

The Gap and the Craft: Martin McDonagh's *A Skull in Connemara* on the Galician Stage

McDonagh, Ireland and Galicia

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Irish dramatic works have a history of becoming successful exports. A significant number of plays emanating from Ireland have been incorporated to the Galician theatrical system since the early 20th century. To a great extent, the origin of this interest can be attributed to the poeticised connection between Ireland and Galicia established in the Rexurdimento and its later utilisation by the nationalist movement. Even though this continues to affect the reception of Irish cultural products, other factors must be considered when scrutinising more recent incorporations.

The fact that Martin McDonagh's "Leenane Trilogy" has been marketed in Galicia as unambiguously Irish responds not only to the array of characteristics that conform the international perception of Irishness but also to a distillation informed by the minorised status of Galician culture and internal debate on the issue of national identity.

This article will analyse the incorporation of Martin McDonagh's *A skull in Connemara* to the Galician theatre system in 2010 through both textual and extratextual sources, with particular attention to the ways in which specific elements of the translation and adaptation processes contribute to a representation of Irishness that fits in with the expectations of Galician audiences.

Arguably, few national identities are as internationally recognisable as the Irish, due to an array of cultural references that populate the collective imaginary, both within and beyond its geographical borders. Long before the Celtic Tiger catapulted the country to the international foreground in a way that transcended the purely economic, Ireland could count cultural products as some of its most visible exports, amongst them, numerous Irish dramatic works. In Spain, we find a considerable number of plays by Irish authors entering the system from the early 20th century onwards, not only being translated into Spanish but also into Catalan, Basque and Galician.

The focal point of my research is how the representation of Irish identity on the Galician stage has been—and currently is—affected by the multiplicity of factors at play in the theatre adaptation process. In this article, I will examine the incorporation of Martin McDonagh's *A Skull in Connemara* to the Galician

theatre system, with particular attention to the ways in which specific elements of the translation and adaptation processes contribute to a representation of Irishness that fits in with Galician audience expectations. I will utilise both textual and extratextual sources in order to carry out an analysis of the incorporation process in line with Descriptive Translation Studies. However, while this approach is adequate when identifying and describing the operational norms which determine the final product, it does not do full justice to the multilayered nature of dramatic phenomena nor to the different dialogical levels present in theatre translation. In particular, the range of agents and mediators involved in the process of transposing a play for the stage, and who influence the decision-making process, demands close attention to their positioning in the political and sociocultural context. Although Descriptive Translation Studies scholars and approaches are not insensitive to the cultural aspects of translation, these do not constitute its main preoccupation. Accordingly, my analysis is enriched by drawing on culturalist and comparative approaches, such as those proposed by Bassnett and Venuti.

At this point in time, three plays by Martin McDonagh, namely those often referred to as the “Leenane Trilogy” have been produced in Galicia by two different professional companies. The first of them, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, translated by Avelino González and Olga F. Nogueira, was presented with the title *A raíña da beleza de Leenane* by Teatro do Atlántico under the direction of Xúlio Lago in 2006, ten years after first being staged by Druid Theatre in Galway and London. This was not the first or last time that the company would work with texts by Irish playwrights, having already staged *O encoro (The Weir)* by Conor McPherson in 2004 and Brian Friel's *O xogo de Yalta (The Yalta Game)* in 2009. The Santiago-based company Producións Excéntricas then undertook adaptations of the other two plays that make up McDonagh's *Leenane Trilogy* in quick succession, under the direction of Quico Cadaval—*A Skull in Connemara* in 2010 and *The Lonesome West* in 2011. Here, too, they worked with Avelino González, whose role as initiator and particular *modus operandi* is discussed below in greater detail. By the time Martin McDonagh was incorporated into the Galician system, ten years had lapsed since *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* premiered in Galway. In that time, the London-born playwright had gained recognition, not only through his dramatic works but also as a script writer, with the award-winning films *Six Shooter* (2005) and *In Bruges* (2008).

