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## BRANDING THE IRISH NATION: MARTIN MCDONAGH'S *THE ARAN TRILOGY*

The paper analyses the representation of the Irish national identity in Martin McDonagh's *The Aran Trilogy* with regards to the definition of the term *brand*, which originally denotes an act of labelling or marking with a hot iron. In McDonagh's incomplete trilogy, the state apparatuses of family relationships, political views, and the Catholic Church can be observed as the social institutions within which the Irish are labelled as uncontrollably violent. In order to specify that the primary target of *The Aran Trilogy* is the Irish nation, McDonagh eases the process of the audience's identification with the plays by using contemporary brands of food, as well as music, films, and television programmes. The paper aims to demonstrate that the described procedures reveal McDonagh's intention to make the Irish aware of their faults as a nation, which is in line with the tradition established by John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*.

*Key words:* brand, Ireland, identity, state apparatuses, repression, violence, family, politics, Martin McDonagh, *The Aran Trilogy*

### Introduction

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an eventful period in the history of the Irish people, as it marked the flourishing of political nationalism which would eventually culminate in the Irish War of Independence (1919—1921). Political nationalism coincided with cultural nationalism, since nationalistic pride gave rise to the Irish Literary Revival, a literary movement focused on reviving the Irish language and culture. During the Revival, the west of Ireland earned a special place in the imaginative consciousness of Irish authors. The Irish west

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became essential for the creation of national identity, since it was perceived as the locus nurturing the authentic Irish culture and the last stronghold of Irishness in which the traditional way of life was preserved (LONERGAN 2012: 57—58). Irishness can be defined as a concept based on the assumption that the Irish share a collective spirit that unites them (FARRELLY 2004: 21—23).

John Millington Synge was initially one of the leading figures of the Revival, and he was advised by Yeats to visit the west of Ireland as the site of authentic Irish identity (LONERGAN 2012: 57—58). However, Synge was also among the first Irish writers who disrupted the mythologised image of the Irish. *The Playboy of the Western World* shows Synge's compatriots as complete opposites of the ideal of stable and sober people that was promoted by the Irish nationalists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The audience watching the premiere performances opposed the image of the Irish as violent people and drunkards, although the play focuses less on the belligerence within the Irish nation than on the people's paralysis, numbness, and languor in the mythical past (KIBERD 2011) — features that had already been criticized in the works of Jonathan Swift and AE, for example. The aim of such representation was to alarm the Irish through recognition of their faults so as to provoke change.

We may observe a similar treatment of Irishness in the works of contemporary Irish playwrights. The Anglo-Irish dramatist Martin McDonagh has been a frequent topic of debate among critics with regards to his origin. He was born and raised in London as a child of Irish immigrants (MCDONAGH 2013a: ix—x), which McDonagh recognises as a vital source for his plays, despite simultaneously refusing to be classified in terms of nationality: “I don't feel I have to defend myself for being English or for being Irish, because, in a way, I don't feel either. And, in another way, of course, I'm both. That's exactly what the work arises out of” (O'HAGAN 2001). McDonagh deals with the west of Ireland in two of his trilogies – *The Leenane Trilogy* takes place in the small town of Leenane in Connemara, while the unfinished *Aran Trilogy*, consisting of two plays, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, takes place in the Aran Islands. Interestingly, the plays belonging to the second trilogy do not depict identical time periods, as *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is set in 1934, while *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* takes place in the 1990s. Both trilogies reflect the Anglo-Irish mixture of McDonagh's origin, since the plays represent a combination of the Irish setting and the form of British *in-yer-face* theatre, which is defined as “any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message” (SIERZ 2001: 4). The aim is to provoke the audience's reaction by shocking them, and various means are used in order to produce the given effect, such as representation of violence, taboos, obscene language, nudity, and explicit sex (4—5).

