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# How do Martin Mcdonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* Utilise Landscape to Construct and Contest National Identity?

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Both Martin Mcdonagh and Jez Butterworth draw upon landscapes which have been iconic in defining national identity: *The Cripple of Inishmaan* is set in the 'Wild West' of Ireland and *Jerusalem* is set in a wood in pastoral England. During this essay, I will argue that as the landscapes of pastoral England and the Aran Islands have been substantially reproduced across the arts, they have contributed to the imagining of the nation and are thus central to Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community'.[1] However, Mcdonagh and Butterworth subvert the way that these landscapes have previously represented national virtues, and instead propose alternative readings of the landscape. I will also examine how both playwrights explore the geo-political significance of these landscapes, evoking questions of belonging and exclusion. Throughout this essay, I will utilise Doreen Massey's model of space as an active, alive entity to illustrate how these landscapes, which have been traditionally perceived as static cultural constructs, have been reworked and revised by the playwrights to contest existing representations of national identity.[2] Thus, I will explore how landscapes as cultural images have become part of the 'imagined community', how each playwright has mobilised these landscape images and hence contested definitions of national identity, and how each play offers a capitalist critique through highlighting the significance of who occupies the landscape.

Firstly, I will discuss how landscape functions as an iconography for national identity. Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove propose that the landscape is 'a cultural image' which is freighted with meaning.[3] Here, 'image' highlights the stasis of landscape; it is a fixed cultural construction which has longevity. This interpretation of landscape as an enduring symbol for national identity is supported by Massey's critique of represented space as one-dimensional. This outlines the exclusion effected by representing the nation through a singular image. Furthermore, iconic landscapes such as the West of Ireland and pastoral England can be understood through Henri Lefebvre's thesis of 'conceived space'.[4] Lefebvre's 'conceived space' explores space as a cultural construct which is usually represented by outsiders. This is true of both the West of Ireland and pastoral England; both have been appropriated by the political elite to represent the nation.

*Jerusalem* is set in the South of England, a landscape which has been instrumental in defining England as a 'civilising' colonial power. The pastoral came to symbolise 'civilisation', where the quotidian was peaceful, a stark comparison to the primitivism in England's colonies. Stephen Daniels argued that the pastoral landscape was associated with 'state-sponsored nationalism' which highlights how landscape as a live space has been appropriated and immobilised by nationalists.[5] In effect, the rural landscape was deployed to pacify the nation; it served as a dose of nostalgia to quieten unrest when national identity was under scrutiny. Butterworth seems to yield to the conservatism of the pastoral. The play's title and the opening anthem of 'Jerusalem' is recognisable to the audience, it has been used in national ceremonies as a hymn, evoking the purity of the English landscape and 'greatness' of the nation. Moreover, the '*Wessex flag*' draped across the set is a relic of an ancient England.[6] Thus, from the outset, Butterworth marks his play as quintessentially English; it is located within the pastoral idyll and the population participate in traditional rural customs.

Yet, the wild landscape of the Aran Islands has been represented in opposition to the calm of rural England. This wildness was appropriated by the English as a reflection of the 'uncivilised' population of Ireland, identifying a synonymy between the savage landscape and its people, a notable contrast from the social calm encoded in England's pastoral landscape. This notion of 'otherness' has been discussed by Edward Said, who claims that England, in order to preserve its Imperial power depicted foreign cultures as uncivilised, 'Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule'.[7] However, a trope of Irish drama is the need to reclaim this sense of alterity which is seen in how the rugged landscape of the Aran Islands and the simplicity of life there have been propagated by Irish nationalists.

[1] Benedict Anderson, *The Imagined Communities: The Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006).
[2] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005).
[3] Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge: CUP 1989), p. 1.
[4] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 1991).
[5] Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 4.
[6] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 5.
[7] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 51.

This laudatory depiction is seen in J.M Synge's play, *Riders to the Sea*, where the Aran islanders are harboured from modern society and are entirely dependent on the natural world.

McDonagh invests in the iconic landscape of the Wild West. In the main setting of the '*small country shop*', McDonagh makes scarce use of props which reiterates the simplicity of the Aran islanders' existence. Furthermore, '*the mirror'* as one of the only props without a practical function, could symbolise the insular outlook of the community, a recurrent characteristic of Irish drama.[8] Equally, the audience are met with a comic sequence, with Kate's repetition of, 'I do worry awful about Billy...' (p. 1). Throughout the sequence, the aunts repeat each other highlighting their farcical circumlocution which adheres to the stereotypes of the Irish as unintelligent. Due to his Anglo-Irish heritage, McDonagh has been criticised for reinforcing debilitating stereotypes of the Irish. However, I will argue that his nationality and therefore the authenticity of his representations are unimportant to this discussion; my focus is centred on how McDonagh offers a postmodern exploration of national identity through the landscape. Thus, both playwrights invoke landscapes which as spaces have been immortalised by the political elite. The English pastoral and Aran Islands are deployed as nostalgic reminders of when national identity was more certain, when the idea of 'nation' had more impetus. It is therefore important to consider the effect that these landscapes as cultural constructs have upon the audience whilst watching the productions. Susan Bennett argues that during performance there is 'an outer frame' which signifies the 'shared socio-cultural knowledge' of the audience.[9] This is central to my discussion of landscape and national identity; the 'outer frame' denotes the audience's set of expectations when confronted with the landscapes of the Aran Islands and the English pastoral. I will argue that this shared knowledge is instrumental to each production as both playwrights disrupt the audience's expectations of the landscape's role in the fabrication of national identity.

