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# 'The Intertextual Presence of Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall* in Martin McDonagh's *Six Shooter*'

By Dr. David Clare

As many critics have pointed out, Martin McDonagh's work for the stage and screen is deeply indebted to the drama of Samuel Beckett. Critics have detected clear allusions to *Endgame* (1957), *Footfalls* (1976), and *Rockaby* (1980) in McDonagh's stage plays,[1] and have noted that McDonagh alludes to *Waiting for Godot* (1953) in a number of works.[2] Prominent examples include the 1997 play, *A Skull in Connemara*, which takes its title from Lucky's speech, and McDonagh's first full-length film, *In Bruges* (2008), which uses *Godot* as one of its four main intertexts. While *In Bruges* is more obviously indebted to Harold Pinter's 1960 play *The Dumb Waiter*, Nicholas Roeg's 1973 film *Don't Look Now*, and

[1] Werner Huber, 'The Early Plays: Martin McDonagh, Shooting Star and Hard Man from South London', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 13-26 (p.25); Nicholas Grene, 'Ireland in Two Minds: Martin McDonagh and Conor McPherson', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 42-59 (p.47); Christopher Murray, 'The Cripple of Inishmaan Meets Lady Gregory', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 79-95 (pp.91-92); Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama* (Second Edition), (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.240-242; Patrick Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), pp.16, 142.

[2] Huber, 'The Early Plays: Martin McDonagh, Shooting Star and Hard Man from South London', p.19; Lisa Fitzpatrick, 'Language Games: *The Pillowman*, *A Skull in Connemara*: Martin McDonagh's Hiberno-English', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 141-154 (pp.152-3); Karen Vandevelde, 'Martin McDonagh's Irishness: Icing on the Cake?', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 349-362 (p.358); Anthony Roche, 'Re-working *The Workhouse Ward*: McDonagh, Gregory and Beckett', *Irish University Review* 34.1 (Spring/Summer 2004), 171-184; Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, pp.16, 26-27, 142, 166.

Charlotte Brontë's 1853 novel *Villette*,[3] it mirrors *Godot* in featuring a male duo trapped in a purgatorial space,[4] who are visited (in this case, in memory) by a small boy and intruded upon by a violent, 'British',[5] bully. While critics have spotted these Beckettian references, they have curiously failed to recognise that McDonagh's Oscar-winning short film, *Six Shooter* (2004), draws heavily on Beckett's classic radio play, *All That Fall* (1957).

McDonagh has a reputation for ostentatiously signalling his intertextual use of other works (frequently cited are the open references to *Don't Look Now* in *In Bruges* and to

[3] Since *In Bruges* tells the story of two London-based gangsters awaiting instructions from their boss in a hotel room, it is clearly, and primarily, a reworking of Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*. McDonagh does not hide this – the gangster's aliases are 'Cranham and Blakely', the surnames of the two actors from a famous BBC production of the play that McDonagh has said was a big influence on him. The first critic to spot this allusion was Fintan O'Toole. (Fintan O'Toole, 'McDonagh Has Left the Theatre. Or Has He?', *The Irish Times*, 15 March 2008.) For more on McDonagh's use of *The Dumb Waiter* in *In Bruges*, see Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalisation: Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.146-147; David Clare, 'A Belgian Town as Purgatory and an Irish Gangster as Christ in Martin McDonagh's *In Bruges*', forthcoming in *EmerginG perspectiveS* 3.1 (Autumn, 2012): 47-60 (p.57).

As regards Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, one of the central conceits of *In Bruges* is the fact that the arthouse film being shot by a Belgian crew throughout the movie is (in the memorable words of one character) 'a jumped-up Eurotrash piece of rip-off fucking bullshit'. The film is a 'rip-off', because it draws so heavily on Roeg's classic horror film. (Martin McDonagh, *In Bruges*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p.45.) In this scene, McDonagh is knowingly (and comically) acknowledging that the same accusation could be levelled at *In Bruges* itself, since it also 'borrows' liberally from *Don't Look Now*. Both films take place in a beautiful European city with canals; both feature characters haunted by the death of a child; and both make prominent use of religious iconography.

Finally, there are several parallels between *In Bruges* and *Villette*, a novel written by someone who is (like McDonagh) an English-born person of Irish descent. Charlotte Brontë's novel is set in a fictional version of Belgium; there are important gothic, 'city nightscape' scenes in both works; and – as with the character of Ray in *In Bruges* – we don't find out definitively at the end of the work if the male hero lives or dies. McDonagh signals his use of Brontë's novel by giving Ray's girlfriend Chloë the surname 'Villette'.

[4] For a concise analysis of Purgatory in the plays of Beckett (including *Waiting for Godot*), see Katherine J. Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), pp.8, 12, 52-59. For Bruges as Purgatory in McDonagh's *In Bruges*, see Clare, 'A Belgian Town as Purgatory and an Irish Gangster as Christ in Martin McDonagh's *In Bruges*', 47-60.

[5] Harry Waters, the Cockney gangster in McDonagh's film, is unambiguously British. Pozzo (in the English-language version of *Godot*) can be seen as Stage English – or Stage Anglo-Irish – to the degree that, in contrast to Gogo and Didi, who are poor and speak in Hiberno-English, he is a wealthy landlord whose speech is peppered with British public school phrases like 'of the first water', 'my good man', and 'I propose to dally with you a moment'. (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 22; 18; 17.) Pozzo's Stage Britishness is also evident from his anxiety over social propriety. At one point he wonders, 'How am I to sit down now, without affectation, now that I have risen? Without appearing to – how shall I say – without appearing to falter.' He eventually concludes that he would only be able to sit if Gogo or Didi 'asked [him] to sit down.' (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p.24.) Of course, assigning distinct nationalities to the characters in *Waiting for Godot* is a risky (and arguably dubious) enterprise, since Beckett is careful to internationalise the proceedings by giving the characters names from various cultures and by having the characters allude to French, English, and Irish places. Nevertheless, it is still significant that, even in the original French version of the play, Beckett agreed with Roger Blin that Pozzo should be played 'as an English gentleman farmer'. (Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, (London: Vintage Books, 2002), p.446.)

