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Functional Violence in Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *The Pillowman*

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Functional Violence in Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and
The Pillowman

by

LINDSAY SHALOM

(Under the Direction of Dustin Anderson)

ABSTRACT

While Martin McDonagh's plays have engendered laughter, disgust, and fear, he might be best known as part of a long line of Irish playwrights who faced controversy due to their art. Much like Synge, Shaw, and O'Casey, McDonagh has faced criticism and even outrage due to the violence and misunderstood portrayals of the Irish in his plays. Though the violence in plays like *The Pillowman* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* has been labeled gratuitous, we might better understand the purpose of that violence by examining them in light of Michel Foucault's concepts of knowledge and power. Foucault's approaches best highlight one of McDonagh's most important themes: the establishment of a power dynamic between characters. Foucault's analysis of the development and interaction of power structures in society, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, clarifies the violence of McDonagh's plays, and might add depth and greater meaning to his use of extreme violence.

INDEX WORDS: McDonagh, Irish, Violence, Foucault, Modern Theatre, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Pillowman*

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INISHMORE AND THE PILLOWMAN*

by

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B.A., Florida State University, 2012

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in
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MASTER OF ARTS

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

McDonagh and the Tradition of Power on the Irish Stage

While Martin McDonagh's plays have engendered laughter, disgust, and fear, he might be best known as part of a long line of Irish playwrights who faced controversy due to their art. Much like Synge, Shaw, and O'Casey, McDonagh has faced criticism and even outrage due to the violence and misunderstood portrayals of the Irish in his plays.

Though the violence in plays like *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001) and *The Pillowman* (2003) has been labeled gratuitous, we might better understand the purpose of that violence by examining them in light of Michel Foucault's concepts of knowledge and power. Foucault's approaches best highlight one of McDonagh's most important themes: the establishment of a power dynamic between characters. Foucault's analysis of the development and interaction of power structures in society, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), clarifies the violence of McDonagh's plays, and might add depth and greater meaning to his use of extremes.

McDonagh and the History of Irish Theatre

McDonagh finds himself as the beneficiary of a number of masters of the Irish stage. Drawing elements from various members of the elite of Irish stagecraft, McDonagh is able to focus these elements into a clarified depiction of power dynamics on the stage. McDonagh was raised in London, but spent his summers with his family in Connemara on Ireland's remote west coast.

He clearly draws on these summers in Ireland as inspiration for the setting of his Irish plays: The Leenane Trilogy and The Aran Islands Trilogy. McDonagh's play *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is set on the largest of the Aran Islands off of the west coast of Ireland. McDonagh is not the only playwright to find inspiration in "the lonesome west" (Synge 24). According to John Millington Synge's diary, in 1896 W. B. Yeats advised him to leave Paris and instead experience life on Ireland's remote Aran Islands. Yeats encouraged Synge to "express a life that never before has found expression" (Synge 1896). Yeats here refers to the lives of the Irish peasantry, which had seldom been previously *genuinely* or *accurately* articulated on the stage. Synge took Yeats's advice and composed beautiful plays and books inspired by the Aran Islands.

Plays like *The Playboy of the Western World*, set in County Mayo, demonstrate his ability to preserve the lyricism and poetry of traditional Hiberno-English of the Irish West. Historically, the west of Ireland has been less thoroughly colonized than the east coast. Because of this, some remote parts of Western Ireland still live a more traditionally Irish life. To reflect this, Synge incorporates authentic Hiberno-English words and phrases into *Playboy*.

Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* focuses on Christy Mahon, a man on the run for allegedly killing his father by splitting his skull with a loy. While on the run, he stumbles upon Flaherty's public house where most of the resulting action of the play occurs. The inhabitants of this small village in County Mayo are both fascinated and impressed by Christy's violent story of patricide. Michael Flaherty glorifies Christy's bold crime, as does his daughter Peegen Mike. Christy subverts the power dynamic between father and son by physically attacking his father Old Mahon.

The subversion of traditional power relationships between parent and child is also seen in Martin McDonagh's *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* when Padraic ties up and threatens his father and in *The Pillowman* when Katurian kills his cruel, immoral parents. Christy becomes a popular figure in the town because of his rumored crime, which gives him a certain power within the community.

Because it goes against the rules of society, Christy's crime elevates him to a higher position within the town. He uses his new, heightened status to romance Pegeen Mike even though she is betrothed to Shawn Keogh. Pegeen is impressed with Christy's independence and power differing greatly from Shawn who gives up his own will and leaves it in the hand of the Church. Shawn demonstrates the power of the Catholic Church in the west as he says to Pegeen, "Aren't we after making a good bargain, the way we're only waiting these days on Father Reilly's dispensation from the bishops, or the Court of Rome" (2). Christy resists the hegemony of the Church and shows little regard for propriety when he agrees to stay as pot-boy overnight at Flaherty's so Pegeen Mike will not be alone.

The local residents admire and encourage Christy until Old Mahon, Christy's ostensibly dead father, comes looking for him. This, understandably, comes as quite a shock since Christy claims that he has killed his father. Though Old Mahon suffers a head injury, he is still able to track down his wayward son and expose his lie. Once Christy is exposed as a liar, the other characters scorn and deride him. When the truth of Old Mahon's death is exposed, Christy loses all the power and respect he once held within their community. When the local residents learn the truth behind Christy's crime, they physically punish him by burning him with turf from the fire and tying him up.

Christy, however, does gain some power when he acquires the courage to stand up to his oppressive father telling him, “Go on now and I’ll see you from this day stewing my oatmeal and washing my spuds, for I’m master of all fights from now. [*Pushing Mahon*] Go on, I’m saying” (151). Christy stands up to his father both verbally and physically in this final scene illustrating the power he has regained. This combined effect of physical and verbal agency allows Christy to overpower his father.

Of Synge’s plays, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) has caused the most outrage, but it has also gained the most acclaim. Both Synge and McDonagh have been accused of using the Stage Irishman to exploit Irish stereotypes in order to gain popularity in England. When *Playboy* was staged at the Abbey Theatre in 1907 the audience rioted because of its use of crude language such as “shift” and its exaggerated depictions of Irish people engaging in drunkenness, violence, and sex. Many Irish playwrights have been similarly criticized for pushing the boundaries on stage, but are later celebrated for it.

Sean O’Casey’s work, in slightly different capacities, also stirred audiences to critical outrage with his theatrical subjects and themes. *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) by O’Casey is a two-act play set in a Dublin tenement building in 1920 during the Irish War for Independence. This serious context adds depth to the almost farcical tragicomedy. The tenement setting enables multiple characters to fluidly enter and exit scenes to heighten comic effects like misunderstandings and malapropisms.

Much like McDonagh’s *Lieutenant*, O’Casey’s *Gunman* features almost farcical characters that are emphatic about gaining Irish independence from England.

The regular tenants in the building believe that Seumas Shields's new roommate Donal Davoren is a gunman on the run associated with the IRA. Political violence is a prevalent theme within both plays impacting the characters' actions, and forcing some of them to perform against their will. *Gunman* features characters like Tommy Owens and Minnie Powell who are forthright in their allegiance to the burgeoning nationalist Ireland. Donal and Seumas lose support for Republicanism after witnessing the violence and carnage associated with war. Donal even attempts to escape that life to the point retreating into his own fictional world of poetry and romance.

The lyricism of O'Casey's language is clearest when Donal and Seumas romantically muse to themselves about the futility and pain of war. The beginning of the play establishes the characterization of the Irish as literary juxtaposed with that of the English as evidenced when Donal recites his own poetry followed by British poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound." O'Casey uses characters like Donal to demonstrate that Ireland is a learned country with a strong literary tradition and a connection to Greek and Roman culture.

Though Donal is thought to be an IRA gunman on the run, he confesses to Minnie that he would not die for his country. Donal laments the violence of the war saying, "Oh, Kathleen ni Houlihan, your way's a thorny way" (250). Here his words exemplify his disillusionment with the political state of Ireland instead referring to his homeland as 'Kathleen ni Houlihan,' who is a symbol for Ireland popularized during the Irish cultural revival. By referring to Ireland as Kathleen ni Houlihan, Donal illustrates his artistic sentiment and inability to cope with reality in the face of war.

By letting Minnie take the blame for their bombs during the Black & Tan's raid, Seumas and Donal display their unwillingness to engage with the violence and reality of war.