In his study on McDonagh's oeuvre, Patrick Lonergan (2012: 58—59) notes that the unfinished *Aran Trilogy* deals with how Ireland presents itself to the world, particularly criticising "Ireland's capacity for myth-making". In the plays, McDonagh focuses on three specific institutions which helped model the Irish national identity: family, politics, and the Catholic Church. The described institutions are defined by Louis Althusser as ideological state apparatuses, which function "massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression" (ALTHUSSER 1971: 145). However, the manner in which McDonagh portrays the mentioned state apparatuses in *The Aran Trilogy* leads us to conclude that repression and ideology in Ireland operate evenly within them, with the repressive elements potentially overpowering ideology in certain situations. Additionally, McDonagh's use of various brands exemplifies the operating of mass culture, which can also be observed as a contemporary ideological state apparatus. Since McDonagh manages to incorporate all significant aspects of the Irish society into the plays, *The Aran Trilogy* may have the potential to lead the Irish audiences to self-understanding.

### *The Aran Trilogy*

In the first play, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, McDonagh deals with the Irish attitude towards two of the mentioned ideological apparatuses, family and the Church, in the period that is relatively close to the Irish Literary Revival and the Irish War of Independence. Family relationships in the play can be examined from the perspective of the responsibility of parents for their children and vice versa. Parents are expected to look after their children, especially while they are young, but that is not the case with the eponymous hero of the play, 'Cripple' Billy Claven, a teenager who lives with his aunts, Eileen and Kate Osbourne. His parents drowned off the coast of Inishmaan, and it is not until the end of the play that Billy discovers the exact reason of their death. The local gossip Johnnypateenmike reveals to Billy that his parents sacrificed their lives in order to save Billy's – they committed suicide by drowning so that their life insurance fee could be paid out for Billy's life-saving medical treatment which they could not otherwise afford (MCDONAGH 2013b: 73—74). However, once Johnny leaves and Billy's aunts discuss the matter in private, we learn that Johnny's story is a lie told to protect Billy from the harsh reality. The truth seems to be quite the opposite: instead of sacrificing themselves to save their child, Billy's parents attempted to drown Billy, and it was Johnny who managed to save him from the sea (80). The expectation that children should look after their parents or caretakers when they grow old is also annulled, as Billy decides

to leave the island and abandon his overprotective aunts in order to pursue his luck in Hollywood (19). Upon returning home four months later, Billy tells his aunts that he rejected the part in the film because he could not bear being parted from them (63), although the actual reason for his return is that he did not get the part at all (66). Another example is seen in the relationship between Johnny and his ninety-year-old mother – not only do they despise each other and openly wish for each other's death (36), but Johnny also makes an active, yet unsuccessful effort to kill his mother by keeping her constantly drunk (30–31, 41–42).<sup>3</sup>

The described dysfunctional family relationships affect the entire community in Inishmaan. As depicted by McDonagh, the community is distorted by general lack of empathy and becomes panoptic in its nature – instead of looking after one's family, everyone seems to mind everyone else's business, which is evident from the amount of various petty rumours. The key representative of panopticism is Johnny, the self-proclaimed “newsman” of the island (27), who spreads gossip and any information he finds significant from door to door, and in return he asks for payment in kind, usually food and drink. He positions himself as a figure of authority when it comes to controlling all the relevant information, and he uses various methods of repression to monitor the other characters, all in an attempt to transform them into what Michel Foucault describes as “docile” bodies (FOUCAULT 1995: 136–138). Johnny firmly believes that the end of obtaining news justifies any means, so he never refrains himself from using every possible method of aggressive interrogation to extort the information he deems worth spreading, including outright blackmail.