Robert Flaherty's *The Man of Aran* (1934) in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (1996)); however, the intertextual games that McDonagh plays are frequently quite subtle. For example, as Laura Eldred has demonstrated, classic horror films are important (if slightly veiled) presences in McDonagh's early trilogies. He slyly borrows from *Psycho* (1960) in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Se7en* (1995) in *A Skull in Connemara*, *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) in *The Lonesome West*, and *Freaks* (1932) in *The Cripple of Inishmaan*.[6] The sheer number of 'parallels' between *Psycho* and *Beauty Queen* led Eldred to rightly insist that 'it [is] impossible to call these similarities a coincidence.'[7] The same can be said about the numerous parallels between *All That Fall* and *Six Shooter*. Both works centrally feature trains, the death of young children, childless couples, animals, reflections on Christianity, and haunting Irish memories which inspire bizarre and, indeed, violent behaviour in the present.

McDonagh chose Beckett's radio play as an intertextual base for *Six Shooter* for a few reasons. First, just as he challenges and updates Synge in the *Leenane* trilogy (1996-1997),[8] he is challenging and updating the Protestant Beckett's ideas regarding Christianity and adult/child relationships in *All That Fall* by applying them to Irish Catholic people of his own time. Second, McDonagh is disputing Beckett's (relatively) sympathetic portrait of greater Dublin in *All That Fall* by including various, scathing remarks about the capital in *Six Shooter*. (As we shall see, comments made by McDonagh suggest that his – perhaps merely playful – antipathy to Dublin stems from his West of Ireland and Irish Diasporic

[6] Laura Eldred, 'Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic', in *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook*, ed. by Richard Rankin Russell, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 111-130 (pp.109-116).

[7] Eldred, 'Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic', p.112.

[8] For McDonagh's 'rewriting' of Synge in the *Leenane Trilogy*, see Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, pp. 19, 23, 30-31, 42; José Lanters, 'Playwrights of the Western World: Synge, Murphy, McDonagh', in *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage*, ed. by Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan and Shakir Mustafa, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University press, 2000), 204-222; Shaun Richards, '"The Outpouring of a Morbid, Unhealthy Mind": The Critical Condition of Synge and McDonagh', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 246-263; Laura Eldred, 'Martin McDonagh's Blend of Tradition and Horrific Innovation', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 198-213.

backgrounds.) Finally, McDonagh was attracted to Beckett's radio play as an intertextual base for his film, because the visual medium enabled him to exploit some of the untapped 'performativity'[9] of the earlier, audio work.

**McDonagh and Intertextuality**

As several critics have pointed out, part of the postmodern nature of McDonagh's work is the fact that his scripts conspicuously draw on (and play games with) famous works by other writers.[10] McDonagh consciously creates his new work from older, well-known sources in order to emphasise that his scripts are consciously-constructed works of art, and not depictions of 'reality'. McDonagh also plays these intertextual games, because he wants to 'rewrite' earlier works to suit his own philosophic and aesthetic ends.

As Julia Kristeva argues, intertextuality always involves the 'absorption and transformation' of the earlier text.[11] As regards 'absorption', McDonagh has stressed in interviews that he considers 'the story element [as] the most important dimension' in his work;[12] as such, he wants the intertextual sources to 'melt' into his own works, so that

[9] As David Crouch has noted, "performativity" has increasingly come to be regarded as "the reconfiguring, or reconstitutive, *potential* of performance". (David Crouch, *Flirting with Space: Journeys and Creativity*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 47. Emphasis mine.) As such, in this essay, I regard 'performativity' as 'performative potential', which can be exploited to a greater or lesser extent by performers or 'adapters' (i.e., those transferring a work from one medium to another and/or those playing intertextual games with an earlier work).

[10] See John Waters, 'The Irish Mummy: The Plays and Purpose of Martin McDonagh', in *Druids, Dudes and Beauty Queens: The Changing Face of Irish Theatre*, ed. by Dermot Bolger (Dublin: New Island, 2001), 30-54 (pp.49-50); Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), p.269; Murray, 'The Cripple of Inishmaan Meets Lady Gregory', p.91; Maria Kurdi, 'The Helen of Inishmaan Pegging Eggs: Gender, Sexuality and Violence', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 96-115 (p.98); Richards, '"The Outpouring of a Morbid, Unhealthy Mind": The Critical Condition of Synge and McDonagh', pp.256-258; Sara Keating, 'Is Martin McDonagh an Irish Playwright?', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 281-294 (p.289); Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, pp.xiv, 126; José Lanters, '"Like Tottenham": Martin McDonagh's Postmodern Morality Tales', in *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, by Patrick Lonergan, (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), 165-178.

[11] Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and Novel", in *Desire and Language*, ed. by Leon S. Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora et al, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 64-91 (p.66).

[12] As quoted in Jeff O'Connell, 'New Druid Playwright is a "Natural"', *Galway Advertiser*, 11 January 1996.

audiences are able to enjoy his scripts as entertaining tales in their own right. The fact that many (or perhaps most) audience members won't recognise the references to Sam Shepard's play *True West* (1980) in *The Lonesome West*[13] or Flannery O'Connor's novel *Wise Blood* (1952) in *A Behanding in Spokane* (2010)[14] confirms Christopher Morash's description of McDonagh's plays as 'copies that have forgotten their originals'.[15] McDonagh's ability to effectively 'absorb' earlier works into his own is only relevant to this article to the degree that *Six Shooter*'s debt to *All That Fall* has long gone unremarked. Of greater importance to my argument here is McDonagh's habit of 'transforming' (challenging, updating, and adapting for other media) the work of earlier writers.

Before exploring the ways in which McDonagh transforms Beckett's *All That Fall* through its absorption into *Six Shooter*, we must first firmly establish that McDonagh does indeed use Beckett's radio play as an intertextual base for his film. As will become clear, the numerous parallels between the two works more than prove an intertextual debt.

**The Parallels between *Six Shooter* and *All That Fall***

The first and most obvious parallel between *All That Fall* and *Six Shooter* is the centrality of trains to both works. The train line featured in Beckett's play is the one that appears repeatedly in his fiction and drama, the Dublin 'Slow and Easy'. This was the Harcourt Street line which served the suburb where Beckett grew up, Foxrock in South County Dublin

[13] Waters, 'The Irish Mummy', p.50; Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, pp.29-30.