The issue of coping with trauma and tragedy in darkly humorous ways is something that McDonagh draws on from Sean O'Casey, J. M. Synge, and Samuel Beckett. Beckett acknowledges O'Casey and Synge as major influences in his development as a writer. O'Casey's preoccupation with disintegration, especially of the body is also seen in Beckett's plays. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1956) is one of the most recognized and critically acclaimed plays of the twentieth century. Beckett, who was born in Dublin, originally wrote the play in French and later translated it into English.

In *Waiting for Godot* the main characters Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon (Gogo) engage in word games, commiserate together, incite laughter, and fight all while waiting for the revered Godot to arrive. As they wait, Pozzo and his slave Lucky walk by and attempt to engage them in conversation, which is successful for a short time. Pozzo introduces himself and Lucky to Didi and Gogo and proceeds to sit down, eat, and then begins a performance of sorts for the men. As is typical of the Theatre of the Absurd, *Godot* contains repetition, word games, and a cyclical plot structure. Didi and Gogo are characterized by their inaction, questionable memories, and repetitive actions. Gogo repeatedly asks Didi if they can leave forgetting each time that they cannot because they are waiting for Godot.

In Act I of *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo commands Lucky to perform tasks, which he obeys such as dancing and “thinking” on command. Pozzo constantly displays his authority over Lucky by forcing him to do manual labor such as holding his bags and stool. By forcing Lucky to perform physical tasks for him, Pozzo limits Lucky’s independence and free will. The rope tied around Lucky’s neck is a physical manifestation of the power that Pozzo holds over him. The second act of *Godot* repeats the action of the first. However, the power relationships change when Pozzo returns blind and Lucky dumb. This reversal of previously established power dynamics is also seen in McDonagh’s *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *The Pillowman*. In Act II, Pozzo’s blindness causes him to rely more heavily on Lucky for physical aid. Since Pozzo is physically limited, he cannot intimidate Lucky with corporeal punishment anymore. Thus, Lucky occupies Pozzo’s old position of power by controlling him physically.

Joseph Roach¹ argues that the barren landscape and lack of food in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* evokes images of the Irish famine. Additionally, he contends that the character Pozzo represents the absentee landlord in Ireland with Lucky as his exploited and seemingly imprisoned Irish tenant. Roach positions Pozzo as a symbol for the English Empire. Thus, Pozzo and Lucky’s master-slave dynamic is representative of England’s imperial dominance over Ireland. *Waiting for Godot* explores the different ways that memory of violence functions within individuals. Gogo repetitively asks Didi if they can leave but Didi reminds him that they are waiting for Godot.

¹ Roach, Joseph. “‘All the Dead Voices’: The Landscape of Famine in *Waiting for Godot*.” *Land/scape/theater*. Ed. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 2002. 84-93. Print.

Pozzo and Lucky also have distorted memories and fail to remember previously meeting Didi and Gogo in Act II. Additionally, Godot's messenger boy says he was not there the previous evening. These distorted memories cause the audience to doubt the characters' authority leaving them powerless.

Though *Waiting for Godot* is set in an unnamed location, it addresses important themes and issues prevalent in Irish drama. McDonagh's plays, *The Lieutenant* and *The Pillowman* address similar issues of memory, trauma and violence. *The Pillowman* is set in Kamenice, an invented place, used as a substitute for Ireland. The main characters Katurian, Michal, and Ariel all share a past of enduring torture at the hands of their parents. Seen in a similar context, England as the dominant parent limits the rights of Ireland and the Irish by detaining them and inflicting torture upon them. Dublin's Kilmainham Gaol is the physical manifestation of Britain's historical surveillance, power, and violence in Ireland.

Beckett, like many of his contemporaries, left Ireland as an adult but still used the island as inspiration for his work. Similarly, writer Oliver Goldsmith was born in Ireland but became well known as a writer when he moved to London. Goldsmith was born in Ireland around 1728, and like so many other Irish writers went to Trinity College, Dublin to study. At Trinity, Goldsmith experienced city life in Ireland and later moved to London to establish a career as a writer. Goldsmith's play, *She Stoops to Conquer* is an enduring comedy first performed in London in 1773 featuring comical misunderstandings, tricks and mockery. *She Stoops to Conquer* parodies the traditional British sentimental comedy, instead favoring 'low comedy.' Goldsmith challenges the power of the English bourgeoisie by emphasizing their faults and hypocrisies.

Not only do McDonagh's plays share many thematic similarities to Goldsmith, both playwrights also share many biographical parallels. Both McDonagh and Goldsmith have Irish roots but lived in London to establish their writing careers. They use the language of the colonizer, English, to criticize and mock the dominant British culture. Goldsmith critiques the indolence, wealth and morals of British high society through his portrayal of several self-serving characters such as Tony Lumpkin and Mrs. Hardcastle.

In *She Stoops to Conquer*, Kate Hardcastle must marry her father's choice for her, Mr. Marlow, but is put off by his shyness around high-class women. Through a series of misunderstandings caused by Mrs. Hardcastle's son Tony, Marlow and his friend Hastings mistake the Hardcastles' home for an inn. Consequently, they treat Kate and her family like employees. The action of the play revolves around the comedy caused by Tony's trick. By the end of the play, however, Kate and Marlow are engaged and Hastings and Constance's relationship ends in an engagement as well.

She Stoops to Conquer stands as an unrelenting indictment of the English bourgeoisie using comedy, imitation and mockery. Like McDonagh, Goldsmith occupies a complicated cultural position being neither fully English nor Irish. Both playwrights use their art and hybrid position to explore cultural and political problems between both nations. Goldsmith and McDonagh employ comedy to critique the dominant social and cultural conventions.

All of these plays exist within the Irish literary tradition and comment on social and political issues. They examine the imperial conflict between England and Ireland recognizing it as a ruthlessly violent and disheartening struggle.

The Black & Tans' ability to provoke the Irish to violence (as seen in *Gunman*) benefits the British in justifying the necessity of their interference in Ireland. Using the cultural and political tensions in Ireland as inspiration, these playwrights recognize that violence has historically been used as a way to control others and show dominion over them.

McDonagh and the Theatre of Irish History

Despite their geographical proximity, Ireland and England have had a historically tense and bloody relationship. In the eleventh century, as England became a unified nation, it explored and colonized Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. As a result, in the twelfth century Anglo-Normans settled in Ireland displacing some of the native Irish. King Henry II of England wanted to assert his dominance in Ireland and so made the kings of Ireland pledge their allegiance to him in exchange for protection. The Irish agreed out of fear of more invasions. King Henry, however, did little to protect the Irish from the Anglo-Norman invaders because he was busy fighting with the French at this time. At first, these Anglo-Norman lords resisted Irish customs and refused to abide by Irish laws. The lords forcefully took land in Ireland from the native inhabitants and built castles to solidify their power. This displacement understandably caused discontentment in the native population, and sparked an ever-increasing animosity between the natives and their would-be conquerors. These Anglo-Normans saw the native Irish- Catholics as not only inferior, but not capable of governing themselves. The Anglo-Normans began the practice of feudalism in Ireland when they took Irish land and forced the natives into subservient positions. Over the next few centuries, England increasingly tightened rule over Ireland caused regularly intensified turmoil between the two cultures.

When King Henry VIII split from the Catholic Church and established the Church of England, most of the Anglo-Normans living in Ireland did as well. Henry's daughter, Queen Elizabeth I continued his religious legacy by supporting the Anglican Church during her reign. Queen Elizabeth I put tight constraints on Irish Catholics so they would be discouraged from rebelling. Thus, the Anglo-Normans had more wealth and opportunity than the native Irish in Ireland. Over time the Anglo-Normans adapted to Irish customs and traditions but some remained loyal to the British crown politically and religiously. Tensions between the two nations still continued to grow through the centuries. Declan Kiberd explains the imperial relationship between Ireland and England, "the English have presented themselves to the world as controlled, refined and rooted; and so it suited them to find the Irish hot-headed, rude and nomadic, the perfect foil to set off their own virtues" (56). As an imperial force, it was in England's best interest to project their most negative qualities onto the colonized natives to justify the need for English imperialism.

The Act of Union of 1800 unified Ireland and England under the title of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Irish Catholics, however, were still not emancipated and faced religious and political discrimination in Ireland. The resulting Protestant Ascendency brought with it British lords who were awarded land in Ireland that was stripped from Irish Catholics. Once these different cultures came into contact with one another, it became impossible for both to remain completely unchanged.