The news that triggers the action of the play is the arrival of a Hollywood filming crew led by the director Robert Flaherty, who plans to film his fictional documentary *Man of Aran* on the islands. The announcement stirs everyone on Inishmaan, especially Billy, who wishes for any chance to escape from his aunts. In order to be taken by boat to Inishmore to audition for the film, Billy shows the sailor Babbybobby a doctor's letter – Billy is diagnosed with tuberculosis and only has several months to live. He asks Bobby not to tell anyone about his illness, but Johnny appears and demands to see the letter (MCDONAGH 2013b: 23–26). As Johnny persists, Bobby calls him rude, which infuriates Johnny:

**Johnny:** *I'm rude? I'm rude? With ye two standing there hogging letters, and letters from doctors is the most interesting kind of letters, and ye have the gall*

<sup>3</sup> Dysfunctional family relationships are the topic that McDonagh also deals with in his first trilogy, *The Leenane Trilogy*, which has been analysed in: Nataša Antonijević and Biljana Vlašković Ilić, *The Irish identity as a brand in Martin McDonagh's The Leenane Trilogy* (orig. *Ирски идентитет у Линејн трилогији Мартина Макдоне*, 2019).

then to call *me* rude? Tell oul limpy to be handing over that letter, now, else there'll be things I heard here tonight that won't stay secret much longer.

**Bobby:** Things like what, now?

**Johnny:** Oh, things like you rowing schoolies to Inishmore and you kissing green-teeth-girls in Antrim is the kind of thing now. Not that I am threatening blackmail on ya or anything, or, alright yes I am threatening blackmail on ya but a newsman has to obtain his news be hook or be crook.

(27)

However, the threat backfires because Bobby knocks Johnny on the ground and bashes his head with stones, forcing him to promise that he will keep all the information to himself (27—28). Nevertheless, Johnny is not discouraged, since he continues his pursuit for news: he demands that the doctor should reveal Billy's diagnosis to him, completely disregarding the doctor-patient confidentiality (33). After the doctor has also denied him the requested information, Johnny starts making guesses regarding the diagnosis. His claim that the Irish are famous abroad for being a friendly nation is immediately followed by a malicious statement: "I'd bet money on cancer" (37). The most appalling element of Johnny's assumptions is the fact that he desires the worst possible outcome for Billy simply because it would make better news.

Johnny's behaviour shows that violence within a community may arise out of monotony and boredom. Based on the usual gossip spread by Johnny, we can see that McDonagh's Inishmaan is a place where nothing interesting ever happens, apart from occasional maiming of domestic animals and petty quarrels. The characters depicted in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* both discuss and commit violent acts on a daily basis, and they do not seem to be disturbed by them. Furthermore, some of the characters, like Johnny, wish for any slight misunderstanding to become a full-blown feud, because it will serve as entertainment to the community. The described mentality of McDonagh's Aran inhabitants indicates that they are "emotionally and physically damaged individuals for whom verbal abuse, incidental cruelty, and casual violence seem to provide the only recourse to their empty lives" (GARCIA 2011: 30).

The insensitivity and lack of empathy are also relevant for the characters' relationship towards the state apparatus of the Catholic Church, for they completely disregard the Christian "call" for care and love between family members. Moreover, the characters refuse to show respect towards church representatives, which is mainly motivated by the clergymen's sexual advances towards children and teenagers. These acts of violence have the potential of provoking a violent response from the attacked young people, which is the case with 'Slippy' Helen McCormick, a teenage girl famous for pegging eggs at others. She mentions having pegged eggs at Father Barratt, and when she is reproached by Eileen that it is an act against God, Helen defends herself: "Oh,

maybe it is, but if God went touching me arse in choir practice I'd peg eggs at that fecker too" (MCDONAGH 2013b: 12). According to her, one needs to respond to violence with equal measure: "I have to be so violent, or if I'm not to be taken advantage of anyways I have to be so violent" (76). Helen's dialogue with her brother Bartley reveals that he may also have been victim of abuse:

**Bartley:** Sure, getting clergymen groping your arse doesn't take much skill. It isn't being pretty they go for. It's more being on your own and small.

