

# INTERMEDIAL DRAMA AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF IRISH IDENTITIES

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I

In “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue” (1998), Fredric Jameson devastatingly critiques the dissemination of the American way via mass media.<sup>1</sup> He describes globalization primarily as “a communicational concept, which alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings” (Jameson 55). Jameson believes that the colonization of people’s minds by television programmes is worse than earlier and perhaps more tangible forms of imperialism and exploitation:

American mass culture, associated as it is with money and commodities, enjoys a prestige that is perilous for most forms of domestic cultural production, which either find themselves wiped out – as with local film and television production – or co-opted and transformed beyond recognition, as with local music. (Jameson 59)

The American film, television, and music industries are economic factors of the highest order, from which enormous profits can be reaped. And they are, at the same time, cultural factors of highly homogenizing influence, as they propagate American lifestyles, attitudes, and mores all over the globe (Jameson 60). The dominance of Hollywood films and American television programmes in global mass culture is powered by economic advantages of the United States over smaller countries and, in Jameson’s view, also amounts to “an allegory of the end of the possibility of imagining radically different social alternatives” (Jameson 62) to this American hegemony:

The point is therefore that, alongside the free market as an ideology, the consumption of the Hollywood film form is the apprenticeship to a specific culture, to an everyday life as a cultural practice: a practice of which commodified narratives are the aesthetic expression, so that the populations in question learn both at the same time. (Jameson 63)

Contrary to the modernist period, when non-commercial aesthetic impulses could find sanctuary in the cathedrals of high art, in postmodernity “no enclaves – aesthetic or other – are left in which the commodity form does not reign supreme” (Jameson 70).

Such criticism of globalization and commodification reverberates in Irish cultural and theatre criticism. With regard to transformations from national to global paradigms of Irish identity and, more specifically, their theatrical representations, Patrick Lonergan’s study *Theatre and Globalization: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (2009) provides the most comprehensive and intense discussion to date. Lonergan emphasizes the outdatedness of a nationalist postcolonial paradigm with regard to Ireland, which is being replaced by the Jamesonian paradigm of globalization as a predatory process (Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization* 5, 27, 29). Lonergan tries to demonstrate

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1 This essay is adapted from Achilles, “Staging the Commodification of Ethnicity”.

that globalization spells total commodification and tends to disperse national concepts such as Nike as a recognizably American brand or, for that matter, Irish identity into deterritorialized notions (Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization* 21). In Lonergan's view both Irish identity and cultural products such as Irish drama turn into global brands, much like Nike and other globally marketed goods: "[T]he word 'Irish' has become deterritorialized: it may be used to refer to the physical territory of Ireland, but it also acts as a brand – a commodified abstraction that gives meaning to its purchaser instead of signifying the physical territory of a nation" (Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization* 28).

Lonergan describes globalization not quite consistently as both an inevitable objective process and as a subjective and collective belief, a communal fantasy (Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization* 19-20). It seems to be something in between: an objective process, largely triggered by global markets, advanced forms of electronic communication, and air travel, which develops an intercultural dynamic that people also register in their minds and which thereby manifests itself in artworks and cultural products. In his analyses of globalization as both Americanization and commodification Lonergan relies on, and is joined by, quite a number of cultural critics who register with regard to individual plays what Lonergan tries to capture as a pervasive phenomenon of Irish theatrical production. Mediatization, intermediality, and questions of authenticity and commodification are in the foreground of these studies. Werner Huber's essays on contemporary Irish drama and film, "Contemporary Drama as Meta-Cinema: Martin McDonagh and Marie Jones" (2002) and "(De-)Mythologising Ireland on the Screen" (2003), are pioneering ventures into this new field, which influenced both Lonergan's book and articles by Jacqueline Bixler, Lisa McGonigle, Karen O'Brien, Susanne Peters, Mark Phelan, and Robin Roberts.<sup>2</sup>