[14] I am thinking, of course, of the stealing of an embalmed body (or body part) from a museum and the repeated references to primates and their cages. It should be noted that *A Behanding in Spokane* may actually be more indebted to John Huston's 1979 film adaptation of *Wise Blood* than it is to O'Connor's original novel. Given the increasingly tendency to look at McDonagh as – first and foremost – an 'Irish Diaposporic' writer, it is imperative to note that O'Connor and Huston were both Irish-American. (For McDonagh as an 'Irish Diasporic' writer, see Eamonn Jordan, 'McDonagh and Postcolonial Theory: Practices, Perpetuations, Divisions and Legacies', in *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, by Patrick Lonergan, (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), 193-208 (p.208); Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, p.229; Aidan Arrowsmith, 'Genuinely Inauthentic: McDonagh's Postdiasporic Irishness', in *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan, (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006), 236-245.)

[15] Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000*, p.269.

(although, in *All That Fall*, Beckett renames Foxrock 'Boghill').[16] The Harcourt Street line, and Foxrock station, play a significant role in the novel *Watt* (1953), but are most central to this radio drama. In *All That Fall*, an old woman called Maddy Rooney walks to the station to meet her blind husband, Dan, as he gets off the train after work. Given her ill health, Mrs. Rooney would not normally attempt this journey, but is doing so, because she wants to surprise Dan for his birthday.

As Maddy approaches and finally reaches the station, she meets, among others, the station-master, Mr. Barrell. (This surname is a clue to Beckett's own intertextual games: he tweaked the name of the real-life Foxrock station-master, Mr. Farrell, to match the surname of a character from Sean O'Casey's one-act play, *The End of the Beginning* (1937), a 'knockabout' farce that Beckett greatly admired.)[17] Maddy Rooney also meets Mr. Barrell's young assistant, Tommy, who, like the other locals, treats her with disrespect, even ignoring her when she is in physical and emotional distress. Terence Brown has suggested that this disrespect is at least partially rooted in the fact that Maddy is a Catholic convert to the Church of Ireland, and not a born-Protestant, like many of the other locals, and therefore often appears socially inappropriate to their eyes.[18] There is indeed much evidence to support this in the play, including a few key points that Brown does not mention in his essay. First, her maiden name – Dunne – is more commonly a Catholic surname than a Protestant one in Ireland. (That said, Rooney is also a predominantly Catholic surname.) Second, there is Maddy's enigmatic remark 'I do not exist. It is a well known fact', which could refer to her status as a Catholic convert to Protestantism in the Irish Republic – a demographic that 'does not exist' as far as the hyper-Catholic, mid-twentieth-century, Irish state is concerned.

[16] *All That Fall* in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Shorter Plays*, (London. Faber & Faber, 1984), 9-39 (p.27).

[17] Samuel Beckett, 'The Essential and the Incidental', in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. by Ruby Cohn, (London: John Calder, 2001), pp.82-83; see also Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p.193.

[18] Terence Brown, '"Some Young Doom": Beckett and the Child', in *Ireland's Literature: Selected Essays*, (Mullingar: Lilliput Press, 1988), 117-126.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, there is Maddy's use of the term 'hot-cupboard',[19] a mix of the Irish Catholic terminology 'hot press' and the Anglo-Irish Protestant 'airing-cupboard'. It is a verbal sign of Maddy's cultural ambiguity. While these religious signifiers explain Mrs. Rooney's social alienation, the more 'spiritual' aspects of religion, as featured in the play, will be covered later in this essay.

The train carrying Dan Rooney from Harcourt Street is very late in appearing. Eventually, however, it arrives, Dan disembarks, and he is clearly agitated. We eventually learn that the train was delayed, because a young boy fell out of it en route; it is darkly hinted that Dan may have intentionally, or simply accidentally, contributed to the boy's fall.[20]

In McDonagh's *Six Shooter,* the vast majority of the action takes place on a train. The train passengers we meet in McDonagh's film, it is eventually revealed, are people who have suffered all but one of the bereavements alluded to by a doctor in the film's opening scene. A middle-aged man called Donnelly (Brendan Gleeson) has just lost his wife; a couple named Dooley (Aisling O'Sullivan and David Wilmot) have lost their son to cot death, and an aggressive and humourously obnoxious young man (Rúaidhrí Conroy) has just lost his mother. As in *All That Fall*, the train is stopped due to someone falling out of it. In this case, it is the grieving mother; she throws herself off the train after the young man cruelly taunts her. (He alleges that her son was not a cot death but died because she 'banged it on something'.)[21] The Guards, after speaking to Donnelly and the young man about the woman's suicide, realise that the young man is the fugitive who 'shot the poor head off' his mother (as one character so delicately and indelicately puts it). Thus, when the train pulls into the next

[19] *All That Fall*, pp.19; 37.

[20] Hugh Kenner rightly argues that 'whether Dan killed that child is unimportant; in fact, it is a non-question', because, during the course of the play, 'we learn that he is a killer at heart, and has killed love, and still keeps his hands clenched about love's throat.' (Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*, (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1996), p.162.)

[21] This quote from the film, and all subsequent ones, come from Martin McDonagh (writer and director), *Six Shooter*, 2entertain, 2007. DVD.

station, the Guards are armed and ready to arrest him. This leads to a shoot-out in which the young man is killed.

As is already evident, the death of children features prominently in both works. However, these child deaths are not limited to the boy that Dan may have pushed off the train in *All That Fall*, and the cot death and shooting of the matricidal adolescent in *Six Shooter*. There are several other allusions to the death (or threatened killing) of children in both works. In *All That Fall*, we learn that the Rooneys lost their daughter when she was young, and Dan says that he has often fantasised about killing the young boy, Jerry, who walks him to and from the station each day. Before we learn that Dan may already have killed the boy on the train, he asks his wife, 'Did you ever wish to kill a child? Nip some young doom in the bud?'[22] As Paul Stewart avers, 'the replacement of "bloom" by "doom" strongly suggests that it is in blooming that one is doomed, that life itself is the disaster that one should wish to avoid.'[23] This is a common theme in Beckett, as famously encapsulated in the line from *A Piece of Monologue* (1979), 'Birth was the death of him.'[24]

Dan's wife, Maddy, shares her husband's aggressive attitude towards children, wanting little Jerry to buy a 'gobstopper'[25] with the tip she gives him, the sweet's name presumably indicating that she wants to shut his mouth. She is distressed by 'children's cries' throughout the piece, and, like her husband, she hates the 'neighbour's brats' and resents the 'jeering' and even physical assault that they regularly suffer at the hands of the Lynch twins.[26] Readers of Beckett will of course see a link to the large brood of Lynch children in

[22] *All That Fall*, p.31.