**Helen:** [...] You're small and often on your own. Have you ever had your arse groped by priests?

**Bartley** (*quietly*): Not me arse, no.  
(27)

Furthermore, the distrust towards the Church is seen in the lack of reverence towards the Catholic doctrine. One of the examples of disrespect is the free interpretation of biblical stories by Helen, who admits that she prefers Pontius Pilate because "Jesus always seemed so full of himself" (58). Finally, the Bible as an item is no longer treated as sacred – Johnny's gossip reveals an incident in which two brothers argued and one of them threw the other one's Bible into the sea (4). Later on, a Bible – possibly the one from Johnny's story – gets washed up on the shore during Bobby's preparations of the boat. The stage directions given at this point are aligned with the characters' previously described attitude towards the Church, because "**Bobby notices something in the surf, picks a bible out of it, looks at it a moment, then tosses it back into the sea and continues working on the boat**" (30).

We may observe the analysed characters' relationship towards family and Church as a distortion of the principles upon which these state apparatuses are founded. The characters' lack of empathy stems from the pressure to fulfil various social roles, imposed rather aggressively both within family as the society's nucleus and in the wider community of the island. The characters perceive violent resistance as the legitimate answer to disciplinary violence, due to which the action of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* does not lead towards establishing any order, but towards provoking chaos. By describing violence both as a method of imposing discipline and as a method of resisting it, McDonagh undermines the traditional image of the west of Ireland as an idyllic location and depicts his fictional Inishmaan as the inversion of the given image.

We may notice a similar pattern in the second play, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, which is closer to the contemporary audience since the action is set in "circa 1993" (MCDONAGH 2014: 1). This is McDonagh's first openly political play, in which he deals with the violence that has apparently become an inseparable part of Irish nationalism.<sup>4</sup> The state apparatuses observed in

<sup>4</sup> When asked about the violence depicted in *The Lieutenant*, McDonagh claims that it represents

*The Lieutenant* are those of family and politics, and the characters' relationship towards them can be interpreted simultaneously, because the "hails" made by the two apparatuses are opposed by the same act. Namely, an individual's viewpoint takes precedence over any established mode of thinking, which allows the trivial to be prioritised as vital, while the vital is treated as insignificant, ultimately leading to a complete inversion of the traditional system of values. McDonagh uses farcical exaggeration and shows us a community in which cats' lives are seen as more important than human lives. In such an environment, both the request to love and care for one's family and the request to love and fight for one's homeland are annulled by what Ann Dillon Farrelly calls "cat philosophy" (2004: 153). This philosophy can be summed up in the claim that the well-being of cats is more important than anything else, including one's family members and political allies.

The play revolves around two cats – the first one, Wee Thomas, is owned by 'Mad' Padraic Osbourne, member of the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army) who operates in Belfast, while the second one, Sir Roger, belongs to Mairead Claven, a girl who wishes to join Padraic someday. Mairead's and Padraic's fondness of their pets threatens the lives of everyone around them, since they are prepared to kill anyone who does any harm to these animals.<sup>5</sup> As soon as Padraic is informed by his father Donny that Wee Thomas has been "poorly" (MCDONAGH 2014: 14), he storms back to Inishmore to find his cat dead. Infuriated for having lost his "best friend in the world" (15), Padraic concludes that Wee Thomas's death was Donny's fault and decides that the only fair retaliation is to kill both Donny<sup>6</sup> and Mairead's younger brother Davey, who was helping Donny in an attempt to conceal the truth from Padraic. The willingness to shoot Donny is only the last of Padraic's violent acts towards his family, since he crippled his first cousin at the age of twelve for laughing at his scarf (7). Placing his pet cat as a top priority in his life, Padraic has caused a complete deterioration of his family relationships.

The same can be said of Mairead, because Sir Roger proves to be more important to her than her brother. Like Padraic, she claims that her pet is her "best friend in the world" (60), while at the same time she constantly abuses Davey and even tries to blind him by shooting him in the eye with an air

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his personal reaction to the violence taking place in Northern Ireland during the period of The Troubles: "I chose the INLA because they seemed so extreme and, to be honest, because I thought I'd be less at risk. I'm not being heroic or anything — it was just something I felt I had to write about. The play came from a position of what you might call pacifist rage. I mean, it's a violent play that is wholeheartedly anti-violence" (see FEENEY 1998: 28).