Physical manifestations of England's long history of imperial power over Ireland still exist in the form of prisons such as Kilmainham Gaol, now a museum to Irish republicanism, and first built as a panoptic prison in 1796 in Dublin to detain and execute Irish republican leaders. The Gaol exposes Britain's long reign of political and physical power over Ireland and its people. McDonagh joins a long history of Irish writers who explore the effects of Britain's violent rule in Ireland.

Britain's historical rule in Ireland throughout the centuries culminated in a tense religious and political atmosphere most notably manifested through the violence of the Troubles in the twentieth century. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *The Pillowman* explore the violent religious and social upheaval in Ireland during the Troubles. Michel Foucault's text, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* also analyzes different governments' methods of controlling people through power in the forms of violence and imprisonment.

Observation & Castigation: Watching McDonagh Watch Others

Michel Foucault is one of the most celebrated French philosopher and writers of the 21st century. Foucault's most core contribution is his development of Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of genealogy: an exploration of how our society has come to be in our present situation. Foucault builds upon Nietzsche's basis, but also moves past this concept to analyze power relations such as those at play in the modern prison system. Foucault's work goes beyond Nietzsche's conceptions of the past providing implications for these power mechanisms in the future. Foucault greatly respected Nietzsche's work, using his idea of genealogy as the foundation for many of his texts.

Several of Foucault's book titles are allusions to Nietzsche's work such as *The Birth of Tragedy* as compared to Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Birth of the Prison*.

Though Foucault's work borrows and builds upon some of Nietzsche's concepts, it also introduces new ideas such as *discourse*. Foucault describes *discourse* as the language used to convey people's ideas within the boundaries of that society's superstructural hegemony. Discourse is a learned behavior based off of social cues and propriety. According to Foucault, every human relationship is an ongoing negotiation of power. The source of this power comes from having knowledge of the truth especially when applying judgment to others. Foucault observes that, "Power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (27). Thus, knowledge of the truth is essential in gaining power and dominion over others.

In the context of Foucault's work, *Discipline and Punish* to punish someone for a crime is to establish the truth of the offense and to assign judgment. Foucault explains this development stating, "But now a quite different question of truth is inscribed in the course of the penal judgment. The question is no longer simply: 'has the act been established and is it punishable?' But also: 'What *is* this act of violence or this murder?'" (*Discipline and Punish* 29). These changes in society's use of punishment become the focus of Foucault's work. *Discipline and Punish* takes a genealogical view of history, analyzing the different mechanisms that shape discourse throughout society. As its title indicates *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* explores the way criminals were punished before the invention of the prison.

Once the prison was established as the main form of punishment, it became clear that it engenders recidivism and crime. It became another institution exposed to hegemonic influence used to control society's delinquents.

Foucault observes that the concept of social abnormality occurs once society has labeled someone as deviating from the standard or norm, and they become known as delinquents. Differing from contemporary society's conventions, people were not always labeled by the actions in which they partook. For example, previously, sex and sexual acts were simply acts in which people took part but were not necessarily defined by them. In recent centuries, however, people became defined by the sexual acts that they perform. These people who deviate from what society mandates are looked at negatively and labeled as abnormal.

A prominent aspect of *Discipline and Punish* is Foucault's adaptation of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. Panopticon in Greek means "all-seeing" and is the basis for the panoptic structure. The Panopticon is a building that can be used as a prison, school or monastery. It is circular with a tower in the center and individual cells that line the walls. The tower has a guard and is used to watch the prisoners without them knowing if they are or are not being watched. The Panopticon makes it possible through its intricate design for a guard to be present or absent from the watchtower without being noticed by the prisoners.

The Panopticon in the form of a prison like Kilmainham Gaol became the physical manifestation of Bentham's social theory described in his 1798 "Proposal for a New and Less Expensive mode of Employing and Reforming Convicts."² The objective of the Panopticon is to instill a system of self-policing within the prisoners' minds to deter them from committing further crimes. People would then police their own and others' actions. Bentham believes that to prevent crime there must be a punishment that is so painful to the criminal that it outweighs the pleasure one receives from committing the crime. Bentham's concept of surveillance or *panopticism* has become an intrinsic part of modern society illustrated through the open design of shopping malls, schools, and prisons.

Foucault argues that the modern prison is integrated into every part of society because of these surveillance and control tactics. The subject is controlled by the knowledge that someone who may punish them could be monitoring them. Therefore the process of being imprisoned within the Panopticon should change the way the prisoners monitor their own actions. The sense of uncertainty of being watched and judged keeps the prisoners behaving according to the rules of the institution. The prisoners' sense of uncertainty is transferred from the confines of the Panopticon to the outside world. Thus, according to Bentham, the method of self-policing is established. While the practicalities of self-policing met with limited success in prisons like Dublin's Kilmanham, the lingering effects of physical manifestations of social power remain.

Foucault, through Bentham, analyzes the role of power in society's use of violent and nonviolent punishment. The themes of policing and self-policing are prominent in McDonagh's *The Lieutenant* and *The Pillowman*.

² This can be found in *Jeremy Bentham, The Works of Jeremy Bentham, vol. 11 (Memoirs of Bentham Part II and Analytical Index) [1843]*, edited by John Bowring.

Padraic calls himself the Lieutenant of Inishmore because he believes he is capable of policing Ireland for “criminals.” However, Padraic’s methods are violent and lack proper legal procedure much like that of Ariel and Tupolski in *The Pillowman*. McDonagh has been criticized for his portrayal of the hyper-violent stage Irish especially in the character of Padraic.

Understandably, the critical debate surrounding McDonagh according to Patrick Lonergan is, “the belief that McDonagh is cleverly subverting stereotypes of the Irish, and the conviction that, on the contrary, he is exploiting those stereotypes, earning a great deal of money by making the Irish look like a nation of morons” (“Globalization” 636). Many critics object to the way McDonagh portrays his Irish characters because of their negative and extreme traits. However, McDonagh emphasizes these well-known Irish stereotypes in order to subvert them. Lonergan argues, “McDonagh's point here is clear: he is neither creating nor exploiting images of stage-Irish characters; rather, he is drawing attention to his audiences' willingness to accept such images uncritically” (“Globalization” 650).

Critics argue that though this method is successful for British audiences, when it is taken out of the U.K. some viewers will assume that all of McDonagh’s characters are sincere representations of the Irish. This criticism especially addresses McDonagh’s play *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and its depiction of the members of groups such as the IRA and INLA during the Troubles in Ireland. An Irish audience would be aware of the history between the two cultures—a violent and horrific time imprinted in the memories of Irish and English citizens alike.

So, the play can have a different impact when viewed by audiences outside of Great Britain and Ireland, which is important when considering audience and critical reviews and interpretations of McDonagh's work already known for challenging audience expectations. Noel Carroll recognizes this method explaining, "In short, engendering expectations and then subverting them, is McDonagh's signature strategy" (176). Thus, it is not surprising that McDonagh uses this formula in plays such as *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *The Pillowman*.

Though many critics such as Lonergan appreciate McDonagh's theatrical style, Mary Luckhurst objects to McDonagh's use of extreme violence and expletives in his plays calling his methods gratuitous. However, one of Luckhurst's biggest critiques of McDonagh as a playwright is that he seemingly identifies himself as English, and thus purposely mocks the Irish for financial gain. She claims that, "*The Lieutenant* has been elevated to commercial status only because it does not challenge the Little Englander's view of himself as benevolently superior" (38). Luckhurst argues that McDonagh's main objectives when writing are making money and satisfying the sensibilities of the English. McDonagh emphasizes certain character traits to challenge the audience's preconceptions and willingness to accept common stereotypes as fact. Luckhurst's inability to separate author's intent from her interpretation of McDonagh's plays, cause her to focus on his personal life and behavior as opposed to his artistic merit.

Additionally, Luckhurst faults McDonagh because he has been quoted saying that he got into writing plays because "it was a way of avoiding work and earning a bit of money" (222).

Luckhurst interprets this comment as McDonagh admitting he is lazy, greedy, and has a flawed work ethic. Clearly, Luckhurst's complaints rely too heavily on McDonagh's comments to the press rather than the content of his plays.