[23] Paul Stewart, 'Beckett's Misopedia', *Irish University Review* 41.2 (Autumn/Winter 2011), 59-71 (p.67).

[24] *A Piece of Monologue* in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Shorter Plays*, (London. Faber & Faber, 1984), 263-269 (p.265).

[25] *All That Fall*, p.28.

[26] *All That Fall*, pp.31; 33 31.

another work that takes place around Foxrock station, the novel *Watt*. Paul Stewart has written intriguingly of this Lynch connection in a recent article on Beckett's misopedia, which examines (in great detail) manifestations of this neurosis in all of Beckett's work.[27] Here it is enough to say that the Rooneys' hatred of children in *All That Fall* seems to stem mainly from grief over the loss of their own daughter and their resentment both of those who still produce children and the by-products of that procreation.

In McDonagh's *Six Shooter*, other allusions to the death of children include the doctor's brief reference to a second cot death and the scene in which the young man refers to the Dooleys as 'Fred and Rosemarie' as they return to their seats. This is a reference to Fred and Rosemary West, 'an English couple who abused and murdered at least a dozen young girls (including one of their own daughters) from the period 1967 until their arrest in 1994.'[28] At one point in the film, the young man also ruminates at length on the fact that he can't understand why parents don't kill their children more often. In discussing the death of the Dooley's baby, the young man says:

> I'll bet they banged it on something. I would if I had a kid. Just keep bangin' it, like... on something... if he was getting on my nerves, like... I'm surprised Mams and Dads don't kill their kids more often, 'cos most kids are fuckin' rotten. I certainly am; I'm a fuckin' rotten kid.

He then asks Donnelly, 'Have you got kids?'

Donnelly answers 'No', and the fact that he and his wife were a childless couple makes them analogous to the Rooneys in *All That Fall*. While Donnelly and his wife may not have had biological children, they did have a surrogate child – David, their pet rabbit, whom

[27] Stewart, 'Beckett's Misopedia', pp.59-71.

[28] Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, p.261.

they have treated as a beloved son. At the end of the film, Donnelly, depressed over the loss of his wife, over the Guards' shooting of the young man (who, interestingly for our purposes, he cradles in his arms like a son as he dies), and over the rotten state of the world generally, decides to kill himself. To prevent the rabbit from enduring life without a protector and without someone to feed him, Donnelly shoots the rabbit's head off and then turns the gun on himself. He drops the gun, however; it fires his only remaining bullet, and he must now face life without a wife or his furry 'son'. This shooting of the rabbit can be seen as another death of a child in the work.[29]

Linked to all of this misopedia and childlessness are issues around fertility and infertility, which are alluded to repeatedly in both works. In *All That Fall*, we learn that the Tyler's granddaughter, a neighbour of the Rooneys, can no longer have children because she had 'the whole bag of tricks removed'.[30] Mrs. Rooney lists 'childlessness' among her major griefs in life, laments the loss of her dead child's 'loins',[31] alludes to her daughter's missed menopause,[32] scorns 'celibates' like Mr. Barrell for not understanding family ties,[33] and repeatedly refers to the fertility or sterility of animals.[34] There are also two references to pregnancy and childbirth by the character, Mr. Tyler. Early in the play, he refers to 'the wet afternoon of [his] conception';[35] later, when the train finally arrives, he says, 'I am glad I have been spared to see this', [36] an allusion to Simeon in the Bible, who was pleased to have

[29] The killing of the rabbit could be seen as an act of euthanasia; Donnelly wants to spare his 'son' a painful death through starvation and neglect. Euthanasia is also arguably present in Beckett's work. If Dan Rooney did indeed push the young boy out of the train ('nip[ped] some young doom in the bud'), it was to spare him the anguish associated with living.

[30] *All That Fall*, p.14.

[31] *All That Fall*, p.16.

[32] *All That Fall*, p.14.

[33] *All That Fall*, p.27.

[34] *All That Fall*, pp.19, 30, 36-37.

[35] *All That Fall*, p.15.

[36] *All That Fall*, p.27.

lived long enough to see the Messiah in the form of the baby Jesus. As Terence Brown has pointed out, it is noteworthy that, 'in a play dominated by references to sterility, childlessness and death', the action 'is framed by the strains of Shubert's "Death and the Maiden", with its implications of a virginal demise'.[37] In addition to the unseen, dying, old 'maiden' who lives 'alone in [her] ruinous old house',[38] repeatedly playing the Shubert record, and the 'celibate'[39] Mr. Barrell, other childless people feature prominently in the piece, most notably the penny-pinching, haughty spinster, Miss Fitt. In addition to being an unmarried woman, Miss Fitt also contributes to the fertility/sterility theme through her conspicuous use of the word 'conceivably', which is italicised for emphasis by Beckett in the script.[40]

Beckett's negative feelings about childbirth in this play are, as Deirdre Bair argues, linked to his conviction, first formed at a lecture by Jung he attended in 1935, that he 'had not been entirely born' – that he had 'prenatal memories', 'remembered birth as "painful"', and that this trauma explained his strained relationship with his mother and 'the improper and incomplete development of his own personality.'[41] Indeed, in *All That Fall*, Beckett has Maddy Rooney recall attending a lecture by 'one of these new mind doctors', in which the psychologist explained that a female patient 'had never really been born.' Maddy (like her creator) admits to being 'haunted [by those words] ever since.'[42]

In McDonagh's *Six Shooter,* fertility and infertility are alluded to not only through the childlessness of the Donnellys and the fact that suicide has ended the chances of Mr. Dooley having more children with his wife. It is also present in an important conversation between

[37] Brown, '"Some Young Doom"', p.120.

[38] *All That Fall,* p.12.

[39] *All That Fall,* p.27.

[40] *All That Fall,* p.25.

[41] Bair, *Samuel Beckett,* p.222.