Butterworth rebuts the traditional iconography of the pastoral as symbolising the 'civilisation' of the English. Where Stephen Daniels claims that 'the green rolling hills' of the South of England were repeatedly depicted in paintings to reflect the gentility of the pastoral population, the landscape in *Jerusalem* embodies and exhibits social fractures.[10] Evidence of Rooster's lifestyle is etched on to the landscape; it is littered with rubbish, empty bottles and drug paraphernalia (p. 6). The rural landscape is rejected as a source of purity and civilisation; it is the site of intoxication and rebellion. Although the pastoral is tarnished by Rooster's lifestyle, I will propose that Butterworth refutes the idea that the woods should remain emblematic of social order and aesthetic beauty. Butterworth mobilises the landscape, it is no longer representative of the calm of the population; it is a subjective space which is receptive to those who inhabit it. Thus, the landscape in *Jerusalem* facilitates Rooster's Dionysian lifestyle. The drug and alcohol abuse throughout the play can be interpreted as a means to reconnect with the Dionysian self, the antithesis of the 'civilised' depictions of the pastoral population. Rooster is the primal human archetype, a fundamentally free individual, acting outside of homogenising social strictures. The emancipating effect of the woods is expressed by Rooster as he claims that most parents in Flintock used the forest for, 'drinking, smoking, and pilling' when they were younger (p. 42). This highlights how the woods provide a space to fulfil carnal desires and throw off social conventions of propriety, a veritable rejection of the pastoral as emblematic of the 'civilisation' of the nation.

Likewise, as the audience experience 'accordions and woodland scenes' they are also subject to 'people dancing with wild abandon' to 'deafening bass' which illustrates how the production itself is invested in Dionysian revelry (pp. 5, 6). The audience therefore shares the visceral experience with the characters on stage, the rave music throughout is a feature of the Dionysian as a 'low' cultural form, outlining the abandonment to impulse on a dual level. This synthesises with Butterworth's claim that the play favours 'mythos' over 'logos', offering escapism from the banal quotidian.[11] Here, 'logos' can be interpreted as logic, reason and deference to social conventions, whilst 'mythos' alludes to the Dionysian self and the supernatural. Furthermore, Butterworth's activation of the pastoral landscape as a Dionysian realm is strengthened by the Common Player's productions of Jerusalem in 2014. Rather than taking to conventional, prestigious theatres, the Common Players toured the West Country, incorporating the play into midsummer festivals. The advertisement for the tour primed audiences to expect 'live music and cold cider', highlighting the purpose of the production to entertain.[12] Moreover, the tour is centred on socialising and alcohol, encouraging a venture into the Dionysian, and a step away from the 'logos' of the everyday. The landscape as a static representation for national identity

[8] Martin Mcdonagh, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (London: Bloomsbury Meuthen Drama, 1997), p. 1.
[9] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 142.
[10] Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape, Imagery and National Identity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 7.
[11] David Cote, 'Q&A: Mark Rylance on Jerusalem', *Timeout* <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/theater/q-a-mark-rylance-on-jerusalem-broadway> [accessed 28 December 2015].
[12] *New Jerusalem* <http://www.newjerusalem.org.uk/> [accessed 30 December 2015].

therefore loses impetus when the play is taken out of large institutional theatres; it is liberated as a space through site-specific performance.

Like the audiences of *Jerusalem,* the audience who went to see *The Cripple of Inishmaan* on the West End and Broadway would have been familiar with the landscape as a reproduced cultural product. Declan Hughes alludes to the schism between the Irish landscape in drama as 'conceived' and 'lived' space, he questions, 'why does contemporary Irish theatre ignore contemporary Ireland?'.[13] Here, Hughes criticises the way that Irish drama is governed by nostalgic reminders of a pre-colonial Ireland, despite the prosperity of the nation seen in the Celtic Tiger period from the late 1990s until the recession in 2008. Thus, the Aran Islands as a cultural image anchor Irish drama in the past when it perhaps should look to the future as an independent, modernised nation. This is a critique of McDonagh's drama which is proposed by Shaun Richards, who claims that some criticise McDonagh for 'recycling disabling images' to generate himself an income.[14] However, I will argue that McDonagh 'recycles' these images to embark upon a postmodern exploration into the representations of Irish identity.