While Jameson and other critics of globalization may be right in claiming the importance of commodification, this does not necessarily mean that art and, notably, drama have lost their critical function altogether and do not explore the distortions of specific cultural identities, produced and distributed by the machinery of Hollywood films and other mass media, anymore. In the Irish context the colonizing influence of Britain has long been replaced by the United States as the dominant Other (Carlson). In several recent Irish plays, such American appropriations of the language, the spirit and the image of Ireland – commodified narratives of Irishness – are depicted with regard to the portrayal of Ireland and the Irish in film. In the following I will discuss in greater detail the relationship between Irish and American cultural identities, as they are mediated by the mainstream entertainment industry represented by Hollywood movies. Both Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* (1999) and Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1998) focus on the intercultural representation of Ireland and the Irish in Hollywood movies. Both plays are intermedial or metadramas in the

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2 For Lonergan's discussion of Werner Huber's position, see Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization*, 117-18.

sense that they take film productions as their subject matter. My analysis of these plays is unthinkable without Werner Huber's previous exploration of this terrain.<sup>3</sup>

## II

Both Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* and Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* belong to a sizable number of contemporary plays which explore Irish-American relations, among them Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come* (1964) and *The Loves of Cass McGuire* (1966); Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) and *The Wake* (1998); Anne McGavigie's *The Cairn Stones* (2001) and Sebastian Barry's intriguing *White Woman Street* (1992) (Carlson). Both plays also share a concern with the representation of Ireland on screen. This concern is of long standing in Ireland. As early as 1937, Gabriel Fallon, later the Irish film censor, wrote in an article entitled "Celluloid Menace": "We cannot be the sons of the Gael and citizens of Hollywood at the same time" (qtd. in Huber, "(De-)Mythologising Ireland" 351). This coexistence of the disparate is enforced, however, by the overwhelming dominance of American film projects on Ireland as compared with indigenous ones: "While less than one hundred feature films have been made by Irish film-makers in Ireland during the cinema's first century, more than two thousand fiction films have been produced about the Irish outside the country" (qtd. in Huber, "(De-)Mythologising Ireland" [351]. On Hollywood and internationalization in general, see also Wasser). While the title page of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* carries a film still from *Man of Aran*, the semi-documentary whose production the play obliquely discusses, the title page of *Stones in His Pockets* shows an Irish cow against the background of a polaroid green pasture and staring at the beholder from what is obviously a film reel. Another play by Belfast-based, Northern Irish playwright Marie Jones, published together with *Stones in His Pockets*, is announced on the title page like a double bill at a movie theatre as "also featuring *A Night in November*." Werner Huber has drawn attention to the fact that, in the production of *Stones in His Pockets* at the Duke of York Theatre in London, "the rolling title and credits projected at the opening of the play fully turn the theatre into a cinema and suggest the mode or illusion of a feature-film presentation" (Huber, "Contemporary Drama" 18).

In *Stones in His Pockets*, the emphasis on the mediation of realities is heightened by the fact that the main characters, Charlie Conlon and Jake Quinn, who are hired as extras for £ 40 a day for the production of a Hollywood romance of Irish life called *The Quiet Valley*, also play all the other roles in the play.<sup>4</sup> When the play is read, this obviously very economic foregrounding of impersonation and role-playing tends to be

3 See Huber, "Contemporary Drama as Meta-Cinema." McGonigle's and Roberts's essays also address both Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* and McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan*.