[42] *All That Fall,* pp.35; 36; 36.

Donnelly and the young man. The young man, after learning that Donnelly has no children, asks:

> Will you have [kids], in the future, like? 'Cos it doesn't matter how auld ye are nowadays. Tony Curtis... he's fuckin' ancient and he's still havin' kids. Not Tony Curtis, who? *(pause)* Rod Steiger. I'm always getting them cunts mixed up. Rod Steiger, aye, and he's a fuckin' hundred, like. *(Looking out the window)* Ah sheep.

This abrupt shift of attention to animals in *Six Shooter* is not unusual for either work. In *All That Fall*, the animal noises that puncture the piece are key to the sonic landscape that Beckett is setting up – an element of the work that was so important to him that he famously refused to allow the piece to be performed on stage, since it was written for the ear. Of note for this article is the fact that the animal noises are often used by Beckett to accentuate points about fertility or sterility. The squawk of the hen upon its death leads Mrs. Rooney to meditate on the fact that 'all her troubles [are now] over', including 'all the laying and hatching'.[43] The braying of a donkey leads her to note that 'that was a true donkey. Its mother and father were donkeys',[44] not like 'hinnies or jinnies', mentioned a little later, which are 'barren or sterile'. [45] Finally, the 'cooing' and 'billing' of birds is used to draw attention to their courtship rituals and their subsequent acts of procreation.[46]

In *Six Shooter*, in addition to the aforementioned sheep, a story about an exploding cow is a centrepiece of the work, and the camera focuses not only on sheep and cows, but also on dogs, horses, and a stuffed monkey at key points throughout the film.

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[43] *All That Fall*, p.19.

[44] *All That Fall*, p.30.

[45] *All That Fall*, p.37.

[46] *All That Fall*, pp.16, 17; 17.

Another significant parallel between *All That Fall* and *Six Shooter* is that both works prominently feature reflections on Christianity, perhaps not surprising since the mysteries around mortality and the creation of life are so central to both. In *All That Fall*, there are several comments from the Rooneys and Miss Fitt about their active participation in the Church of Ireland. In relation to this, Terence Brown has compellingly argued that the play is Beckett's indictment of Protestantism, with its 'self-absorbed', 'life-denying' 'creed[s]',[47] and Seán Kennedy rightly sees the play as addressing 'Protestant fears of engulfment in the Irish Free State'.[48] However, on a more purely spiritual level, the characters repeatedly make allusions to heaven or, at least, what happens after death. Dan 'dream[s] of ... another home' (with an emphasis that is distinctly mystical), Miss Fitt speaks about being 'flown... home', Maddy talks about 'drifting gently down into the higher life', and Mr. Slocum mentions 'the void' (again, in a way that is both natural and mystical).[49] Paul Stewart links the simultaneous misopedia and desire for a child in *All That Fall* to the wider theme in Beckett of 'desire for, and fear of, continuance through off-spring'.[50] Perhaps all these references to eternal life are further evidence of what Stewart calls Beckett's 'on-going search for a means of continuation removed from sexual reproduction,'[51] and, I would add, removed from the strict Christianity of his devout mother.

Christianity also arises in *All That Fall* in that, as in *Waiting for Godot* and other Beckett works, the play contains earnest discussions about Biblical passages. In this case, the Rooneys discuss the types of animals involved in two gospel stories – the creature that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the birds alluded to by Jesus in the Sermon on the

[47] Brown, '"Some Young Doom"', p.125.

[48] Seán Kennedy, '"A Lingering Dissolution": *All That Fall* and the Protestant Fears of Engulfment in the Irish Free State', *Assaph: Studies in the Theatre* 17/18 (2003), 247-262.

[49] *All That Fall*, pp.32; 23; 21; 18.

[50] Stewart, 'Beckett's Misopedia', p.69.

[51] Stewart, 'Beckett's Misopedia', p.71.

Mount.[52] The Rooneys also refer to the famous real-life Irish clergyman E.J. Hardy (who would have been known to the Becketts),[53] and his startlingly-titled, 1886 best-seller *How To Be Happy Though Married*. The reference to this book reiterates the play's strong, anti-domestic theme. Finally, the title *All That Fall* comes from the Biblical passage that will be the basis for the following morning's sermon in the Rooneys' local Church of Ireland: 'The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down';[54] this verse simultaneously refers to the long-suffering Rooneys and to the boy who fell (or was pushed) from the train.

The reflections on Christianity in McDonagh's *Six Shooter* are less nuanced than Beckett's but still central to the piece. After the grieving Mrs. Dooley commits suicide, Donnelly begins crying, thinking about his own recently-deceased wife. This leads to an interchange on the existence of God between Donnelly and the young man:

> YOUNG MAN: Ah now, don't cry auld fella. She's up with God now... She's up with God now.
>
> DONNELLY: I don't believe in God – not no more.
>
> YOUNG MAN: Of course you believe in God. You're an auld fella.
>
> DONNELLY: No, today was the last straw.
>
> YOUNG MAN: Why? What happened today? Oh, aye, your wife and now Mrs. Train-Surf-Woman. But, sure, that wasn't God's fault. He can't be everywhere at once, like.

[52] *All That Fall*, p.37.

[53] Feargal Whelan, 'Panel Discussion: Protestantism in Beckett's Ireland', *Beckett and the 'State' of Ireland Conference* (University College Dublin), 8 July 2011.

[54] *All That Fall*, p.38.

This leads to a dark laugh (through tears) from Donnelly. Donnelly, however, later proves that he can't fully let go of his belief in God. When he is about to shoot the rabbit and then himself, he first places a picture of the Sacred Heart face down. (This is arguably an allusion to Beckett's *Film* (1965), in which O is 'disturbed by [a] print ... of the face of God the Father' and 'tears the print [from] the wall, tears it in four, throws down the pieces and grinds them underfoot.')[55] And when Donnelly fails to commit suicide successfully, his last line of the film is 'Oh Jesus, what a fuckin' day...', which is half a prayer and half a blasphemy.

Having clearly established *Six Shooter*'s intertextual debt to *All That Fall* through the enumeration of numerous, uncanny parallels between the two works, we must now consider how and why McDonagh 'transforms' the work of earlier writers. More specifically, we must determine why he chose to interact with Beckett's radio play.