<sup>5</sup> The described motif is similar to the one in McDonagh's script for the film *Seven Psychopaths* (2012), in which the life of a shih tzu, a dog, is deemed more important than human life.

<sup>6</sup> Patricide also occurs in *The Lonesome West*, a play belonging to McDonagh's *Leenane Trilogy*, in which Coleman Connor kills his father for commenting on his hairstyle.

rifle (17—18). The only potential family member she treats with love could be Padraic himself, as he is her romantic interest, and upon his return to Inishmore they start a promising relationship. However, Sir Roger's fate does not allow a happy ending for the two of them. Namely, in an attempt to hide Wee Thomas's death, Davey snatches a ginger cat, and together with Donny he paints it black with shoe polish. However, he never mentions that the cat is not a stray, but Mairead's Sir Roger, which he snatched so as to retaliate for all the maltreatment he has suffered in the past. The cat's disguise fails rather expectedly, because Padraic immediately notices that the cat has been painted, so in a fit of rage he shoots Sir Roger. He tells Mairead that he killed a cat because "it seemed terrible unhygienic" (60) and asks her to discard the corpse. Upon seeing the dead cat, Mairead recognises her pet and realises that she needs to avenge his death. Despite being in love with Padraic, Mairead cannot forgive him – her allegiance stays permanently with Sir Roger, which is why she is capable of killing Padraic ruthlessly (64—66).

The characters' political views are also influenced by "cat philosophy", which is particularly seen in Padraic. He is an Irish nationalist and member of the INLA, a dissident group that separated from the IRA (Irish Republican Army) and is centred on Marxist theories.<sup>7</sup> However, when Padraic discusses the cause for his fight, there is no sign of Marxist ideology in it. Instead, he has his own interpretations of the INLA's politics which revolve around – his cat: "Y'know, all I ever wanted was an Ireland free. Free for kids to run and play. Free for fellas and lasses to dance and sing. Free for cats to roam around without being clanked in the brains with a handgun" (60). Being the centre of Padraic's world, Wee Thomas also becomes the centre of his political views, which indicates a trivialisation of the Irish cause as "the personal is confused and intermingled with the political" (YELMIŞ 2014: 114). When Padraic realises that Wee Thomas is dead, everything in his life collapses, and he admits that all his violent acts were inspired by his pet:

I will plod on, I know, but no sense to it will there be with Thomas gone. No longer will his smiling eyes be there in the back of me head, egging me on, saying, 'This is for me and for Ireland, Padraic. Remember that,' as I'd lob a bomb at a pub, or be shooting a builder. Me whole world is gone, and he'll never be coming back to me.

(MCDONAGH 2014: 44)

Padraic further insulates his viewpoint from the INLA by disregarding human rights in general (YELMIŞ 2014: 106). This is seen in Scene Two,

<sup>7</sup> As Gus Martin elaborates, the aim of the INLA remained identical, since they fought for the reunion of Ireland and Northern Ireland. What set them apart from the other Irish radical nationalist organisations was the desire to create an Irish socialist republic after the reunion (see MARTIN 2006: 244).

during Padraic's torture of James, a petty drug dealer who was caught selling drugs to students. James is brutally punished by Padraic, who pulls out two of his toenails and prepares to cut off one of his nipples (MCDONAGH 2014: 11–12), and the main reason for such a punishment is the fact that James's customers were not only Protestants – which is acceptable for Padraic – but Catholics as well: “You do push your filthy drugs on the schoolchildren of Ireland, and if you concentrated exclusive on the Protestants I'd say all well and good, but you don't, you take all comers. [...] Keeping our youngsters in a drugged-up and idle haze, when it's out on the streets pegging bottles at coppers they should be” (12). Apart from being overly cruel, Padraic is also concerned only for a specific group of people who might join his fight for Ireland in the future.