4 On *Stones in His Pockets* and its influence on South American drama, see Bixler; on this play against the background of the Celtic Revival, see Phelan; on its pedagogical ramifications, see Peters.

forgotten, but it must be very prominent in productions (Huber, "Contemporary Drama" 18). Although role-playing and the metacinematic film set situation heighten the virtuality of *Stones in His Pockets*, these features are at the same time also very realistic, as Hollywood's invented Ireland may reach many more people than ever reach the real and tangible Ireland. *The Quiet Valley*, the title of the film within the play, and its nostalgic Irish setting and Chatterley-esque romance plot of peasant boy meeting the daughter of the Big House across the religious and social divide are reminiscent of a number of feature films on Ireland such as *The Quiet Man* (1952), *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), and *Far and Away* (1992) (Huber, "Contemporary Drama" 18-19; Huber, "(De-)Mythologising Ireland" 5-7; MacHale; MacKillop; McLoone 57-58; and McNee). The plot of *Stones in His Pockets* centres upon the actual making of the film in "a scenic spot near a small village in Co. Kerry" (*Stones* 8) and displays what Werner Huber calls the "cinematic colonialism" (Huber, "Contemporary Drama" 19) of Clem, the English director, ignorant of Irish ways; his opportunist, arrogant, and overambitious Irish assistants Simon and Aisling; and Caroline Giovanni, their American star, playing the daughter of the Big House.

The interaction of the Irish characters with the Hollywood film crew demonstrates how complex cinematic colonialism is and that exploitation can be mutual – the exploited exploiting the exploiters as well as vice versa. The relationship of both protagonists to America proves to be more complex and ambivalent than meets the eye at first glance. In the breaks between the shooting of scenes for *The Quiet Valley*, the Irish extras Jake and Charlie discuss their predicaments. Charlie is a bankrupt Irish video store owner who was unable to compete with Extravision, a big video company. Beyond his employment as an extra, he does want to compete with the Hollywood movie production, however, and produce a film of his own (*Stones* 11-12, 14). He obviously tries to exploit the production he is in to further his own film project. Jake makes clear that many locals try to use the filming to their best advantage, renting out all the house space they possibly can (*Stones* 17; see also 20, 21). Ireland may be the victim of Hollywood stereotyping, but Irish landlords and publicans, not to speak of Irish video stores, also profit.

The central issue around which the interrelations of the Irish and non-Irish characters in the play revolve is authentic Irishness. The play highlights in various and hilarious ways that this is a commodity hard to come by, indeed. The climax of artificiality is reached with the shooting of a scene of *The Quiet Valley*, involving the extras in the representation of the quintessential and ultimate Irish stereotype – digging turf. While they are thus engaged, they are to move their heads from left to right and vice versa, following with their eyes the protagonists, Maeve and Rory, who approach each other on horseback from opposite sides. The only problem is that Caroline Giovanni and Kurt Steiner, the Hollywood stars playing Maeve and Rory, respectively, do not deign to be present in person. They will be represented by the hands of Aisling and Simon, the assistant directors. Charlie describes the situation succinctly as the extras looking dispossessed at Aisling's hand, pretending it is Maeve on a horse looking sorry for them (*Stones* 33). As the Irish peasantry was dispossessed by the Protestant ruling

class in the period which the film tries to capture, the extras are visually dispossessed by their ruling class, the film stars, who act as the absentee landlords used to. Add to this Jones's provision that all the roles are played by Charlie and Jake, they will have to follow the movement of their own hands with their eyes to represent all of the above and thus to extend visual deprivation even more radically to the audience. Exploitation and deprivation obviously take on new and different forms in the media age. And so does authenticity. Not only the Irish extras, but also the American stars suffer from their Hollywood-style pursuit of authenticity. The reproduction of an Irish accent by an American tongue is in the centre of the play's discussion of authentic Irishness. Caroline Giovanni trains her articulation with the help of a professional accent coach, who tries to console her for her linguistic imperfection by telling her that "Ireland is only one percent of the market" (*Stones* 13). Charlie argues along similar lines that an authentic brogue is a majority decision: "[B]een that many film stars playing Irish leads everybody thinks that's the way we talk now ..." (*Stones* 14).