Though Luckhurst mentions the marketing style of British playwrights in the 1990's, she does not give enough attention to the character that McDonagh portrays in order to publicize his plays by making controversial and arrogant comments. Luckhurst takes what McDonagh says in interviews to be his sincere thoughts and thus judges him unfairly. Luckhurst's harsh indictment of McDonagh seems to be a result of his many arrogant public comments and not based on his body of work. Lonergan provides an answer to Luckhurst's doubts about the sincerity of McDonagh's portrayal of the Irish saying, "the question of whether McDonagh is exploiting or subverting stereotypes is not so much unanswerable as irrelevant" ("Globalization" 652). Since McDonagh's public relations strategy revolves around being controversial, one can infer that his polemical comments are insincere and not to be taken seriously. McDonagh's public persona is deliberately controversial just like the characters in his plays. McDonagh's use of extremes pervades his persona as well as his plays.

CHAPTER II:

The Lieutenant and the Prison

As alluded to in the introduction, Martin McDonagh's play, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, has regularly received mixed criticism typically centering on the violence, and his volatile and stereotypical characters. Some critics, like Mary Luckhurst, find the carnage of McDonagh's plays gratuitous and offensive. Indeed, Luckhurst describes *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* as an "orgy of random violence" implying that the violence in the play lacks any meaning or function (36). Though the play's violence seems gratuitous to some, in light of Michel Foucault's concepts of power, truth, and knowledge, the violence is seen as integral to the power dynamic between the characters, and adds a philosophical depth to violence present within the play. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault examines the evolution of the penal system and its use of violence as a punishment in order to gain power and control over criminals. In it, Foucault illustrates the dynamic between knowledge and power that has become an essential characteristic of human interaction.

The play opens with Davey, an eccentric teenager, carrying a bloodied, clearly dead cat to his neighbor, Donny's house. The play, then, begins with the image of a bloody and gruesome death, establishing a violent tone from the outset.

The audience learns that the dead cat, Wee Thomas, belongs to Donny's son, "mad Padraic" a member of the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army)—a splinter group of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) who has been away in the north of Ireland.

Both Donny and Davey are nervous because Padraic is known in Inishmore for his quick and violent temper. Their fear of Padraic's reaction causes them to attempt to cover up Wee Thomas's death. They try to hide his death by replacing him with another live black cat. Davey can only capture an orange cat, so he and Donny cover it with black shoe polish to fool Padraic. Davey and Donny's fears are warranted because when Padraic discovers the truth about Wee Thomas he vows to kill both men.

Donny, in his search for Wee Thomas's killer, forces a confession out of Davey using intimidation and fear. Davey claims that he had nothing to do with Wee Thomas's unfortunate ending. He maintains that he was just trying to help by bringing the injured cat to Donny's house. However, fearing Padraic's reaction, Davey (with Donny's encouragement) admits to killing Wee Thomas. Donny says to him, "If you admit it was you knocked poor Thomas down, Davey, I won't tell him. If you carry on that it wasn't, then I will. Them are your choices" (11). In this difficult predicament, Davey provides a false confession so that Padraic won't blame and physically harm him. Davey seems more concerned with his physical wellbeing than his reputation on Inishmore.

Foucault notes that, "[torture] occupied a strict place in a complex penal mechanism, in which the procedure of an inquisitorial type was reinforced with elements of the accusatory system [...]" (39). Donny questions and accuses Davey without any real evidence. Here, Donny uses Padraic's violent reputation to scare and intimidate Davey into confessing to killing Wee Thomas.

In their interaction Donny forces Davey to confess against his own will out of fear for his physical safety placing Donny in the position of power. Davey's false confession obfuscates the truth of the crime, which also positions Donny as being more powerful. Foucault explains in *The History of Sexuality*, "When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body"(59). Donny tortures Davey in his pursuit of the truth forcing him to experience pain to uncover the veracity of the crime.

Before Padraic appears onstage, both Donny and Davey label him as "mad," thus providing the audience with a preconceived idea of him based off of others' descriptions. The concept of social abnormality, Foucault argues, began with the development of the human sciences, which established a norm that regulated the way normal and abnormal people were categorized. Once a society establishes a normal standard of behavior, it automatically creates a category of people who deviate from this behavioral standard or norm and are viewed as negative. These people are labeled as "abnormal" and thus treated differently by others. Padraic is assumed to be abnormal before he even appears on stage because the other characters already identify him as "mad."

Mairead, Davey, and Padraic are all identified by other characters as deviating from the societal norm either in appearance or behavior. Padraic is recognized and labeled as "mad" by Donny, Davey, Joey, Brendan, and Christy. The other characters also call Mairead "mad" and comment on her short hair, which they say likens her to a boy and deviates from the "normal" length of women's hair.

They mock and attack Davey's long hair as well, calling it a "girl's mop" (8). These characters are marginalized, belonging to the fringe because of their appearance and behavior.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains, through an examination of history, how people were once able to perform non-reproductive sexual acts and resist classification or identification as homosexual. As history progressed through the nineteenth century, Foucault recognizes the shift from simply committing acts to being defined by these acts. Sexuality changed from sexual acts one chose to engage in to becoming an inextricable part of one's identity, especially if they deviated from the norm. These identifiers are used to easily categorize and control the masses. In *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, Foucault notes that the entire notion of sexual identity is socially constructed (106). Since repression can be seen as an extension of power, to rebel is to gain a certain power back. Therefore, Mairead's refusal to abide by society's standards of female beauty such as having long hair empowers her by rebelling against the social norm. By pairing Padraic with Mairead, who presents herself as a boy, as a romantic couple, McDonagh evokes images of male homosocial behavior bordering on homosexuality. Similarly, Davey's long hair, and pink bike both illustrate his rebellion against traditional male stereotypes.

Mairead's reaction to the rumors that Davey purposely murders Wee Thomas illustrates Foucault's concept that there is an element of shame and embarrassment that goes along with being accused of a crime. He observes that as the penal system evolved, judgment was passed not only on the act but also on the offender, their motives and past crimes.

After Christy tells Mairead that Davey killed Wee Thomas, McDonagh's stage direction explains, "[*Davey sprints off stage right, covering his face as he goes. Mairead shoots after him, then kicks his bicycle over and starts shooting at it*]" (22). The way Mairead treats Davey changes when she thinks that he savagely kills a helpless animal, i.e. Wee Thomas. Mairead shoots Davey in the face with her air rifle and then thrashes his bicycle. She uses physical violence to punish and shame Davey for his alleged ironically "inhumane" crime. Mairead resorts to corporeal punishment when it comes to punishing alleged criminals. In this case, the category and intensity of crime impacts her punishment on Davey.

Foucault notes the further impact of imposing judgment on offenders and their crimes stating that as the penal system evolved, the questions changed to, "What *is* this act of violence or this murder? To what level or to what field of reality does it belong? Is it a phantasy, a psychotic reaction, a delusional episode, a perverse action?" (*Discipline and Punish* 29). Using these questions, Donny and Davey apply this dynamic of judgment on Padraic by anticipating his reaction based on his past behavior. When Donny tells Davey that Wee Thomas belongs to Padraic, Davey anxiously asks, "Oh Jesus Christ, Donny! Not your Padraic in the INLA?!" (10). Davey continues his fearful rant saying, "As if he wasn't mad enough already. Padraic's mad enough for seven people. Don't they call him 'Mad Padraic'? Isn't it him the IRA wouldn't let in because he was *too* mad?" (10). Davey's estimation of Padraic is culled from his combined knowledge of Padraic's past crimes, personality, and behavior. Because Padraic is rumored to have physically injured his own cousin, Davey believes that Padraic would certainly hurt him for a small offense, let alone killing his beloved cat.

Even though Davey tries to maintain his innocence, he still fears being punished by Padraic for bringing Wee Thomas to Donny's house.

After Davey learns that Wee Thomas belongs to Padraic, he begs Donny not to involve him or mention his name. Davey then fearfully asks, "Sure, Padraic would kill you for sweating near him, let alone this. Didn't he outright cripple the poor fella laughed at that girly scarf he used to wear, and that was when he was twelve?!" (11). Donny confirms Davey's fears saying, "His first cousin too, that fella was, never minding twelve! And then pinched his wheelchair!" (11). This incident illustrates Padraic's embarrassment at being identified as deviating from the norm because of his choice of clothing. Padraic's use of anger and violence, especially in this situation, is a result of his feelings of embarrassment and social isolation. Even at a young age, Padraic responds to criticism and mocking with violence. Whether this rumored incident is true or not, it still impacts the way others regard Padraic. This becomes important, because, if accused of a crime in the future, others will learn of his past behavior and think him capable of repeating his offenses or even escalating them. In this way, this Benthamian penal system shifted its focus from the crime to the criminal.

