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OPPONENT'S REPORT:

re "McDONAGHLAND AS A GLOBAL VILLAGE" by Michaela Konárková
(MA dissertation, 2006, supervised by Dr Ondřej Pilný)

This dissertation aims at a treatment of the works of Irish playwright Martin McDonagh within the context of globalisation and its impact upon what Theodor Adorno once referred to as the Culture Industry. Ms Konárková's analysis takes place, however, under the constellation of Marshall McLuhan, Zygmunt Bauman, and Linda Hutcheon—although any number of other names might just as easily have been assembled for this purpose. The use of McLuhan's borrowed notion of the Global Village appears the most useful of those cited by Konárková; Bauman's globalisation paradigm (with its binary classifications of "vagabond" and "tourist" being, in my eyes at least, unconvincing). In short, McDonagh's "West of Ireland" plays are taken as being symptomatic of a certain post-effect of globalisation, itself brought about—according to McLuhan—by a revolution in teletechnologies: i.e. the global inventions of the new mass media. McDonagh's treatment of various assumed Irish theatrical/cultural pieties is seen on the one hand as parodic/satirical; on the other as a deracinating of cultural "scenery": a reduction of the assumed cultural heritage to a mere play of interchangeable images, circulating within a global consumer environment in the form of "entertainment." To this end, Konárková adopts Hutcheon's notion of "parody" as a writerly strategy: a means of critique / exploitation of the evolving structures of cultural hegemony (i.e. between those of the nation state and its myths, and those of the media and entertainment industries).

This approach is clearly an ambitious one, and it involves a number of possible pitfalls, not all of which are avoided in this dissertation. The first involves an oversubscription to the very paradigm of placement and cultural nationalism that is presented here as precisely the object of critique. An example of this is the exclusion of *The Pillowman* from consideration in this dissertation, on the basis that it is the only play of McDonagh's that is *not* set in the West of Ireland. This appears, above all, to be rather self-defeating, especially with regard to the nominalising claims of globalisation. Surely the fact that *The Pillowman* is stylistically and in almost every other respect identical to McDonagh's other plays (with the sole exception of the setting and the characters' names) is of central importance to Ms Konárková's argument.

What is missed here, in Ms Konárková's rationale, is that not only has the "West of Ireland" become a global cultural commodity (exploited in these terms by McDonagh), but that it has also become something of a *critical* commodity, *even in its parodic form*, and that this form is critically *invasive*. It invades, at least, many of the premises of this dissertation, which remains firmly fixed within the frame of Irish literary studies, so that the discussion of globalisation and the global village always takes place within the referential framework of "Irish Studies," even as it seems to demand that such a framework be submitted to a "global" critique. In this way it

appears the dissertation too easily accepts McDonagh's gambit on its own terms—and this begs the question of why one may be ready to credit all but one of McDonagh's plays within an Irish literary-critical context "merely" *because* they adopt West-of-Ireland settings and names, but discredit the one (almost identical) play *because* it does not? (The repeated references to Aleks Sierz's book on In-Yer-Face theatre could have provided a useful context for reading McDonagh within a broader theatrical framework, for example.)

These points leads me to suggest that a possible strengthening of Ms Konárková's argument could involve a theoretical engagement with the logic of commodity and commodity fetish, most notably developed in the early writings of Marx, and later revised in the work of Lukács and Guy Debord. This would also help to clarify the usage of terms like "iconic status" that are used in this dissertation. Alternatively some treatment of the term icon—e.g. in relation to the semiotics of Peirce—would be useful. Other terms could also benefit from clearer definition, such as "farce," "comedy," "parody," "melodrama," "satire." Statement like "the form of farce and melodrama ... illustrates the content of McDonagh's plays" and "the genre of farce very characteristically mirrors the state of events in the global village" remain opaque. Likewise, terms such as "hyperreality" could benefit from further elaboration—e.g. with respect to Jean Baudrillard's treatment of simulation and simulacra. To Ms Konárková's credit she does cite Baudrillard, however only by way of a secondary text, and not directly.

On the use of sources, the efficacy of basing any substantial line of argument on the work of certain tertiary sources like Čulík and Trenský (instead of Esslin) is highly doubtful. In any case, more consistent use of critical sources could have been made, in particular McLuhan, whose significance for this dissertation appears quite central, but which is in fact quite diminished by lack of sustained engagement. Indeed, on many occasions, the trope of "global village" is rather superficially employed.

There are a number of questions that I would ideally like to pose to Ms Konárková. The first has to do with the claim that McDonagh's "parodies" attack the dominant "realist" tradition of Irish drama—and in this context there is reference made to Synge and Yeats. My question would be: cannot everything that is said about McDonagh's nominalism and the iconicity of the West of Ireland equally apply to the work of Synge, Yeats, Gregory et al? i.e. in the "invention" of the Irish Literary Theatre, do not the same conditions apply as in McDonagh's "parody," the difference residing in the assumed motives of the authors? The eschewal of realism in the foundation of the Literary Theatre (i.e. it's "literary nominalism," you might say), would seem to involve an immediately analogous iconicity and "globalisation" of Irish cultural heritage as that which enables McDonagh's plays to be viewed AS parodic in the first place.

On page 35, Ms Konárková appears to disagree with the suggestion that McDonagh's plays are too unrefined, or crude, to be properly considered parody. In this way, there still appears to be a possibility of redemption via theatrical "catharsis" by way of violence. This violence, "deprived of humanity" (as Wehmeyer says) thus appears

to suggest, precisely, the possibility of humanity through the transcendence—or possibly *mediation*—of violence. Does the author thus agree with Hutcheon that parody, like satire, serves a critical function—but that this critical function remains nevertheless positive; it is still a *corrective* one? Are McDonagh's parodies finally "corrective"?

In its present form, compromised by linguistic, structural and stylistic flaws, and by weak referencing, my recommendation is that this MA dissertation receive an overall grade of 2 (B+). There is a great deal of room for improvement indicated here if Ms Konárková intends to attempt literary studies at a higher level.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gavin Jones".

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