The fate of Sean, yet another would-be Irish extra for *The Quiet Valley*, demonstrates that such commodification of human relationships through the influence of media culture is not without serious pitfalls. Sean is the off-centre tragic hero in Jones's tragicomedy. He epitomizes the dilemma of contemporary Irishness, sandwiched as it is between regional specificities and international trends. On the one hand, Sean is inimitably local. When he wants to be hired as yet another turf-digger for *The Quiet Valley* and is rejected, as his impatient harshness clashes too obviously with the romantic never-never Ireland the Hollywood film crew is after, he voices his protest in precisely the authentic brogue Caroline Giovanni will never master (*Stones* 19). Sean is 'the real thing' that would make the fabricated Irishness of the Hollywood screen seem threadbare. Therefore, he cannot be hired. On the other hand, Sean is cosmopolitan. A drug addict, he shares a serious predilection for cocaine with the members of the film crew who happily hand around their ample provisions (*Stones* 24, 27). Contrary to the false local colour which the production of *The Quiet Valley* is generating, the habits of Sean, the Irish rustic, and of the international film crew members converge. As he is also disillusioned by Ireland's loss of agrarian promise and the failure of his original plan of becoming a dairy farmer, Sean represents the identity crisis of a postmodern Ireland, defining itself largely as an alienated site of a computer chip or, for that matter, film production. As he feels ostracized from the film set, which to him is apparently synonymous with the American Dream, he fills his pockets with stones and very really drowns himself (*Stones* 35). The exploitation and deprivation resulting from mediated realities is not in turn virtual but sometimes existential and final. Charlie emphasizes that, with regard to the universal appeal and power of the movie industry based on people's frustrations and dissatisfactions, Sean is an everyman:

No different from me that kid ... like all of us ... like you, don't we dream, do you not fantasise about being the cock of the walk, the boy in the big picture [...] eh? Do you never get carried away into that other world ... we are no different. (*Stones* 43)

After Sean's funeral, Charlie and Jake debate a way out of the alternative between Sean's suicidal depressiveness and the moronic acceptance of Hollywood's pipe dreams. Jake hits upon the idea that Charlie's own private film project, which he has hedged for a long time, could be used to develop an alternative vision, a reversal of the relationship between the power of Hollywood images and the impotence of those exposed to them: "[I]f it was a story about a film being made and a young lad commits suicide ... in other words the stars become the extras and the extras become the stars ... so it becomes Sean's story, [...] and all the people of this town" (*Stones* 54). The story of Sean, the rural admirer of Irish cattle turned would-be emigrant to America, drug and movie addict, and, finally, suicide, will replace the false and irrelevant script of Rory, the Irish peasant, setting right the dispossession of his fellow countrymen by marrying the daughter of the Big House. Irish dispossession is not so much about land possession any more. It is about the possession of a viable self-image in a world dominated by images.

By telling their own stories and producing their own imagery, Charlie and Jake hope to find their Ireland and themselves – even if it is only in the projects of Irish artists such as Charlie and Jake, who produce art films to be called *Stones in His Pockets* instead of *The Quiet Valley*, and, by extension, in Jones's play of the same title. Thereby, this play becomes a plea for a cinematic empire reeling back, for imaginative intervention by pushing an imaginary rewind button, for a self-confident art that opposes the mainstream United States communication industry and is not intimidated by the mega-budgets it will never receive to find its own voice. As weak as this voice may be by comparison, it successfully subverts Hollywood-style prefabricated and stereotypical falsifications of reality.

### III

Martin McDonagh's play *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996/1998) is not as directly concerned with film or theatre representation as *Stones in His Pockets*. It is set in 1934 when Robert Flaherty's semi-documentary *Man of Aran* was filmed on Inishmore (Huber, "Contemporary Drama" 14; and "(De-)Mythologising Ireland" 353-54; see also McMahon; and Mullen). While the play's locale remains Inishmaan, a group of young people, including Cripple Billy Claven, the title figure, goes to Inishmore, the neighbouring and largest Aran Island, by boat, to watch the filming and, possibly, to become part of it (*Cripple* 49). This misfires, as they arrive when the shooting is done and the film crew packs up to leave. Yet unexpectedly, Billy receives an invitation to go to Hollywood: "he's been taken to America for a screen test for a film they're making about a cripple fella" (*Cripple* 61).<sup>5</sup>