All three productions of Martin McDonagh's works in Galician won several María Casares awards—Galician theatre awards—including one for “Best

translation-adaptation". The Premios María Casares are presented on a yearly basis by the members of the Asociación de Actores e Actrices de Galicia (Galician Actors Association). All productions in Galician language are automatically nominated and there is nothing preventing members from voting for shows that they have not attended nor indeed for the only show they have seen in a given category. More relevant to the matter, translations and adaptations will almost invariably be judged without knowledge of the original text. Therefore, as with most awards, their significance as a measure of quality or impact is relative, to say the least. Possibly, a more telling indicator is the nomination of *Oeste solitario*—Produccións Excéntricas' take on *The Lonesome West*—to the Premios Max, awards that acknowledge the work of professionals from the whole of the Spanish state, in so far as it denotes exposure beyond the geographical borders of Galician-speaking territory. As a minorised language, Galician does not enjoy the same status as Spanish in the area of cultural manifestations, despite apparently favourable legal and institutional structure.¹ An award nomination beyond the community brings recognition, and visibility; in commercial terms, it is likely to have a positive impact on the prestige attributed to the play amongst Galician audiences, above all amongst those who are not Galician speakers.

The relatively high number of Irish plays—and particularly Irish-themed plays—produced in the Galician theatre system can be linked to an ongoing interest in Irish culture initiated during the Rexurdimento, the 19th century literary movement which had the rehabilitation of Galician language and cultural identity at its core. Authors associated with the Rexurdimento, such as Eduardo Pondal, drew a poetic connection between Ireland and Galicia on the basis of the two nations' shared Celtic past. This mythical common origin went on to be utilised by the nationalist movement during the 20th century, in an attempt to legitimise claims for recognition and increased autonomy from the central government in Madrid by drawing a parallel with the Irish political situation. It was at that point that the translation of canonical texts from Irish dramatic literature was initiated, with the 1921 publication in the *Revista Nós* of W.B. Yeats' *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, translated into Galician by Antón Villar Ponte from a Catalan version by Marià Manent, which had appeared in *La Revista* earlier that year. The translation was accompanied by poems and pseudo-anthropological articles on Ireland, as well as several references to Terence McSwiney, the late Lord Mayor of Cork, who had recently died on hunger strike. It is a text that ultimately exemplifies the extent of this mystified identification with Irish culture in the Galician system; an identification that, I

will show, continues to affect the incorporation of cultural products from Ireland.

However, current interest in Irish drama cannot be solely explained by this historical linkage, particularly since the number of productions increases from the 1970s onwards, when professional companies begin to venture beyond previously translated authors, such as Synge or Yeats, to more contemporary plays by Sean O'Casey, Brian Friel or Conor McPherson. In the specific case of playwright Martin McDonagh, his works entered the Galician cultural context at a time when the international dissemination and perception of Irish culture began to be shaped by the concept of the "Irish brand". In his work *Theatre and Globalization. Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era*, Patrick Lonergan discusses in detail how the reception of Irish theatre is affected by globalisation, a concept that has in recent times become increasingly relevant when examining the creation and reception of cultural products, especially those destined to travel beyond their source context. In his view, "the transformation of theatre worldwide is just one example of a paradigmatic shift from geographical to conceptual spaces [as Jones's play suggests] the contested territory nowadays is not land but meaning" (Lonergan 2009, 28). Lonergan's definition of Irish drama responds to a replacement of geographical national borders with a more conceptual delimitation of national identity—Irish plays are not necessarily plays produced in either of the two Irish states but "plays that are marketed or received internationally as corresponding to the Irish 'brand'" (28). Dramatic works are thereby presented as products and, indeed, Lonergan takes into consideration some of the commercial aspects of the productions he examines. However, the notion of "Irish brand" is not merely an economic concept. If we consider a brand as constituted by a collection of recognisable features, the term is not only applicable but particularly relevant in cases where the export of a dramatic work requires a process of adaptation. This will accentuate the contrast between what international audiences identify as 'Irish' and what is perceived as 'Irish' in the Irish context itself.