Mairead, Padraic's neighbor and Davey's fierce sister, also believes that Davey is responsible for Wee Thomas's death until she overhears Christy, Brendan, and Joey admit to murdering Wee Thomas. Once she discovers the truth about Padraic's cat, she occupies the dominant position of power and influences Padraic's decisions and actions. Mairead manipulates Padraic by withholding the truth about Wee Thomas from him. This choice shows Mairead's agency in its first clear manifestation.

She dictates the experience of truth that Padraic will encounter, and this allows her to exert a sense of control—or even dominance—for the first time.

Similarly, Padraic takes the “law” into his own hands in order to occupy a position of power over others. Foucault notes that, “If torture was so strongly embedded in legal practice, it was because it revealed truth and showed the operation of power” (55). Padraic, who is a member of the INLA, appears on stage for the first time torturing a local drug dealer in an abandoned warehouse in the north of Ireland. Padraic physically punishes James, a local drug dealer for selling marijuana to “the students at the tech” (14). Padraic, who believes that James is corrupting the youth of Ireland, tortures him privately thus adding elements of judgment and shame to his crime. Foucault notes that, “to find the suitable punishment for a crime is to find the disadvantage whose idea is such that it robs for ever the idea of a crime of any attraction” (*Discipline and Punish* 104). Padraic uses both physical pain and judgment of the soul to exert power over James and prevent him from committing other crimes. Padraic removes James’s toenails and then threatens to cut off his nipple. In an amateur approximation of torture, he uses James’ fear of physical pain to intimidate him, placing James in the subservient or subjected position.

This dynamic is interrupted when Padraic hears that his cat, Wee Thomas is “doing poorly” during his father’s phone call. In this scene, Padraic’s fret over Wee Thomas’ wellbeing overwhelms him, making it impossible for him to continue torturing James. James notices the abrupt shift in Padraic’s mood and uses this to his advantage. Because of Padraic’s emotional pain over his sick cat his soul has been wounded, which then places James in a more powerful position.

Foucault observes that power relations are often unstable and changeable such as the characters' power dynamics within the play.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault examines the shift in punishment noting how the penal system seeks to torture a criminal's soul by limiting their rights. The limitation of one's freedom then becomes the new focus of punishment.

When Padraic detains and tortures James, Donny and Davey, he is preventing them from acting of their own free will. Padraic gains control over his hostages by limiting their rights and liberty. As in McDonagh's other play, *The Pillowman*, when a character is detained by a violent authority figure, they are unable to assert their own agency. The detainee is then powerless and vulnerable to the will of their captor. Accordingly, Padraic is able to control the detained characters physically. Padraic uses physical pain and torture to scare, intimidate, and restrain the other characters.

Since Padraic is so intimidating and volatile, members of the INLA have killed Padraic's cat as a trap to get him to return home to the remote island of Inishmore so they can easily eliminate him. By preying on Padraic's biggest fear—losing his best friend—Joey, Brendan, and Christy of the INLA occupy the position of power over Padraic. They use his fear of emotional pain to manipulate his actions. Padraic is motivated by his emotional loss unlike Donny and Davey who are motivated by physical pain. This is exemplified when Donny tells Davey that Wee Thomas is Padraic's cat, "And was his since he was five years old. His only friend for fifteen year" (10). With this statement, Donny predicts Padraic's emotional pain following Thomas's death. He also anticipates the physical pain Padraic will inflict upon Davey because of his new emotional turmoil.

Foucault observes that, “the expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations” (*Discipline and Punish* 16). Foucault analyzes the shift in the penal system from administering physical punishment to punishing the soul of the criminal. The characters within McDonagh’s plays use both physical and emotional torture to gain power over others.

Foucault notes that the court, which at one time focused on establishing the truth of a crime shifted to assessing guilt by judging the criminal based on their lifestyle, past behavior and relationships. Foucault observes of the penal system, [They] introduce into the verdict not only ‘circumstantial’ evidence, but...the knowledge of the criminal, one’s estimation of him, what is known about the relations between him, his past and his crime, and what might be expected of him in the future”

(*Discipline and Punish* 18)

Instead of being punished for a crime and being released, the offender is judged for the rest of their life based on this incident. Therefore, elements of shame and judgment pass over the offender, placing the accuser in the position of power. In committing Wee Thomas’s murder, Joey, Brendan, and Christy seek to injure Padraic’s soul and *then* his body. Foucault examines the changes that occurred in corporeal punishment since the eighteenth century. These changes in punishment are addressed within McDonagh’s plays.

The Lieutenant of Inishmore is set at the end of the twentieth century, but demonstrates the continuing violence of the Troubles. Although, for the general population, the explosive religious and social tension between Protestants and Catholics had subsided, characters like members of the INLA and Padraic's own brand of the PINLA still look to rekindle that violence. By moving his setting away from the urbanized areas of Belfast or Dublin, McDonagh attempts to create a setting that allows for the characters in the play to function in a society where violence is equated with power and control—a simulacra of the American West in some ways.

Just as Ireland fought for its sovereign independence from England, the characters in *The Lieutenant* continue to fight to rule their own lives. Padraic, Mairead and INLA members Christy, Brendan and Joey all exist in an ongoing state of war and are therefore more aggressive and violent than Donny and Davey. The others all share a heightened sense of awareness and an acceptance of death as inevitable. This makes it easier for them to kill since they exist in a constant state of war.

As discussed in the introduction, the power struggle between Ireland and England is deep-seated. Irish Catholics have a history of being oppressed, which in no small part contributed to the tensions between those who want to remain a part of Britain and those who want an independent Ireland. Padraic is an Irish Catholic who believes in total Irish independence. He has been oppressed his entire life and these feelings of inferiority and powerlessness intensify his use of violence on the dominant culture. Though Padraic says he is torturing James for selling marijuana, he also has a historically religious and cultural reason to hate what James as a person represents. For him, James represents Protestantism and Irish unification with England.

Thus, on a surface level, Padraic tortures James for selling marijuana to Irish Catholic students but there is also a deeper reason for Padraic's brutality. He is channeling years of oppression, servitude and resentment while torturing James. And so James becomes a symbol of the enemy for Padraic. Padraic, in this way, uses violence as a way to gain power over other people.

Padraic has been away in the north of Ireland, an environment where sectarian violence was rampant, and (para) military groups controlled the streets. The nostalgia for this violent atmosphere seems to alter Padraic's method of relating to others even more. Padraic belongs to a splinter group of the IRA called the INLA who clearly do not trust the police. Padraic responds to most problems with immediate violence as illustrated when he ties up and almost kills his own father, Donny, and neighbor Davey for allegedly murdering Wee Thomas. He rips off James's toenails for selling marijuana to tech students, and threatens to slice off his nipple. He also kills Christy, Brendan, and Joey after they tie him up and threaten his life. Padraic's methods of punishment consist of torture, "tribunals" and immediate, close-range executions.

On the other hand, Padraic's neighbor, Mairead judges and punishes others based off of their Foucauldian truth-statements (in the form of forced confessions) throughout the play. She tries to make Davey confess to killing Wee Thomas and will only believe he is innocent after she overhears Christy, Brendan, and Joey admit to murdering Padraic's cat. Once she learns the truth, she targets Christy, Brendan, and Joey and blinds them to save Padraic's life.

Foucault suggests that, “Through the confession, the accused himself took part in the ritual of producing penal truth” (*Discipline and Punish* 38). So, through the act of confessing, the accused assists in the law’s search for the truth of a crime.

When Mairead realizes that the cat Padraic calls unhygienic and brains is her very own Sir Roger, she does not hesitate to shoot Padraic as punishment. By killing Padraic, she asserts her agency over him. She too is in an emotional daze when she realizes that Sir Roger is dead. Mairead does not wait for an explanation from Padraic once she discovers that he murdered her cat. In this scene Padraic asks, “Can I tell you this Mairead? I did brain a cat this morning, but I did have a reason” (49). Padraic’s reason is, “It seemed terrible unhygienic. Half covered in black muck” (49). Neither Mairead nor Padraic are yet aware that he is talking about killing her cat. Accordingly, Mairead replies, “Fair go, so. I don’t like unhygienic cats. Braining nice clean cats, I’m saying” (49). When she discovers that Padraic killed her shoe-polish covered cat, she quickly shoots him in the head. She bypasses any type of trial to prove Padraic’s guilt because of his earlier confession to braining a cat “half covered in black muck” (49). For Foucault, knowledge of the truth equates power. Therefore, whoever is privy to the confession, holds power over the confessor. Mairead holds power over the other characters by being a witness to their confessions.