**McDonagh's Motivations**

As a postmodernist, McDonagh occasionally 'transforms' earlier classics by parodying or ironically echoing them. A good example of this is his decision to replace the spirited Pegeen Mike and Christy Mahon from Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) with the sad, failed couple at the heart of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, Maureen Folan and Pato Dooley. In McDonagh's hands, Pegeen Mike, the fiery twenty-year old from Synge's play, becomes a forty-year old spinster with mental health issues. Likewise, while Synge's Pegeen loses a newly-empowered young buck to 'a romping lifetime' as a 'playboy',[56] McDonagh's heroine loses the kindly but very ordinary man she desires to emigration and a younger rival. In spite of these contrasts, the grief of loss is just as poignant in both plays, and McDonagh's

[55] *Film* in *Samuel Beckett: Collected Shorter Plays*, (London. Faber & Faber, 1984), 159-174 (p.167). Special thanks to Rod Sharkey for first suggesting this to me.

[56] J.M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World and Other Plays*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p.146.

ending speaks volumes about the straitened socio-economic state of the West of Ireland in recent decades. (Indeed, it is arguably a more accurate portrait of western life in Synge's time, as well.)

In *Six Shooter*, McDonagh does not parody or ironically echo *All That Fall* with what Christopher Murray dismissively calls his 'postmodern ... cynicism'.[57] He instead aims (as he often does) to make intertextual links that will 'add resonance and layers of meaning'.[58] Postmodernists like McDonagh believe that if audience members spot a reference – or series of references – to a classic work, it will influence (and, indeed, enrich) their reception of the new work they are viewing. For example, when McDonagh repeatedly connects *Beauty Queen*'s Maureen Folan to *Psycho*'s Norman Bates – another character who 'murder[s] out of sexual repression'[59] – he hopes that people who spot the link will suspect that Maureen is a darker character than she at first appears. He also wants them to infer that his play is not merely a kitchen-sink comedy; at any point, we may enter 'the blood-soaked realm of horror and the gothic', to quote Eldred.[60]

In the case of *Six Shooter*, and its intertext *All That Fall*, the 'resonances and layers of meaning' are inextricably linked to the themes and preoccupations that are common to both works. McDonagh hopes that audience members who are reminded of *All That Fall* while watching *Six Shooter* will consider the ways in which he is differentiating his views from those of his hero. The fact that McDonagh belongs to a different Irish cultural demographic than Beckett, and that he is writing for a contemporary audience, leads him to depict Christianity, adult/child relationships, and Dublin quite differently from his predecessor.

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[57] Murray, 'The Cripple of Inishmaan Meets Lady Gregory', p. 93.

[58] Graeme Burton, *Media and Society: Critical Perspectives*, (New York: McGraw-Hill International, 2010), p.35.

[59] Eldred, 'Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic', p.112.

[60] Eldred, 'Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic', pp.109-113.

The different perspectives on Christianity in these works are rooted in the authors' divergent religious backgrounds and cultural contexts. Beckett was from a Dublin, low-church Anglican household and was unusual among his family and their social circle in choosing to abandon his faith. *All That Fall* – perhaps more than any other Beckett work – reflects its author's belief that, 'at the moment of crisis', membership in the Church of Ireland is of no more help or significance than an 'an old-school tie'.[61] In the radio play, Beckett satirically depicts the Anglican Miss Fitt as narrowly and bigotedly pious, and he sympathetically (and comically) laments the Rooneys' attempts to believe in the infallibility of the Bible and to look for perspective/wisdom from a Sunday sermon. To Beckett's mind, the characters in *All That Fall* are clinging to something that has lost whatever meaning it once possessed; as such, his views were relatively radical for mid-twentieth-century Ireland, especially compared to the evangelical Anglicans around whom he was raised.

By contrast, McDonagh, who was born into a West of Ireland Catholic family in London, frequently addresses spiritual concerns shared by *many* contemporary Irish Catholics. In the case of *Six Shooter*, Donnelly represents those who were raised Catholic during the height of the Irish Church's power, and who find themselves desiring but unable to abandon their Catholic beliefs. McDonagh implies here, as he does in *In Bruges*, that those raised in a strict Catholicism will never be able to shake the imprint of the Church on their souls.

The young man in *Six Shooter* represents the rising generation of Irish Catholics who (McDonagh fears) are overly lacking in moral restraint since the fall of the Church. The young man unequivocally regards belief in God as belonging to an older generation, and is not curbed in any way by moral teachings or the fear of God. McDonagh is suggesting that

[61] As quoted in Anthony Cronin, *The Last Modernist*, (London: Flamingo, 1997), p.21.

religion provides a coherent moral code that might not be easy to replace; this is an implicit criticism of Beckett's *All That Fall*, in which it is implied that there is little or no reason to hang on to one's (dying) religion.

Ascribing such moralistic authorial intentions to McDonagh may surprise those who regard the postmodernist as an 'amoral' writer. However, a number of critics have (rightly) begun to recognise the ethical nature of McDonagh's work.[62] As Stephanie Pocock argues, McDonagh's ethical sense is heavily informed by his Catholic upbringing, and he must come to be seen as part of a specifically Irish *Catholic* literary tradition. She writes:

> While *The Leenane Trilogy* has been extensively analyzed for the influence of the Protestant Abbey founders, it may also be fruitfully considered in the context of writers like George Moore and James Joyce, who both, despite rejecting Catholic religious beliefs early in life, were drawn to ... its doctrines, its narratives, and its characters. ... Alongside the influence of Quentin Tarantino films, television sitcoms, and the plays of John Synge, McDonagh's world bears the unmistakable marks of the Catholic tradition. In the *Trilogy*, as in Catholic teaching, human beings are seriously and dangerously flawed, capable of appalling levels of cruelty and indifference.[63]

The young man in *Six Shooter* is crueller and more indifferent to others than most of McDonagh's characters (which is saying quite a lot). His lack of respect for his elders highlights another area in which McDonagh challenges or updates Beckett. Because of the

[62] See, for example, Richard Rankin Russell, 'Introduction', in *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook*, ed. by Richard Rankin Russell, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1-8 (pp.3-5); Stephanie Pocock, 'The "ineffectual Father Welsh/Walsh"?: Anti-Catholicism and Catholicism in Martin McDonagh's *The Leenane Trilogy*', in *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook*, ed. by Richard Rankin Russell, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 60-76; Eldred, 'Martin McDonagh and the Contemporary Gothic', pp.119, 126; Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, p.29.