Padraic's interpretations of the Republicans' cause are in tune with what occurs within the rest of the INLA as represented by McDonagh, since everyone seems to give a personal 'touch' to the battle for Ireland's independence. This is seen when Christy, Brendan, and Joey, Padraic's fellow INLA members, discuss why Padraic has to be executed. As their conversation reveals, each of them has an individual view of the INLA's cause that is rather distant from the actual ideological core that lies at the heart of the army's agenda. They present themselves as “devoid of political and historical awareness” (YELMIŞ 2014: 119), which is illustrated in Christy's assumption that the expression “the ends justify the means” was told by Marx (MCDONAGH 2014: 27). Furthermore, the trio opposes Padraic's desire to create a splinter group and separate himself from the INLA, which is already a splinter group of the IRA (29). Christy expresses what he considers to be the INLA's agenda in a speech explaining why Padraic has become a threat to the movement:

It won't be so quick then he'll be to go forming splinter groups, and knocking down fellas like poor Skank Toby, fellas who only do the community a service, and do they force anybody to buy their drugs? No. And don't they pay us a pound on every bag they push to go freeing Ireland for them? Isn't it for everybody we're out freeing Ireland? That's what Padraic doesn't understand, is it isn't only for the schoolkids and the owl fellas and the babes unborn we're out freeing Ireland. No. It's for the junkies, the thieves and the drug pushers too!  
(29)

Knowing that his cat is his whole world, Christy attempts to discipline Padraic by killing Wee Thomas. However, not everyone agrees: Joey complains that “[he]’d’ve never joined the INLA in the first place if [he]’d’ve known the battering of cats was to be on the agenda” (Ibid). “Cat philosophy” surfaces again when Christy asks whether they are supposed to fight for happy cats or “for Ireland free” (30), and Joey replies: “It's an Ireland free, Christy. Although I'd like a combination of the two” (Ibid). By depicting the INLA members in

such fashion, McDonagh ridicules the sentimentality and absurdity at the core of the Irish terrorist movements and effectively highlights the pointlessness of the terrorist acts committed in the name of freeing Ireland (REES 2006: 135—136).

The death of Wee Thomas has produced the desired effect, since the news of the cat's poor health lures Padraic to return home. Unfortunately for the group, the ambush fails when Mairead, who has eavesdropped on their plan, blinds them with an air rifle (50—51). All three are killed by Mairead and Padraic, but before dying Christy confesses to the murder of Wee Thomas. Having found the culprit of his pet's death, Padraic brutally tortures Christy with "a knife, a cheese grate, a razor, an iron and anything to gag the screaming" (54), after which the trio's corpses are handed over to Donny and Davey, who are forced to hack them into pieces (55). The torture, the killing, and the dismemberment of Padraic's former comrades suggest that Wee Thomas holds the position of the highest priority in Padraic's life that no political alliance can ever threaten to disturb.

However, the entire gruesome chain of events appears to have been unnecessary, as a black cat, instantly recognised by Donny and Davey as Wee Thomas, casually strolls onto the stage at the end of the play. Christy has killed the wrong black cat in the first place, so the pointlessness of all provoked violence is summed up in the conversation between Davey and Donny:

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

**Donny:** It has!

**Davey:** All because this fecker was after his hole? Four dead fellas, two dead cats... me hairstyle ruined! Have I missed anything?

**Donny:** Your sister broken-hearted.

**Davey:** My sister broken-hearted.

**Donny:** All me shoe polish gone.

(68)

The described relationships towards the analysed state apparatuses undermine the idealised representation of the Irish that was predominant during the Irish Literary Revival. McDonagh disrupts the idealised image of the Irish by means of exaggeration, since the devotion towards family, political views, and the Church in *The Aran Trilogy* proves to be a mythical illusion, while quotidian reality is riddled with violence. In both plays, the characters are faced with violent "hails" to take over various social roles within the analysed state apparatuses. However, these requests remain unanswered because repression takes primacy over ideology: the violent institutional means of establishing order are counteracted by the characters' equally violent means of resisting that procedure, thus positioning violence as an imprinted element of the Irish national identity.