The ability to see is an important aspect of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* as many characters and animals are blinded or face the threat of being blinded. Mairead shoots out cows’ eyes in order to protest the meat trade. She also blinds Joey, Brendan, and Christy to save Padraic’s life and threatens to blind Davey. It is also rumored that Padraic blinded Christy by shooting him with a crossbow at close range.

The act of being watched or viewed is essential to modern prison practices. Foucault, in his work, demonstrates again Bentham's concept of the Panopticon, a penitentiary that separates its detainees into individual cells that are watched at all times by a guard who is placed in a tower in the middle of the circular structure. The Panopticon creates an atmosphere of mystery for the prisoners who are never sure if they are being observed or not. The design of the Panopticon is such that its prisoners should feel they are being watched at all times even if they are not. Because the prisoners are never sure if others are observing them, they have little agency. The concept of the Panopticon is important to Foucault's theories because it is the manifestation of surveillance, punishment, and power.

The ending of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is full of bloodshed and chaos, and finally uncovers the truth behind Wee Thomas' death. After Mairead saves Padraic's life from his three fellow INLA members, Christy confesses to killing Wee Thomas before he dies. Upon learning this information, Padraic and Mairead torture Christy together for his crime. Christy says to Padraic, "Just making me peace with God, I am, in the last seconds before I slip away, now" (45). Padraic's emotional grief is so intense that when he hears Christy's admission he is only able to express his pain by physically torturing him.

Similarly, when Mairead discovers that the cat Padraic killed is hers, she does not hesitate to respond to her emotional pain with physical violence. She shoots Padraic in the head point blank with two guns while distracting him with a kiss and singing "The Dying Rebel." With this action, Mairead places herself in a position of power over the other characters while reinforcing the Irish and historical context of the play.

Once Padraic is dead, Mairead becomes the character the others fear. This is exemplified when Davey asks Donny, “Oh, will it never end? Will it never fecking end?” (54). Davey is referring to Mairead’s abrasive treatment of him and Donny mirroring Padraic’s reign of terror. The true irony of the play is that in its final scene, Wee Thomas, who is supposed to be dead, appears on stage unharmed and unconcerned. Mairead, like Padraic, asserts her authority using others’ fear of violence and pain. Mairead seemingly replaces Padraic as the “Lieutenant of Inishmore” as she forces Donny and Davey to clean up her carnage by chopping up the remaining dead bodies.

This cycle of violence, power and torture mirrors the tense political relationship between Ireland and England. England, as the dominant power projected their own faults and vices onto their characterizations of the Irish. Thus, the English controlled the way other countries viewed the Irish until Irish writers used the English language against its own inventor.

CHAPTER III:

Discipline, Punishment, and *The Pillowman*

In *The Pillowman*, McDonagh more fully develops his treatment of violence as a commentary on discourse, knowledge, and power. Notably, he also shifts the setting. Though the unknown setting establishes the play as geographically non-Irish, the power dynamic between Ireland and England is mirrored in the relationship between the characters. Rather than this operating as a specifically Irish situation, McDonagh creates an unreal space to deal with the Foucauldian polemical reality of these truths.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault investigates the development of criminal punishment and the power (agency) associated with inflicting punishment on others. In *The Pillowman*, the police officers, Ariel and Tupolski, inflict pain and torture on Katurian as a way to regain their dominant position of power by uncovering the truth of the crime. For Foucault, knowledge is defined by the ways it relates to human nature and behavior, which are evaluated against a standard or norm. Foucault investigates the power associated with enforcing laws and inflicting punishment on others. He argues that a crime only exists because society has labeled it as such.

These concepts of torture and power are central to understanding McDonagh's *The Pillowman*. The play begins with Katurian, blindfolded and being accused of instigating a recent bout of child murders with his "backward" brother, Michal. Katurian's written stories are under investigation because of their grotesque subject matter: children being tortured and killed in horrifying ways.

The lead detective on the case, Tupolski, quickly identifies Katurian's main theme as, "some poor little kid gets fucked up.' Your theme" (13). However, Katurian denies that his stories have any conscious theme or message stating that he is purely a storyteller with "no axe to grind" (8). That statement, in many ways, is one of the most reflective of Foucault's treatment of truth; rather delivering the event from a standpoint that demonstrates a specific political agenda, Katurian presents the truth of the story for the audience to experience individually.

Both he and Michal are accused of acting out three of Katurian's stories that feature disturbing images of child sadism and infanticide. Though Katurian repudiates consciously including any social commentary in his stories, it becomes evident that they all share similar themes such as personal revenge, violence, and the innocence of youth and childhood. These themes suggest a certain social and political viewpoint especially due to Katurian's use of extreme violence. Jose Laners identifies Katurian's quandary stating, "Katurian's dilemma in *The Pillowman* is also that of McDonagh, and of his audience: can a writer 'just tell stories' for mere 'private' entertainment, or do those stories always end up acquiring unintended (political) meaning, simply by virtue of being out of the author's hands and in the public sphere?" (11). To Foucault, everything has a type of political agenda because it is a part of discourse and nothing can have meaning outside of said discourse.

As noted earlier, McDonagh's plays have often been criticized for utilizing the Stage Irishman, even when he subverts those stereotypes through his use of extremes.

Kiberd notes, “the two major Irish stereotypes on the English national stage embody those polarities of feeling: on the one hand, the threatening, vainglorious soldier, and, on the other, the feckless but cheerily reassuring servant” (63). McDonagh mocks the characterization of the Stage Irishman within his own characters thus undermining the power of it as an insult. *The Pillowman* is set in a fictional space that is used to explore the complicated power dynamics between Ireland and England in a non-Irish setting.

As quoted to Patrick Lonergan, John Waters observes the dispute over McDonagh’s plays and frames the critical argument as either a “search for truth” or an “appetite for delusion” (636). In *The Pillowman*, we see both demonstrated as the detectives use excessive force on Katurian in their search for the culprit of a recent spree of child murders. Foucault equates knowledge with truth and employs a power—knowledge dynamic while investigating the uses of torture. Truth and the knowledge of truth are fundamental aspects of power. Foucault observes that, “ever since the Middle Ages slowly and painfully built up the great procedure of investigation, to judge was to establish the truth of a crime, it was to determine its author and to apply legal punishment” (*Discipline and Punish* 19). Thus power lies in the truth and who has access to it so they can employ punishment on others.

In situations like those retold in *The Pillowman*, Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* would call our attention back to Bentham’s idea of the Panopticon— a structure in which one guard can observe every room of a facility from a single location. Consequently, the prisoners are aware they are being watched but have no idea who is watching them at any given time. Thus, the prisoners are stripped of their power because they are never certain of when they are under surveillance.

With the concept of the Panopticon, came the regularization of discipline used to control the masses. One resulting process from this is the state's control over discipline and disciplinary actions. When the state controls mechanisms of discipline, a centralized police power is formed.

This appears to be the context in which *The Pillowman* is written as Tupolski explains to Katurian, "I am a high-ranking police officer in a totalitarian fucking dictatorship. What are you doing taking my word about anything?" (18). His statement represents the equivocal nature of the centralized police power. In this scene, Katurian places his trust in Tupolski to keep his brother unharmed. In the next room, Michal simulates the noises of torture as a way for the police to anticipate and control Katurian's behavior thereby regaining power by torturing his soul and uncovering the truth from him. Tupolski reminds Katurian that he is in the position of power by reneging his promise to keep Michal unharmed. Michal is unaware of the officer's plans to harass Katurian and so he cooperates with them and screams to avoid really being tortured.

As a way to regain their power and to uncover the truth, Ariel and Tupolski use different torture methods on Katurian and Michal. Ariel physically tortures Katurian in the play but he also attempts to punish Katurian's soul by feigning to torture Michal. Katurian becomes disturbed when he hears his brother's gruesome screams even though no one is being physically harmed. Later, Michal explains to Katurian, "Oh, no, the man said he was *going* to torture me, but I thought, 'No way, boy, that'd hurt,' so I just told him whatever he wanted to hear, and he was fine then" (27). Michal does not seem to understand the consequences associated with pretending to be tortured and how this would impact Katurian.