[63] Pocock, 'The "ineffectual Father Welsh/Walsh"?: Anti-Catholicism and Catholicism in Martin McDonagh's *The Leenane Trilogy*', pp.62, 74.

different time periods and Irish demographics focussed upon in their work, McDonagh and Beckett present adult-child relationships very differently. In *All That Fall*, the adults, while they may be tortured by the noisiness and rudeness of children, are still very much in charge. Miss Fitt shudders to think of life without her mother, on whom she relies for her very sense of self.[64] And, while the interestingly-named orphans, Tommy and Jerry (references to the cartoon duo, perhaps?), are occasionally disrespectful to their elders, they are rudely reminded of their marginalised status as orphans with no social standing repeatedly by the adults they encounter. In *Six Shooter*, on the other hand, the children are in a much more powerful position. The young man is not merely disrespectful to his mother, he aggressively denounces her view that people can do whatever they put their minds to, and eventually 'shoots the poor head off her'. When Donnelly comments that the young man does not seem upset by the death of his mother (before realising that he has murdered her), the young man replies, non-plussed: 'Well, she wasn't the most pleasant of women, and, sure, life goes on.' McDonagh is showing that the power dynamics between adults and children have changed drastically since Beckett's time.

A final significant difference between *All That Fall* and *Six Shooter* is the authors' contrasting views of Dublin. Beckett's love for the landscape around Foxrock – which was never more lovingly evoked than in the beautiful memory passages in the late novel, *Company* (1980) – is a key feature of *All That Fall*. In fact, Beckett's radio play is, in its own twisted way, a celebration of the south Dublin suburbs. *Six Shooter*, on the other hand, goes out of its way to insult Dublin. The young man refers to Dublin as 'the city that never sweeps', adding that he is going there, because 'I needed some heroin and a shite accent, so I thought I'd head straight to the source, like.' This observation leads to a heavy rebuke from

[64] *All That Fall*, p.26.

Mr. Dooley, ostensibly for the young man's use of foul language, but the fact that the rebuke is delivered in a strong Dublin accent betrays another aspect to his anger.[65]

McDonagh's antipathy to Dublin[66] would seem to stem from his West of Ireland and Irish Diasporic cultural backgrounds. When Dubliner Conor McPherson described McDonagh's plays as 'stage Irish' in the *New York Times* in 2006, McDonagh responded in a statement heavily informed by the fact that his parents are from 'the country' and that he was raised outside of Ireland: 'That's a ludicrous thing to say ... Dublin people think they are the centre of the world and the centre of Ireland. And they don't realize that people have to leave Ireland to get work, and they look down on people who do. It strikes me as an odd thing – that someone who grew up in one town thinks they know everything about a nation and a Diaspora.'[67] In 'transforming' *All That Fall*, McDonagh chose to directly confront and comically deride the love for Dublin present in Beckett's original work.

While McDonagh mainly uses intertexts to 'add resonance and layers of meaning' to his scripts, he also 'transforms' classics by extending what he regards as the untapped, 'performativity' of those earlier works. For example, as was noted above, one of the major intertexts embedded in McDonagh's *In Bruges* is Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*. While McDonagh may have started with a similar set-up to that of Pinter's play (two gangsters in a hotel room, awaiting instructions from their Cockney crime boss), the fact that he was

[65] Patrick Lonergan has interestingly suggested that Mr. Dooley might be Pato Dooley from *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. (Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, p.140.) This is certainly possible. However, the fact that Pato went to America at the end of *Beauty Queen* and that the character in *Six Shooter*, as portrayed by David Wilmot, has a Dublin accent (Pato grew up in Connemara) would certainly be evidence against such a connection. This is especially true since McDonagh, as director, could have encouraged Wilmot to use a Galway accent.

[66] Of course, these may just be the views of McDonagh's fictional character, especially since the depiction of the Dublin-born gangsters in *In Bruges* is relatively sympathetic.

[67] Kelly Fincham, 'Irish playwrights Conor McPherson and Martin McDonagh cross swords over Irish identity', *irishcentral.com*, published 8 March 2010, accessed 11 November 2013. Complete link: http://www.irishcentral.com/opinion/Irish-playwrights-Conor-McPherson-and-Martin-McDonagh-cross-swords-over-Irish-identity-86965742.html#ixzz2kM6QMH00

making a film – and not restricted to a stage – meant that he was able to take the gangsters outside and get them into significantly more elaborate adventures than a stage play would allow.[68] With *Six Shooter*, McDonagh exploits the untapped 'performativity' of Beckett's *All That Fall* by putting on film images which could only be imagined while listening to the radio play. A key example of this is McDonagh's handling of animals in *Six Shooter*. In Beckett's radio play, we get the sound of various creatures throughout the piece, including the sound of the hen getting run over. In *Six Shooter*, the fact that McDonagh is working in a visual medium enables him to *show* us all the animals that (in a nod to *All That Fall*) he has included in his film. McDonagh draws extra attention to this aspect of his transformation of Beckett's radio play; whereas we only hear the hen getting run over in *All That Fall*, McDonagh ostentatiously shows us footage of a cow exploding in *Six Shooter*'s most memorable (and visually arresting) scene. Since Beckett prohibited stage productions of *All That Fall*, his classic radio play was meant to be distinctly non-visual.[69] With *Six Shooter*, McDonagh's 'punk'[70] irreverence towards the past (including the work of his heroes) led him to simultaneously pay homage to *All That Fall* but also to challenge and 'transform' it through the addition of the visual dimension.

**'Highly Skilful Pasticheur' or Serious, Postmodern Artiste?**

Having established how and why McDonagh uses *All That Fall* as an intertext for his film, there remains the question of whether or not this adds or detracts from *Six Shooter*'s value as

[68] It should be noted that McDonagh's film stays true to Pinter's work, in that these adventures in other locations only further emphasise that the two men cannot escape the ramifications of their initial decisions to become gangsters.