5 For assessments of McDonagh's drama, see Chambers and Jordan, *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh*; in particular Christopher Murray, "The Cripple of Inishmaan Meets Lady Gregory" 79-95; and Mária Kurdi, "The Helen of Inishmaan Pegging Eggs: Gender, Sexuality and Violence" 96-115. On *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and the problem of disability, see Connor, Kim, and Meszaros; on questions of globalization, authenticity

With the exception of two of the play's nine scenes (Scenes 7 and 8), one of which shows Billy "shivering alone in a squalid Hollywood hotel room" (*Cripple* 74) and the other the less than gracious reception of *Man of Aran* by the Aran Islanders who are also its subject matter, the play's focus remains with the people on Inishmaan and what they distantly hear about what is going on both on the Inishmore film set and in Hollywood. The focus never really shifts to the film set or Hollywood itself. McDonagh is more concerned with his own view of the Irish West than with its Hollywood representation, which provides only one facet in a more general picture of constructed and mediated realities. McDonagh's personal connection with Ireland is filtered through his experience of England. He grew up in an Irish enclave in London and spent his summer holidays in the west of Ireland. He belongs to the "children of Irish emigrants, growing up with all the accents and attitudes of urban England [who] are finding or making their own connections with Irish culture" (O'Toole x). He "was, and is, a citizen of an indefinite land that is neither Ireland nor England, but that shares borders with both" (O'Toole ix; see Waters 38).

In *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, such dislocations are not only geographical, hovering between London, where the play premièred in the Cottesloe auditorium of the National Theatre, and the Irish and American West. They are also historical, as McDonagh ties his depiction of the society on Inishmore to the production of *Man of Aran* in 1934. But McDonagh's play also harks further back in time than to the beginnings of the construction of the Irish West in film. By implication, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is a commentary on the image of the Irish West projected by the Celtic Revival and the National Theatre Movement around the turn of the last century, notably, on Synge's ambiguous celebration of the West and the Arans in his plays. The very title of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* sounds like a hilarious deflation by "disability-in-your-face" (Connor) of Yeats's famous advice to Synge to leave symbolist Paris in the eighteen-nineties for the Aran Islands in order to seek creative inspiration and to disclose in his art the essence of the Celtic race lying encapsulated there.

Both geographically and chronologically McDonagh's Inishmaan adopts a strangely shifty quality. It is a virtual island shot through with different traditions and problematics, both Irish and non-Irish, "pre-modern and post-modern at the same time" (O'Toole xi). In McDonagh's drama, "the allegedly postmodern Ireland of Tayto crisps, Kimberley biscuits and Australian soap operas" is fused with "one drawn from theatre mysticism, nostalgia" (Waters 34). Therefore, his plays read like Synge "rewritten by an Irish Joe Orton" (qtd. in Lanters 212) or "with a postmodern nod in the direction of Sam Shepard" (Waters 50) and "have the qualities of fairytales, of cartoons, but also of TV sit-com" (Waters 50). They have "as much in common with films like Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* as they do with Synge's *Playboy*" (Lanters 213). McDonagh's Ireland is a vision influenced by the postmodern media culture as much as it is informed by historical and cultural realities, the attempt to reknit oneself to a history

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and ecology, see Lonergan, "'Never mind the shamrocks'" and O'Brien, "'Ireland Mustn't Be Such a Bad Place So,'" as well as "Collaborative Ecology."

and traditions only remotely one's own. McDonagh's Ireland has, therefore, the compounded quality of collage or pastiche, reflecting a world of representational crisis in which the image often "precedes the reality it is supposed to represent" (qtd. in Lanters 214-15). In order to highlight the constructed or simulated character of realities, their sur- or irreality, McDonagh thus does not need to depict Hollywood directly on stage. His own and, by extension, his characters' near-absurdist vision is more than a match for the wildest distortions Hollywood script writers might think up. Many of the characters in the play interact in ways which make camouflage and misrepresentation an integral part of their lives – strategies which screen off the repressed that only rarely returns. The images and impressions which their friends and neighbors have of MacDonagh's Aran Islanders are therefore as inadequate as is Hollywood's portrayal of ethnic groups.