Through these acts, the officers inflict pain on both Katurian's body and, more importantly to him, his soul. This kind of doubling or dualism is immediately demonstrated through his first name mirroring his surname: Katurian Katurian.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault recognizes the shift that occurred in the nineteenth century in administering punishment from public to private. When a punishment is public it sends out a message of horror to the masses. As punishment occurred privately people became deterred from committing crimes because they did not want to be penalized, they were not necessarily afraid of physical pain but afraid of a more personal and invasive punishment. These sentences carried with them personal shame and embarrassment. Foucault describes the shift from public to personal punishment stating, "From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights" (11). Instead of inflicting corporeal pain on criminals, they are denied personal rights and freedoms. In McDonagh's *The Pillowman*, the police officers, Ariel and Tupolski, recognize the implications that arise when a criminal is punished publicly. Tupolski says to Katurian, "We like executing writers. Dimwits we can execute any day. And we do. But, you execute a writer, it sends out a signal, y'know?" (22). They challenge Katurian's freedom when they physically detain him against his will.

In *The Pillowman*, the judicial system is unregulated and lacks official procedure as Ariel makes apparent stating, "Y'know, your childhood could be used as a pretty decent defence in court. Well, it could if we weren't going to bypass all that court shit and shoot you in an hour" (52). Ariel seems to relish breaking judicial procedure in favor of physical pain and torture.

For Katurian, the personal (i.e. his soul), lies outside of himself in his stories. If Katurian is shot, his soul will live on through his stories. However if his stories are destroyed, Katurian has no reason to continue living purely in the physical since he would be without his soul. The officers find a way to punish Katurian that focuses on emotional rather than physical pain. Ultimately, Ariel saves Katurian's work from destruction and allows his soul to remain through his stories thus limiting his emotional loss.

Though physical labor may appear like physical punishment, it actually inhibits the prisoner from doing what they most desire. It encroaches on people's liberty, which is viewed as a property and a right according to Foucault, "the expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations" (16). Foucault goes on to explain in *Discipline and Punish* that people started to fear the inevitability of punishment after the crime was committed rather than the punishment itself. As punishments shift, the public spectacle becomes focused on the trial and sentencing rather than the horror of physical pain. People are judged and classified by their crime resulting in a sense of shame associated with committing crimes.

Since the police label Katurian as a child murderer and detain him, they are conforming to Foucault's concept of personal punishment and the restriction of one's rights and liberties. Katurian is being held against his will, unable to leave. As the police label Katurian a child murderer, there is the added element of shame as his crime acknowledges him as deviating from what is considered the social norm. The concept of normality is socially constructed and implies that any behavior that is not considered standard is unnatural and therefore, negative.

People who deviate from the social norm are labeled as perverts. The publicity that used to center on public punishment shifts from what the person did to what motivated the person to commit the crime. The act, Katurian's murder, though it could be done publicly, is done secretly, and not as a spectacle for others to watch.

Even though it is not public, Katurian's murder still sends a message. Foucault recognizes that as a result of the shift in punishments, there is an increased urge to judge the individual instead of the crime alone. Foucault states that:

Judgement is also passed on the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity; acts of aggression are punished, so also, through them, is aggressivity; rape, but at the same time perversions; murders, but also drives and desires...for it is these shadows lurking behind the case itself that are judged and punished.

(Discipline and Punish 17)

The concept of deviance is socially constructed by first presenting a model of what is normal or correct. If one does not fit the criteria then they are labeled as aberrant. Foucault's interrogation into abnormality and deviance shows that society, by labeling someone by the way they compare to the societal norm, creates deviants and abnormalities.

Foucault's concept of social abnormality is addressed in *The Pillowman* when the police berate Katurian for his written stories' acts of child torture and brutality. The officers are, in fact, policing society for social deviants like Michal and Katurian.

Both Ariel and Tupolski use the intensity of the crime in deciding how much torture and pain to inflict upon their victims. Foucault explains how historically trials were once conducted with the utmost secrecy giving the suspect access to barely any information on their case. He notes that, “knowledge was the privilege of the prosecution” which justifies why Katurian is so ignorant about his own case and detainment (35).

Ariel admits, “sometimes I use excessive force on an entirely innocent individual. But I’ll tell you this. If an entirely innocent individual leaves this room for the outside world, they’re not gonna contemplate even raising their *voice* to a little kid again, just in case *I* fucking hear ’em and drag ’em in here for *another* load of excessive fucking force” (53). Though Ariel assumes the individual would be discouraged because of the impact his use of excessive force has on him, the real deterrent is being detained and labeled as a criminal who harms children. The shame involved with this characterization would more likely deter the individual from committing the crime. Along with the shame from this comes the pain of hearing Michal being tortured. The officers attempt to exploit Katurian’s sense of responsibility for Michal by “torturing” him in a room where Katurian can hear his screams.

Foucault argues that, “torture correlates the type of corporeal effect, the quality, intensity, duration of pain, with the gravity of the crime, the person of the criminal, the rank of his victims” (*Discipline and Punish* 34). This is especially true in Katurian’s situation where Ariel and Tupolski openly judge and physically torture Katurian according to the severity and intensity of his alleged crime of murdering children.

Even though Katurian is not guilty, the officers take it upon themselves to judge Katurian and cause him humiliation and shame. Foucault observes that, “There remains, therefore, a trace of ‘torture’ in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice—a trace that has not been entirely overcome, but which is enveloped, increasingly, by the non-corporeal nature of the penal system” (16). The officers inflict emotional pain and suffering on Katurian when they make him believe they have seriously tortured and hurt his “backward” brother, Michal. The officers do not really hurt Michal, but use him as a tool to torment Katurian and to learn the truth thereby regaining their power over the two suspects.

The constant bickering between Ariel and Tupolski is representative of the power struggle between the two. Tupolski is named the lead detective on the case, but Ariel, feeling powerless, resorts to torturing suspects to elevate him to a position of dominance. They appear to deviate from their official duties as detectives when they become responsible for policing Katurian’s stories. Both officers have power over Katurian because they have his stories and decide their fate. Katurian has some power in the situation as he has information on the crimes. The detectives inflict torture on Katurian in order to get a confession and remain in control.

The officers are aware that their punishment on Katurian is a success, but Katurian still resists confessing to the murders. As the audience learns, Katurian did kill two people but it was his mother and his father and not the two innocent children. Katurian Katurian Katurian admits his parents were “funny people” as his repetitive name implies (8).

The audience learns of Katurian and Michal's traumatic childhood through Katurian's story, "The Writer and the Writer's Brother" though in reality it has a different ending. In the story, there is a family with two young boys. One of the boys is chosen by their parents to be a great writer and is given all the tools to fulfill this dream. The other brother is tortured in a room next to the first brother who is able to hear his agonizing screams. The boys' parents conducted an experiment, whether Katurian, growing up hearing Michal's screams, would become a great writer or not. One day, Katurian discovers a bloody note written by Michal explaining how he has been tortured for Katurian's artistic ability to develop.

Katurian is horrified when he realizes what his parents have done. He then finds his parents and kills them for torturing Michal for all those years. Unfortunately, Michal is left permanently brain damaged from being brutalized for so long. In their search for artistic truth, Katurian and Michal's parents tortured their children thus participating in a power—knowledge dynamic. The trauma of Katurian and Michal's childhood is mirrored in Katurian's stories most notably the eponymous, "The Pillowman." The Pillowman is Michal's favorite character as is evident from a conversation with Katurian. Michal remarks that the Pillowman is a "very very good character. He reminds me a lot of me" (36). When Katurian asks him in which way they are similar Michal replies, "You know, getting little children to die. All that" (36). Michal views the Pillowman as a good character because he saves children from the pain of adulthood. Michal says to Katurian, "you're right, all children are going to lead horrible lives. You may as well save them the hassle" (36). Michal views life strictly through his experiences as deviating from the norm.

The issue of author's intent is addressed multiple times within *The Pillowman* beginning with Michal's interpretation of Katurian's stories. Michal confesses to Katurian that he did indeed commit the gruesome child murders for which they are being accused. When Katurian asks him why, Michal responds saying, "You know. Because you told me to" (34). Katurian is taken aback by Michal's response as if he has never thought about the impact his stories could have on others. Michal continues saying, "I wouldn't have done anything if you hadn't told me, so don't you act all the innocent. Every story you tell me, something horrible happens to somebody. I was just testing out how far-fetched they were" (35).

