Carr: Before Rules Was Made*. Eds. Leeney, Cathy and Anna McMullan. (Kildare, Carysfort Press, 2003) p. 129.
- ^{xxx} *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- ^{xxxi} Bourke, p. 133.
- ^{xxxii} C. Wallace. 'Authentic Reproductions'. *The Theatre of Marina Carr: Before Rules Was Made*. Eds. Leeney, Cathy and Anna McMullan. (Kildare, Carysfort Press, 2003) p. 55.
- ^{xxxiii} See Miriam Haughton's article for a fuller analysis of O'Rowe's work, particularly in relation to violence, the grotesque, and his dramaturgy in relation to both traditional and contemporary Irish theatre writing.
- ^{xxxiv} S. Deane. *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790*. (Oxford, Clarendon, 1997) p. 133.
- ^{xxxv} M. Haughton. 'Performing Power: Violence as Fantasy and Spectacle in Mark O'Rowe's *Made in China* and *Terminus*.' *New Theatre Quarterly*. 27.2 (May 2011) p. 155.