What has contributed to his drama's unmistakable hallmark flavour after only a few plays is McDonagh's presentation of characters whose tics and antics capture life as in a magnifying lens. All of the characters in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* are branded by their idiosyncrasies and compulsions as near-caricatures. Among these eccentricities are Billy Claven's inclination to spend hours cow-watching (*Cripple* 7, 33, 55), his aunt Kate Osbourne's habit of talking to stones (*Cripple* 55, 67-68, 79, 86, 89) and her sister Eileen's obsession with eating the sweets herself which she and her sister store in the Osbourne country shop for their customers (*Cripple* 56, 63-64). These and other eccentricities make MacDonagh's characters Hollywood-proof, immune to the threat of becoming transformed into spurious stage or movie Irishmen who usurp reality as it is, a problem foregrounded in Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets*. By their mannerisms, they become so highly individualized that they do not fit any stereotype except that of hopeless crankiness. The repetitiveness of their compulsions throughout the play has the function of leitmotifs and makes them recognizable. The often bizarre nature of these traits provides comic relief which temporarily alleviates the brutal insensitivity that goes along with them. McDonagh's humour softens the impression that his characters are victims driven by psychic compulsions, which rule them and which they cannot control (Waters 46). In the last analysis, many of these habits reveal themselves as a second skin which hides these characters' vulnerability and masks their weakness and compassion; in short, their humanity. In their own ways, these compulsive characters are psychologically as crippled as Billy is physically. Billy himself says at one point: "Well, there are plenty round here just as crippled as me, only it isn't on the outside it shows" (*Cripple* 92). These compulsions and idiosyncrasies contribute in various ways to both the unhinging of conventional expectations and the shiftiness of Irish as well as American realities.

The negotiations between Irish realities and their American representations in the shape of Hollywood movies are similarly ambiguous. Johnnypateen presents the shooting of *Man of Aran* as a chance to emigrate to America: "A little exodus Johnnypateenmike foresees to the big island so, of any lasses or lads in these parts with the looks of a film star about them, wants to make their mark on America" (*Cripple* 13). Johnnypateen's comment on film production demonstrates that the Islanders

may be backward, but their credulity and impressionability is far too limited to make them an easy prey of the lure of Hollywood. Their later abrasive comments during the showing of *Man of Aran* in their makeshift improvised church hall cinema bear this out. Helen McCormick – one of Johnnypateen’s “lasses [...] in these parts with the looks of a film star about them” – voices her protest on a feminist note, resenting that she was not cast as the lead: “I think I might go pegging eggs at the film tomorrow. *Man of Aran* me arsehole. ‘The Lass of Aran’ they could’ve had, and the pretty lass of Aran. Not some oul shite about thick fellas fecking fishing” (*Cripple* 72).

Before we see the reaction of its objects to their depiction in *Man of Aran* (Scene 8), Billy’s dying scene in a squalid Hollywood hotel room (Scene 7) plays with both the suspicions of ill health surrounding him and the Hollywood conventions of an appropriately stereotypical Irish death, including invocations to the Irishman’s decent heart, head, and spirit “not broken by a century’s hunger and a lifetime’s oppression” (*Cripple* 74). The reality status of this deathbed scene remains dubious, as Werner Huber points out:

However realistic Billy’s dying may appear to the audience initially, it is only from the following scene that one is made fully aware that he has only been rehearsing a part and that his dying speech is a fabricated stage-Irish lamentation interspersed with snatches of the ballad of ‘The Croppy’. (Huber, “Contemporary Drama” 15)