## Brands – the instrument of contemporary recognition

The provided analysis has shown that McDonagh's *The Aran Trilogy* appears to follow a path that is similar to Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. The mythical pretexts of the Irish nation are stripped down, which McDonagh perceives as prerequisite for any change, thus aligning the trilogy with the tradition of critical Irish drama initiated by Synge. However, McDonagh enriches the described tradition by incorporating elements that the Irish audience, the plays' primary target group, could easily recognise as part of their everyday lives—we encounter various contemporary brands of food, as well as music, film, and TV programmes in *The Aran Trilogy*, which additionally facilitates the process of identifying oneself with the circumstances depicted in the plays. In *The Cripple*, Bartley discusses various American sweets which he tries to find in Eileen and Kate's store – Mintios, Yalla-mallows, Chocky-top Drops, and Fripple-Frapples (MCDONAGH 2013b: 10–14). Although the Aran Islands should be the most secluded area in Ireland that has not yet been touched by modernity in the 1930s, Bartley's elaboration on the "sweeties" he wishes to buy indicates that he is a well-informed consumer. In *The Lieutenant*, Padraic blames Donny for not taking good enough care of Wee Thomas. Davey adds to the list of Donny's sins by claiming that he feeds the cat "nothing but Frosties", whereas Donny defends himself by stating that he only feeds him cat food, including the high-quality Sheba brand (MCDONAGH 2014: 41). Frosties play an important role at the end of the play as well – whether the ending line is spoken by Davey or Donny depends on whether Wee Thomas eats the cereals or not (69).

Moreover, the action of *The Aran Trilogy* has its own musical accompaniment, and McDonagh chooses the melodies familiar to the Irish. Most of the songs are nationalist, such as "The Croppy Boy" in *The Cripple* (MCDONAGH 2013b: 53), and "The Dying Rebel" and "The Patriot Game" in *The Lieutenant* (MCDONAGH 2014: 20, 32–36). While in the first play there is no other music, nationalist songs are opposed in the second one by mentions of British popular music: James defends his drug dealing by claiming that Paul McCartney supports legalising marijuana (13), while Davey counters Mairead's singing "The Dying Rebel" by starting to sing "The Ace of Spades" by Motorhead (20).

Finally, there are various mentions of films and TV programmes, which may have the most drastic influence on the characters. José Lanthers explains that the grand narratives of the past are no longer meaningful for McDonagh's characters, so they are forced to look for meaning elsewhere. Consequently, many of them can only understand real-life events if they are compared with what they have seen in a film or on television (LANTERS 2012: 165–167). In *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Mairead asks Padraic to watch "a film about the Guildford Four" (MCDONAGH

2014: 33) – presumably *In the Name of the Father* by Jim Sheridan (LONERGAN 2012: 73)<sup>8</sup> – and when the two discuss making a list of people who should be killed, she compares it to the music chart TV show *Top of the Pops* (MCDONAGH 2014: 60). Additionally, Padraic has been influenced by television to create his image of an ideal woman, since he tells Mairead that he would like her more if she looked like Evie from the series *The House of Elliot* (58).

It is in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* that we find McDonagh's direct criticism of an example of the Irish representation on film – Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran*.<sup>9</sup> Flaherty's fictional documentary was supposed to represent life on the islands authentically, but today it is understood that numerous elements appearing in the film are examples of falsified reality. Since one of the central goals of McDonagh's play is to re-examine and debunk the film's alleged authenticity (LONERGAN 2012: 60–64), *Man of Aran* is the background of almost the entire action of *The Cripple*. The characters criticise the film on McDonagh's behalf during its first projection in the church hall. We notice immediately that the film fails to hold their attention because everyone is more interested in gossiping (64). What is more, they constantly comment on the incredulity of scenes, especially the shark hunting (McDonagh 2013b: 54-61), and Helen delivers the final verdict by stating that the film is “a pile of fecking shite” (61). Billy agrees with Helen, which is seen when he ridicules the “arse-faced” lines he was supposed to prepare for the screen test:

‘Can I not hear the wail of the banshees for me, as far as I am from me barren island home.’ [...] ‘An Irishman I am, begora! With a heart and a spirit that on me not crushed be a hundred years of oppression. I’ll be getting me shillelagh out next, wait’ll you see.’ A rake of shite. And had me singing the fecking ‘Croppoy Boy’ then.  
(63)

The importance of the listed brands in McDonagh's trilogy is twofold. On one hand, they help position the plays in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; on the other hand, they symbolise the contemporary Irish nation in a manner similar to the previously analysed state apparatuses. Namely, brands should be understood as being part of mass culture, which is also predominantly influenced by ideology. Since brands belong to a structure that is effectively an ideological state apparatus in its own right, ideology impacts the process of brand creation as well, including the transformation of an individual into a consumer. McDonagh's characters

<sup>8</sup> *In the Name of the Father* is a 1993 film based on the true event – the 1974 Guildford pub bombings, for which four people were falsely convicted. Padraic comments on the film with disgust towards the Guildford Four, since he disapproved of their pleading innocent: “Even if they didn’t do it, they should’ve took the blame and been proud. But no, they did nothing but whine” (MCDONAGH 2014: 33).

<sup>9</sup> *Man of Aran* depicts a few days in the life of what is presumably a typical Aran family; they live in a stone cottage and sleep next to their livestock, cultivate potatoes, and go fishing in a curragh (a traditional small boat). For more information, see LONERGAN 2012: 60–72.

have undergone this transformation, as they constantly assert their attitudes regarding various brands and mass media elements. Moreover, McDonagh ensures that the brands mentioned in *The Aran Trilogy* are well known to the Irish, because the familiarity of a brand within a group triggers the sense of belonging and recognition of one's identity.

## Conclusion

The presented analysis shows that the state apparatuses of family, politics, and the Catholic Church can be observed as the social institutions within which the Irish are labelled as uncontrollably violent, since the repressive “hails” to take on specific social roles are responded by the characters' equally violent resistance. The violent nature of the observed chain of causes and reactions prevents the fulfilment of the mentioned social requests, and it also renders pointless the analysed ideological state apparatuses, which in turn disperses the Irish devotion to family, nationalism and the Church as a mythical illusion. Since demythologising the Irish national identity was a significant element of Synge's plays, we may perceive *The Aran Trilogy* as a continuation of a dramatic tradition whose purpose is to bring the Irish audience to reason. McDonagh additionally eases the identification of the Irish with his characters by introducing diverse brands of food, music, films and TV programmes, which operate within another ideological state apparatus—mass culture. By doing so, McDonagh disassembles the four key social aspects that define the modern Irish nation, so that the Irish audience, his initial target group, could realise their faults, which is the vital prerequisite for any sort of future change. He does so by means of exaggeration, which in turn provokes shock among viewers as the reaction necessary for questioning one's behaviour.

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### БРЕНДИРАЊЕ ИРСКЕ НАЦИЈЕ: АРАН ТРИЛОГИЈА МАРТИНА МАКДОНЕ

У раду се анализира приказ ирског идентитета у *Аран трилогији* Мартина Макдоне из угла дефиниције термина *бренд*, који оригинално означава поступак обележавања или жигосања. У Макдониној недовршеној трилогији, државни апарати Католичке цркве, политичких ставова и породичних односа могу се тумачити као друштвене институције у оквиру којих се ирска нација обележава као необуздано насилна. Како би нагласио да су Ирци примарна циљна група *Аран трилогије*, Макдона олакшава процес поистовећивања публике са драмама тиме што користи савремене брендове хране, музику, филмове и телевизијски програм. Циљ рада је да покаже да описани поступци откривају Макдонину намеру да се Ирци исмеју као нација не би ли постали свесни својих мана, чиме се наставља драмска традиција коју је успоставио комад *Виловњак са западне стране* Џона Милингтона Синга.

*Кључне речи:* бренд, Ирска, идентитет, државни апарати, репресија, насиље, породица, политика, Мартин Макдона, *Аран трилогија*