As Butterworth rejects the notion that the pastoral landscape is a civilising force upon its inhabitants, McDonagh dismantles the myth that the geographical isolation of the Aran Islands renders its population naive. McDonagh defies the colonial stereotype of the Irish being unintelligent as trickery is central to the plot. Billy forges a doctor's note and pretends that he has tuberculosis to persuade Bobby to take him to Inishmore. Given the legacy of the Aran Islands in traditional Irish drama as a wild landscape which denies social mobility, the very notion that Billy can get off of the island and then travel to America is a radical assertion. In effect, Billy as a character defies the fate of his cultural predecessors in Syngean drama; his life is not bound to the landscape.

Moreover, McDonagh primes the audience to accept Billy's 'death scene' in Hollywood as genuine, when it is a screen test. This is a postmodern theatrical technique as the ignorance of the audience is aligned with that of the characters, Eileen and Kate. When Billy departs for Hollywood, Eileen exclaims, 'what the devil's a screen test?' and Kate replied, 'I don't know at all what a screen test is' highlighting the naivety of the islanders (pp. 43, 44). This is ironic, the audience find Kate and Eileen's ignorance comic, yet they do not know what a screen test is either as it is perceived as truth. Thus, McDonagh exposes the audience's ignorance and keenness to absorb national stereotypes. Furthermore, Billy and Bartley ridicule the way that Ireland is represented by the Hollywood film company: Billy recites his final words, 'a decent spirit not broken by a century's hunger and a lifetime's oppression' to which Bartley replies, 'them was funny lines' (p. 63). Here, the characters parody the way that they continue to be represented as victims of famine and English rule; they find this tragic characterisation comic. Mike Pearson claims that insiders of a landscape 'have no clear separation of self and scene', a concept which is debased by McDonagh's play.[15] The Aran islanders parody the way that they have been defined, a process which is central to forging an independent identity and emancipating themselves from reductive stereotypes. Furthermore, the '*mirror*' in the first scene could be seen as a symbol for how the characters reflect on and engage with the ways that they have been represented, marking a definitive separation of 'self from scene' as the characters view the landscape from an external perspective. McDonagh thus empowers the Aran Islanders; they are no longer objects within the image of the landscape, the landscape is mobilised as an active space for self-reflexive discussion.

Finally, I will discuss how there is no outright owner of the landscapes which destabilises how the landscape can represent a singular vision of national identity. The geo-political significance of landscape is discussed by Lefebvre; he defines 'perceived' space as being the place of production and claims that, 'capital and capitalism influence practical matters relating to space'.[16] Butterworth and McDonagh depict corporate influences, the New Estate and the Hollywood film company, as negative, highlighting their resistance to capitalist forces encroaching upon the landscape. Fundamentally, both plays are concerned with resisting the appropriation of landscape for capitalist gains which elucidates how local, and perhaps national identities, are unstable and are under threat.

Butterworth stages a literal battle over the ownership of the landscape: Rooster and the New Estate have conflicting senses of place. There is a tension between 'new' rural inhabitants (potential home-owners) and 'ancient' rural inhabitants (Rooster), marking the dichotomy of 'logos' and 'mythos' that pervades the play. The use of bureaucratic jargon also signifies the victory of 'logos' over 'mythos'. Fawcett's utterances are mechanical and reflect the dehumanising legislative discourses of the state, 'under Section 62 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act.' (p. 8) Here, Fawcett recites official

[13] Declan Hughes, 'Who the hell do we think we are? Reflections on Irish theatre and identity', *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. by Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort, 2009), pp. 8-15, 8.
[14] Shaun Richards, 'Plays of (ever) Changing Ireland', in *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp.1-18, 9.
[15] Mike Pearson, *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Exeter: EUP, 2007), p. 10.
[16] Lefebvre, p. 9.

documents, using 'logos' to validate the eviction warrant and declare her ownership of the landscape. In contrast, Rooster is introduced to the audience as quasi-animalistic as he is seen on the roof of the caravan '*barking ferociously*' (p. 8). Although Rooster is perceived as savage, this stark naturalness could be perceived as a redeemable quality, he is more human than Fawcett. In addition, Rooster is physically above Fawcett, denoting how he is empowered through proxemics.