[69] It should be noted that the Beckett estate has, in recent years, allowed stage productions which have incorporated (to a degree) visual elements. For example, audiences at Pan Pan's 2011 Dublin production (which toured to Edinburgh and London) listened to the radio play while being dazzled by elaborate lighting effects. And Trevor Nunn's 2012 London production (which starred Michael Gambon and Eileen Atkins and toured to New York) was staged so that audiences felt as if they were attending a recording session for a radio production in the 1950s.

[70] McDonagh, as quoted in Fintan O'Toole, 'A Mind in Connemara: The Savage World of Martin McDonagh', *The New Yorker*, 6 March 2006, 40-47 (p.42).

a work of art. When critics describe McDonagh as 'a highly skilful pasticheur',[71] it is often with a touch of disrespect or condescension; these critics imply that McDonagh is not good enough to come up with scripts 'on his own'. Murray sums up this negative view when he writes that 'in current commentaries on McDonagh's plays much space is given to intertextuality, as if this were an accolade. It is only so in a postmodern context.'[72] Murray goes on to suggest that, although McDonagh often uses the work of his idols in a very interesting way, he is sometimes too enthral to his heroes, importing chunks of Beckett or Synge without irony or new artistic purpose.[73] While this may be the case in a weaker, early play like *A Skull in Connemara,* far more often, McDonagh's use of intertextuality is quite subtle. A good example of this is *Six Shooter* and *All That Fall,* in which McDonagh's use of an intertext is so subtle that it is in danger of going unrecognised. And McDonagh can hardly be said to be overawed by his literary and cinematic heroes – we have already seen the freedom and irreverence he exhibits when 'transforming' Beckett's *All That Fall* in *Six Shooter*.

If McDonagh is aware of the criticisms levelled at him for his heavy reliance on intertextuality, he is evidently not moved by them. In his latest work (at the time of writing), the 2012 film *Seven Psychopaths,* he plays more intertextual games than ever. In a film about murderers, a number of intertextual links are made to films concerned with killing and/or Gothic horror. The violent cinema of John Woo is parodied in the comically bloody cemetery scene; Christopher Walken's character shares a surname with the Polish writer/director of *A Short Film About Killing* (1988), Krzysztof Kieślowski; and there are visual and thematic nods to films dealing with homicide and terror such as F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922),

[71] Fitzpatrick, "Language Games: *The Pillowman, A Skull in Connemara*: Martin McDonagh's Hiberno-English', p.141.

[72] Murray, 'The Cripple of Inishmaan Meets Lady Gregory', pp.91.

[73] Murray, 'The Cripple of Inishmaan Meets Lady Gregory', pp.91-92.

John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), Takeshi Kitano's *Violent Cop* (1989), and David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005). Finally, and most importantly (as regards *Seven Psychopaths*'s plot, characters, and 'postmodernity'), there are obvious visual and verbal 'borrowings' from violent classics by Martin Scorsese, including *Mean Streets* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Casino* (1995), and *The Departed* (2006).[74]

These intertextual references to Scorsese are intimately related to McDonagh's increasing reliance on what he calls 'the meta thing'[75] – another, key, postmodern aspect to his work. Since the film's main character, Martin Faranan (played by Colin Farrell), is an Irish writer who is working on a screenplay called *Seven Psychopaths*, he is clearly a version of McDonagh himself. (Faranan even dresses suspiciously like the real-life McDonagh.) This is McDonagh's baldest (and boldest) use of metafictional techniques to date. As Patrick Lonergan has pointed out, 'one of the best jokes' in *A Skull in Connemara* is that 'the [*Leenane*] *Trilogy*'s stupidest character has the Irish version of McDonagh's own given name',[76] Mairtin. And, in *Six Shooter*, McDonagh physically places himself (*à la* Hitchcock) by the cow's pen – suggesting that the story of the exploding cow may be one that McDonagh remembers from his childhood summers in Connemara and Sligo. Here in *Seven*

[74] Although I spotted most of the Scorsese references, as well as the Woo parody, the other film references were kindly pointed out to me by Derek Kelly (previously involved in the Irish film industry, in a variety of roles). The camera shot 'borrowed' from *Nosferatu* is the famous one of actor Max Schreck (as Count Orlok) rising from his coffin. In *Seven Psychopaths*, it is Christopher Walken who rises, and Kelly pointed out to me that Walken played a character called Max Schreck in Tim Burton's *Batman Return* (1992).

While most of the intertextual games in *Six Shooter* are related to famous films, it should be noted that works of literature and popular music also serve as intertexts (if much less prominent or significant ones). An American character speaking Vietnamese in a terrorist situation echoes the climax of John Irving's 1989 novel, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. And, at various points, McDonagh's dialogue references 'Psycho Killer' by the rock group Talking Heads, 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix' by songwriter Jimmy Webb, and two songs ('Tangled Up in Blue' and 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts') from Bob Dylan's 1975 album, *Blood on the Tracks* – an LP with an appropriately sanguinary title, given the subject matter handled in McDonagh's film. Finally, key scenes in the film take place in California's Joshua Tree National Park, a clear allusion to one of U2's greatest albums, *The Joshua Tree* (1987).

[75] As quoted in Patrick Lonergan, 'Seven Steps to Martin McDonagh', *The Irish Times*, 6 November 2012.

[76] Lonergan, *The Theatre and Films of Martin McDonagh*, p.28.

*Psychopaths*, McDonagh raises the metafictional stakes much higher by putting himself right in the heart of the action. Contrary to how this might sound, however, McDonagh's use of 'the meta thing' in *Seven Psychopaths* is anything but simplistic or straightforward. Since the other characters call Faranan 'Marty' (which is, famously, Scorsese's nickname), the main character is also a version of the Italian-American filmmaker.

At this stage, we should expect such slipperiness from McDonagh. The complex use of metafictional techniques in *Seven Psychopaths* mirrors the intricacy of the intertextual games he always plays. While some critics may feel that McDonagh overdoes it at times, an audience members's appreciation of a work like *Six Shooter* can only be increased by recognising (and contemplating) the film's subtle debts to Beckett's *All That Fall*. As we have seen in this article, *Six Shooter*'s intertextual use of *All That Fall* adds 'resonance and layers of meaning' to McDonagh's film, sheds fresh light on Beckett's radio play, and draws extra attention to the issues and themes present in both scripts.