At a time when cultural manifestations cross borders more often than ever due to the increased accessibility brought about by the multiple media at our disposal, such distinctions would nevertheless indicate a source system in which the issue of national identity is a recurrent subject of discussion. Indeed, in the Irish cultural context, attempts to define the essential features of Irishness are commonplace. In an article recently published in *The Irish Times*, Patrick Freyne lists the ideologies that he believes to "have shaped Irish identity over the past century" (Freyne 2012), including a number of "isms"

(Celticism, Catholicism, alcoholism, patriotism, localism), as well as several references to Celtic Tiger-related concepts. This is not a description for outsiders but an account destined to encourage reflection and internal discussion on the aspects that have affected the makeup of Irish society in recent times. Without attempting to provide empirically verifiable information, Freyne's article exemplifies a concern with self-definition.

Certainly, this preoccupation with the definition of "Irish" becomes manifest in many a reaction to Martin McDonagh's works, mostly emanating from the Irish media. Often referred to as "London-born Irish", McDonagh has always avoided labelling himself as either Irish or British. Negative criticism of his dramatic works usually includes references to his controversial depiction of Irish society, often equating it to an outsider's mocking portrayal of the rural West of Ireland. Elizabeth O'Neil describes in her review of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* the prevailing manicheist attitudes towards McDonagh's theatre:

A modern day Synge or an English chancer? [...] Audiences have been divided roughly into two camps; those who think he's captured the black humour and zeitgeist of a postmodern rural Ireland, and those who see him as making a mockery of Ireland and the Irish by lampooning that caricature of old, the 'stage-Irish' fool. (O'Neill 2003).

In an article on McDonagh published by The Guardian, Henry McDonald quotes Malachi O'Doherty's views:

"To me a lot of Martin McDonagh reads like paddywhackery. The Irishness of the people is part of the joke. (You can see in a writer like Beckett, who was Irish, that when he depicts the depleted human condition, he does it without reference to ethnicity.)" (McDonald 2008)

Indeed, McDonagh's national identity would be deemed anecdotal, as is the case with many other authors, were it not for the themes he explores in his plays and the attributes he bestows upon his characters. The inhabitants of the stage Leenane that he recreates are loaded with markers of Irishness, albeit rather conventional ones. Very possibly, Martin McDonagh's use of ethnic clichés is offensive not so much in itself but because he is 'not Irish enough', a thesis sustained by the journalist Adrian McKinty in his blog:

Of course no one likes stereotypes but I think McDonagh is being picked on because of his "Englishness"—always the bogey man for a certain class of critic. The gate keepers of Irishness are on very shaky ground when they try to exclude people with planter names (Gerry Adams) or Norman names (the entire Fitzgerald clan) or anyone who's spent the majority of their life living outside the 32 counties (Yeats, Wilde, Joyce, Beckett, Swift, etc.) [...] So let's keep London born McDonagh and just to balance things out I'll

gladly swap all four of those proud non tax paying Micks in U2 for him.
(McKinty 2009)

According to the distinction suggested by Patrick Lonergan, Martin McDonagh's work can be labelled as Irish drama, despite the fact that most of it has been produced outside of Ireland. Indeed, as far as the Galician context is concerned, the Irish origin of the plays has not only been decisive for their incorporation but has also been repeatedly utilised in the marketing of the productions. References to Martin McDonagh in promotional materials and press releases point repeatedly to his Irish origin, on occasion to the point of attributing him with iconic status, as we can see in the following excerpt from the Teatro do Atlántico web site:

Considérase que McDonagh é unha nova voz e tamén unha nova calidade no drama irlandés suxeríndose que está a facer por aquela dramaturxia o que Pogues fixo pola música irlandesa tradicional nos anos 80. [McDonagh is considered a new voice and also a new quality in Irish drama, suggesting that he is doing for that dramaturgy what The Pogues did for traditional Irish music in the 80s]. (Teatro do Atlántico 2013)