Michal attempts to uncover the truth in Katurian's stories and is therefore dissatisfied with untruthful stories such as Katurian's "The Writer and the Writer's Brother." The written version of the story deviates from the truthful one when Katurian finds the bloody note from "Michal." Katurian breaks into Michal's room and finds his parents simulating the gruesome sounds he has heard throughout his childhood. In this version, Katurian grows up to be a writer and revisits his childhood home. He finds Michal's room and discovers in it the rotting body of a young boy. Katurian realizes that his parents lied to him about torturing Michal. He also discovers a story in the boy's hand that is better than anything Katurian has ever written.

Katurian views the ending as happy for Michal since he really did become a true writer and artist. Michal, however, sees the ending as disturbing since he is dead in it.

Katurian then asks Michal, “what was left in your hand when you died? A story. A story that was better than any of *my* stories. See, “The Writer and the Writer’s Brother” ... *you* were the writer. *I* was the writer’s brother. That made it a happy ending for you” (41). Michal is unable to grasp Katurian’s message that, “It isn’t about being or not being dead. It’s about what you leave behind” (41). For Katurian, his soul remains in his stories whereas Michal’s artistic ability resides within him. To save Michal from being tortured and shamed for his crimes, Katurian suffocates him with a pillow and accepts responsibility for Michal’s misdeeds. By accepting the guilt, Katurian preserves Michal’s reputation from public opinion and derision. The soul of the criminal is judged as well as the crime that is committed. Foucault observes that along with the evolution of the penal system came major changes in society. Foucault’s work on the evolution of punishment and public opinion gives meaning to Katurian’s last sacrifice for his brother.

Foucault notices that in the shift from physical punishment to personal punishment “If it is still necessary for the law to reach and manipulate the body of the convict, it will be at a distance, in the proper way, according to strict rules, and with a much ‘higher’ aim” (*Discipline and Punish* 11). The higher aim is to uncover the truth rather than to simply inflict pain on a suspect’s body. The newer concept of personal punishment focuses on the reduction of one’s freedoms and rights instead of inflicting physical pain. Historically, the body of the criminal symbolized the crime they committed. The body would then be punished physically and the person would be free of the association with the crime.

In *The Pillowman*, Tupolski labels criminals as animals and thus uses the socially constructed idea of defining others by their actions and internalizing it as an integral part of identifying their culpability. This is evident when Tupolski says “Well, we're not animals. We *deal*, sometimes, with animals. We're not animals. (*Pause.*) Your brother will be fine. I give you my word” (13). By labeling others as animals, Tupolski is separating himself from them and remains superior because he is not an animal.

In his text, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault aims to show that many modern ideas are not necessarily self-evidently true but are just a result of the workings of power in society. This power is used to control the masses through hegemony. With the development of knowledge and the human sciences, came the labeling of behavior into what is normal and what is aberrant. People were then labeled as different if they deviated from the social norm. Norms are by nature exclusionary to those who do not fit the common mold.

Ultimately, the detectives are disappointed with Katurian's written confession because he lies in it and obfuscates the truth. Truth can only be produced by power and since Katurian clouds the truth in his confession, he comes from a state of powerlessness. Ariel, recognizing Katurian's loss of power, saves his stories in the end. Power is fundamental to human interaction since it dictates people's behavior. Foucault's argument in *Discipline and Punish* centers on the relationship between knowledge and power through the evolution of punishment and the development of different bodies of knowledge.

CHAPTER IV:

Conclusion

McDonagh has been criticized for his liberal use of violence and cultural stereotypes in his plays, yet when viewed by Irish audiences it becomes clear that he is subverting common characterizations by emphasizing known stereotypes. When interpreted using Foucault's concepts of truth, knowledge, and power, the violence in McDonagh's plays is necessary to the action and characters' development. For Foucault, knowledge and power are inextricably linked through our human interactions. McDonagh recognizes this power-knowledge connection and consequently uses it to establish the power dynamics between the characters within his plays.

Power is central to Foucault's theories as he traces its changes within society's institutions. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault "chart [s] the transformation from punishment as imposed upon a body to punishment as a "technology of power" that works through the mediation of the soul to subject and train the body (DP, 23)" (Schrift 139). This shift in punishment can be seen in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, which begins with Padraic torturing James, but ends with Mairead limiting Donny and Davey's freedom by forcing them to do physical labor. This change from physical punishment to mental and physical control also exists within *The Pillowman* when Ariel and Tupolski threaten to torture Michal to injure Katurian's soul and force him to confess against his will.

The domineering characters within both plays (Mairead, Christy, Padraic, Ariel, Tupolski) seek to control others through a combination of physical and emotional torture. These characters use forms of torture to ascertain the truth, with which they can use to control others.

McDonagh extends his authorial power from the page to the stage by using an abundance of physical props and theatrical effects. These effects force the audience to see, hear, and feel the production. McDonagh establishes power over his audiences by forcing them to experience the text rather than read it in print. Both *The Lieutenant* and *The Pillowman* feature disturbing scenes of violence and gore such as Padraic's bloody assassination of Sir Roger and Katurian's gruesome tales of infanticide. The production gives McDonagh a space to underscore the physicality of the violence of the text.

When watching a play, the audience is unable to read ahead to avoid surprise and therefore have a more authentic reaction than if they just read the text. Issues of interpretation are also minimized when the author has more control over the viewers' experience. The author then maintains power over the audience by utilizing theatrical techniques to force reactions from them thereby controlling their actions and behavior. The power to influence others' choices and behavior is also explored in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.

Theatrical aspects such as the excessive amount of fake blood used in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Maria Doyle argues, turns the violence into comedy (92). Doyle recognizes McDonagh's place within Irish literary history by likening his use of violence and comedy to that of J.M. Synge and Marina Carr.

Doyle explains, “*The Lieutenant* stands as the most unrelentingly violent and the most unrelentingly comic play, a piece that in fact turns the violence into play. Certainly McDonagh is not the only Irish dramatist to mix comedy and violence, which is a tactic popular from J. M. Synge to Marina Carr” (92). By juxtaposing the characters’ trivial daily lives with extreme carnage, McDonagh forces his audience to laugh during uncomfortable and inappropriate events. Using techniques from Grand-Guignol theatre, McDonagh’s plays quickly alternate from comedy to violence causing audiences to laugh during scenes of carnage and gore.

Because McDonagh creates the audience’s theatre experience, he holds power over them, making the theatre another societal mechanism of ideological power. The playwright controls what the audience sees while also being able to observe their reactions. The power to influence others’ choices and behavior is also explored in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. This type of power relationship is explored in Foucault’s observations of Bentham’s Panopticon. The Panopticon relies on surveillance to control its subjects. Because these subjects are unaware of when they are being watched, their behavior is motivated by uncertainty and fear. The concept of panopticism is manifested in modern society’s institutions such as schools, and prisons. Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin, Ireland represents British use of violence, surveillance to control Irish citizens.

In his plays' productions, McDonagh uses the characters' interactions to breed fear and uncertainty in his audiences. In *The Pillowman* the audience remains uncertain of who is to blame for the recent child murders until Michal confesses his guilt to Katurian. Similarly, in *The Lieutenant* the audience is uncertain as to who killed Wee Thomas until Christy confesses his culpability.

Productions of *The Lieutenant* use fake blood, fake cats, live animals, explosions, gunshots, and realistic dead bodies to incite fear and disgust within the viewers. These physical affirmations of violence and power add to the playwright's control over the audience. This tactic of shocking audiences by using extreme violence originated from Antonin Artaud's concept of the Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud's purpose in creating the Theatre of Cruelty is to liberate audiences from their repressed selves. Artaud sought to push audiences' self awareness through psychological shock often fueled by violence onstage. McDonagh incorporates aspects of the Theatre of Cruelty to create an authentic experience for his audiences.

Productions of *The Pillowman* employ tactics, which limit the audience's ability to avoid unpleasantness and violence. When one reads a text, they are able to skip over disturbing parts, however, when viewing a play the audience is unable to avoid the action whether it is pleasing or not. *The Pillowman* features Katurian and others reading his stories while actors simultaneously perform these stories. Katurian's stories often contain scenes of extreme violence such as his parents torturing Michal and parents torturing their young, religious daughter in "The Little Jesus." McDonagh exerts power and control over his audiences reminiscent of the power structure between his characters in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *The Pillowman*. A similar power dynamic is explored

in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Foucault's examination of the relationship between knowledge and power helps to inform how power dynamics function in society. Similarly, McDonagh's plays illustrate these shifting power dynamics in the form of extreme violence.

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