The Islanders’ reactions to *Man of Aran* are as violent as Billy’s rejection of Hollywood, when he unexpectedly reappears in the church hall turned cinema, as if he were stepping out of the celluloid reality of *Man of Aran* from the other side of the screen (*Cripple* 85). Later, Billy pulls the screen back in place, as if to close himself and Inishmaan off from Hollywood and all it represents (*Cripple* 91). Although the interest of Helen, Bartley, and Billy in Hollywood seemed to betoken their gullibility, this impression dissolves under their acidic comments on *Man of Aran* and on Hollywood film production. The Irish signified revolts against its American signifier, as it were. Especially Helen McCormick does not exactly accept the film as self-representation: “What’s to fecking see anyways but more wet fellas with awful sweaters on them?” (*Cripple* 84; see 85). Helen is sufficiently naive to confuse the film and the reality it depicts. She throws five eggs at the screen to hit the woman in it – the role she probably had in mind for herself. Asked whether this is not enough, she replies: “Not nearly enough. I never got her in the gob even once, the bitch. She keeps moving” (*Cripple* 81). Helen is not fighting the Hollywood representation of Irish life. She is fighting Irish life.

In his reaction to Hollywood, Billy is more knowing and more ambivalent. He glosses over that he was not accepted by Hollywood and had to come back. Billy confesses only to Bobby that he wanted to run away from his marginalized role as village orphan and village cripple and that he would have stayed in America, had he been given a chance: “If they’d wanted me for the filming. But they didn’t want me. A blond lad from Fort Lauderdale they hired instead of me. He wasn’t crippled at all, but the Yank said ‘Ah, better to get a normal fella who can act crippled than a crippled fella who can’t fecking act at all’” (*Cripple* 92). In Hollywood, the signifier replaces the sig-

nified anytime. Whereas Hollywood's fabrications are never a serious threat in the universe of *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the outer-direction by one's own compulsions, psychic as well as physical deformations, which render individuals even more indeterminable than celluloid realities, are of much greater import. These uncertainties may seemingly be overcome, however, by the genuinely human impulses which they cannot entirely destroy. With some conviction, Billy maintains at the end of the play: "I know now it isn't Hollywood that's the place for me. It's here on Inishmaan, with the people who love me, and the people I love back" (*Cripple* 88). A fundamental existentialism shines through McDonagh's concern with constructs of the real. When all these constructs are being deconstructed, only love and death seem to remain.

#### IV

On the basis of the postmodern absorption of the message by the medium, Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* and Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* blur the distinguishability between the signifier and the signified. *Stones in His Pockets* does not depict the contrast between genuine Irishness and its Hollywood misrepresentations, but rather the power struggle for the access to media expression of two different, more or less commercial perspectives on Ireland. McDonagh goes still a step further by demonstrating that Irish country life is as constructed *per se* as any of its Californications. By implication, the Hollywood movie industry appears as a both financially and technologically enlarged and empowered blow-up of the machinations and manipulations going on in everyday life in the West of Ireland or anywhere. Taken together, these plays both register and illustrate important stages in the history of ethnic stereotyping. In the simulated thirties of Martin McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, physically handicapped Aran Islanders make it to Hollywood screen tests, if not to the Hollywood screen. At the end of the American century, the Irish extras of a Hollywood film production on Ireland turn the tables on it in Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets* by trying to express their countervision in a movie of their own. While *The Cripple of Inishmaan* emphasizes the ubiquity of misperception and defective vision both on and off the screen, *Stones in His Pockets* dramatizes a bold gesture of subversion and countervision against all odds. Both these plays are held together by a precarious spirit of independence as an antidote to the threat of global Americanization. This spirit of independence distinctly contradicts Fredric Jameson's sweeping statement that in postmodernity "no enclaves – aesthetic or other – are left in which the commodity form does not reign supreme" (Jameson 70). Their common spirit of independence may well be the most lasting legacy of these plays in a universe increasingly determined by realities which are filtered through media.

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