The use of impersonal verbs in this statement suggests that these considerations are a generally accepted fact in the author's context of origin, whereas clearly this is not the case, as shown by the above discussed reviews. It may be that Teatro do Atlántico deemed any controversy surrounding McDonagh's work potentially disadvantageous to the distribution of the play, in particular if it could cast a shadow over an aspect that is clearly so important for its reception in the Galician system—its Irishness. Perhaps for that very reason, debate over whether Martin McDonagh deserves a place in the Irish canon does not attract much attention; neither does his use of ethnicity in ways that for many of his detractors treads a fine line between the grotesque and the downright racist. Although the debate surrounding McDonagh's adscription to Ireland is virtually non-existent in Galicia, this does not mean that his national or ethnic identity is obviated. On the contrary, his name is regularly followed by descriptive references, including attempts to position his work in the context of both the Irish and British cultural systems in a way that reflects the duality of the author's background:

Unha obra moderna, comercial, divertida, escrita por un explosivo e novo autor anglo-irlandés nos 90, martin [sic] McDonagh, que tiña tanta vontade de provocar ó tradicional mundo irlandés que herdaba como horrorizar ó requintado público urbano londinense. [Written by an explosive and young Anglo-Irish author in the 90s, Martin McDonagh, who had as much desire to provoke the traditional Irish world that he was inheriting as to appal the refined urban London audiences] (Produccións Excéntricas 2013)

In the Galician context, McDonagh is often referred to as “angloirlandés” (Anglo-Irish), a label that may succeed in communicating the duality of the author’s national identity to the general public, yet is loaded with socio-political meanings in the Irish context. Although the problematic delimitation of the term is well-documented (MacCarthy 2004), the majority of the audience are likely to remain unaware of its colonial overtones and accept the simplified image of Irish identity that is laid before them.

The promotional materials and press releases surrounding McDonagh’s plays in Galicia point unequivocally to an Irish origin, with Irish motifs featuring prominently in the case of *Un cranio furado*, Produccións Excéntricas’ take on *A Skull in Connemara*. The main image chosen to represent the play on promotional cards and posters is a skull made up of shamrocks in two contrasting shades of green. With their following production, *Oeste solitario* (*Lonesome West*), Produccións Excéntricas omitted the original title, albeit including a more subdued allusion to it, in the form of its initials (LW). The image selected for the poster is a playing card depicting a “King of Shamrocks”, again resorting to the most formulaic symbol of Ireland, easily recognisable internationally. In both cases, the marketing choices put unambiguous stress on clichéd Irish imagery.

The original title in English appears on posters and programmes in virtually the same size as the title in Galician, drawing attention to the fact that audiences will be confronted with a translated play. However, *Un cranio furado*—literally, “a perforated skull”—erases the geographical reference to Connemara, which would be somewhat obscure for most Galician theatregoers, and replaces it with the suggestion of a violent event. This shift in the title anticipates the underlying mystery present throughout the play—did Mick Dowd kill his wife with a blow to the head? In a sense, by creating the early expectation of a crime, the title sets up the audience to expect a resolution of the mystery surrounding Mick’s possible uxoricide. The cause of Oona Dowd’s death will in actual fact remain unsolved at the end of the play, unless we choose to accept her widower’s declaration of innocence. Indeed, McDonagh shows in his works—whether for stage or screen—a predilection for plot twists and an ambiguous interpretation of characters’ intentionality. According to Patrick Lonergan, this is crucial in making the plays exportable:

[T]his openness to interpretation is the major reason why McDonagh’s work has so effortlessly crossed national and cultural boundaries, making him a truly global playwright. [...] his success only makes sense when we think of McDonagh’s work as functioning not on a page but in theatre (or on a screen)—that is, before an audience. (Lonergan 2012, xvi)

While McDonagh certainly shows an inclination towards reliance on audience interpretation for completeness, this is by no means unique to his works. Perhaps, the aspect that truly sets him apart is the way in which he manipulates our expectations, whether of the characters or of the plot itself, to the point that spectators often find themselves questioning their earlier assumptions. In any case, he eludes demanding from the audience absolute condemnation or forgiveness for the people of Leenane, however questionable their actions may be. Whereas these “people” are often caricatures and their social behaviour can be rather extreme, this “grey” morality grants them a genuinely human dimension.