Moreover, Rooster's place in the landscape is legitimated through his mythological ancestry. The audience are informed by Lee that there are ley lines beneath the wood, 'they are lines of ancient energy… this is holy land' (p. 72). Furthermore, Rooster explains that he settled in the wood clearing by chance, his car broke down and he never wanted to move, 'It feels like home' (p. 102). Here, Butterworth implies that Rooster was destined to settle in the 'holy' wood; Rooster has been fully assimilated into the landscape by fate which is symbolise*d* in the oxymoron that his 'mobile home is embedded in the earth'. The lamentation of separating Rooster from the landscape is encapsulated in, 'a feral bellow from the heart of the earth' which indicates how his pain is sourced from within the landscape, denoting a dual affliction (p. 10). Furthermore, there is no rational solution to Rooster's imminent eviction, Rooster calls upon the legends of the landscape, '*relentlessly he beats the drum...'* (p. 109). As the audience witness Rooster's drumming, it signifies how by the end of the play, they too have embraced the Dionysian and absorbed 'mythos'. The audience have literally abandoned themselves to 'the rhythms of the earth', synthesising with the Professor's earlier celebration of the impulsiveness of the pastoral (p. 52). This rejection of the 'logos' sourced in the quotidian of our capitalist society chimes with the anti-capitalist discourses of the 'Occupy Movement' in 2011. Given the play returned to the Apollo theatre in London in October 2011, it was located within the economic and political nexus at the time of the protests, highlighting the political bite of the final triumph of 'mythos' in the play.

Similarly, the film company in McDonagh's play is an intrusive presence upon the landscape. The film company's agenda to reproduce reductive stereotypes of the communities on the Aran Islands is seen in Billy's tragic 'death scene' in which he laments his distance from his 'barren island home', a conventional portrayal of Irish life (p. 52). Furthermore, McDonagh is concerned with their commercial agenda as he explicitly invokes the Man of Aran, a film which romanticised the simplicity of life on the Aran Islands in the 1930s. It has been speculated that after the success of the Man of Aran, the islanders began to act up to the stereotypical depictions of national identity displayed on screen to benefit economically.[17] This signifies how Lefebvre's triad of space as 'conceived' (cultural image), 'lived' (the everyday reality) and 'perceived' (production and social practices) bled together, a notion that is critiqued by McDonagh. Rather than accept and attempt to live up to the hyperbolic portrayals disseminated by the film company, the islanders on Inishmaan critique the way that their communities have been represented. This is seen in Helen's active engagement with the film as she '*throws an egg at the screen'* which mirrors the bawdy audience engagement of Restoration theatre (p. 57). Furthermore, Helen ridicules the notion that the film is a veritable depiction of life on the Aran Islands, she simply exclaims, 'a pile of fecking shite' (p. 61). This reiterates how McDonagh gives a postmodern depiction of national identity; the characters in the play are afforded critical distance to evaluate the way that they have been represented by external perspectives.

Moreover, the Hollywood film company is a negative intrusion on the landscape as it ignited false hope for Billy. Fintan O'Toole argued that a sense of 'American romanticism' pervades the play, which I will argue is a fallible evaluation.[18] Billy does not romanticise America, disillusioned, he jokes, 'it's just the same as Ireland really, full of fat women with beards.' (p. 64) The American dream is not realised; Billy is disposed of by the film company and has no real choice but to return back to Ireland. Due to the influence of the film company, a symbol of modern capitalism on the Aran Islands, Billy loses his sense of place, he was ostracised in America and is displaced when back in Ireland. This sense of isolation becomes desperation at the end of the play, when Billy contemplated committing suicide (p. 81). Thus, like Butterworth, McDonagh critiques how modern capitalist influences extricate individuals from their community; both protagonists experience an identity crisis when separated from their landscapes.

Both playwrights utilise landscape as a free, changeable apparatus to debunk conventional depictions of national identity. In revising the freighted landscapes of the English pastoral and Aran Islands, both playwrights sever the elision between these iconic landscapes and national identity; they have been loosened from the grasp of the political elite, and have been used to re-imagine the nation. Butterworth and McDonagh therefore offer postmodern depictions of the landscape and national identity: Butterworth advocates 'mythos' and disorder to dispute 'civilised' colonial stereotypes of the pastoral; whilst McDonagh demythologises the islanders and advocates 'logos', they are given a critical

[17] Theatre and the Nation Lecture Material (20th October 2015).
[18] Fintan O'Toole, *Fintan O'Toole: Critical Moments in Irish Theatre*, ed. by Julia Furay and Redmond O'Hanlon (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2004), p. 183.

distance to dispute the ways that they have been represented. Thus, both playwrights use space as suggested by Doreen Massey, not as 'a representational, closed system' but as 'always under construction, always in the process of being made'.[19] This concept of the landscape as a fluid, subjective space has arguably been necessitated by contemporary social, political and economic contexts; in a globalised, postcolonial world, nations can no longer be singularly defined through one cultural image; they must evolve, adapt and be receptive to change.

[19] Massey, *For Space*, p. 9.

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