The Gap and the Craft

In the broad field of translation studies, it is now generally accepted that the translation of dramatic works for performance entails specific difficulties, not least because of the layers of readings that overlap in the journey from source text to target text. The translation scholar Susan Bassnett has demonstrated over the decades a distinct preoccupation with theatre translation, an area which she considers has been by and large neglected both in prescriptive and descriptive approaches. In one of her essays on literary translation, specifically “Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation”, she considers two basic conditions for a translation to achieve an effect on the target culture:

For a translation to have an impact upon the target system, there has to be a gap in the system which reflects a particular need, and the skills of the translator have to be such that the end product is more than merely acceptable. (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, 60)

Although Bassnett is referring to poetry on this occasion, her words can be fittingly applied to the translation of dramatic works. For a production to be viable, it needs to appeal to audiences or, to put it in economic terms, there needs to be a market for it. Likewise, viability relies to a great extent on the knowledge the translator has of the specific requirements of translation for the stage and her awareness of performability. Therefore, the impact of a dramatic translation in the target system can be also measured against these two axes—the gap and the craft.

The “gap” is not necessarily a lacuna or deficiency in the target system waiting to be identified and corrected; we could argue that it is in actual fact the knowledge of the source system that opens a gap in the target system. In the specific case of Martin McDonagh’s plays being adapted into Galician, the gap would correspond to the lack of original dramatic texts in Galician with the

specific dramatic opportunities that the Leenane Trilogy offers. Such a need was not uncovered until the stakeholders involved in McDonagh's incorporation became aware of his work. According to Bassnett, the product of the translator's work has to be "more than merely acceptable". While this can provide a starting point,² we must not forget that the translator is not the only contributor to the performance text and the input of director, actors or even audiences can be equally relevant. Therefore, the awareness of a gap is ultimately produced by an encounter, or even a series of encounters, involving all the participants in the process.

In the course of an interview, the translator Avelino González referred explicitly to his perception of a gap in the Galician dramaturgical system when explaining his interest in the works of Irish playwrights, which started during a visit to a bookshop in London: "O encanto que tiñan estes paisanos é que escribían o que os dramaturgos galegos deberían escribir e non escriben" ["The appeal of those fellows was that they were writing what Galician playwrights should be writing but don't"]. Director Quico Cadaval further explained what McDonagh's works could bring to the Galician stage:

Un territorio onde encontrar realismo pouco mixiricas, sen sentimentalismos, mesturado con elementos grotescos, non querendo atribuírle a Irlanda unha serie de características poéticas e con referencias á modernidade. [A territory where one can find realism that is hardly whining, without sentimentalisms, mixed in with grotesque elements, without a wish to attribute a series of poetic characteristics to Ireland and with references to modernity.] (Cadaval and González, pers.comm.)

The controversial grotesque representations of dysfunctional social interactions in the Irish rural milieu that pervade his works may hold the key for their successful incorporation to the Galician system, where McDonagh's sui generis realism is regarded as full of valuable virtues. With this statement, Cadaval interprets McDonagh's code as a raw realism that makes no attempt to poeticise Ireland, at least not in the allegorical ways pursued by W.B. Yeats and his contemporaries. However, there is clearly a degree of stylisation in McDonagh's stage geographies and this would imply that Ireland is poeticised through the use of clichés of rural life, reactualised by the "references to modernity" identified by Cadaval.

Both González and director Quico Cadaval refer to McDonagh's *A Skull in Connemara* as adhering to a realist convention. This perception permeated the translation, performance and production choices and, in turn, the reception of the play. In Galicia, the prejudice against realistic theatrical modes is rooted in a reaction against the "costumbrista" genre and its stylised depiction of rural life.

In costumbrista plays, the rural setting is often a backdrop—nearly another prop—for events dealing with universals of the human condition, a sort of locus amoenus that does not deeply affect nor is it affected by the characters. In contrast, McDonagh dissociates himself from the costumbrista agenda through realistic conventions with a touch of the dark humour to which TV and film-educated audiences nowadays seem to respond so well, and also by tying the people of Leenane indissolubly to their surroundings, starting with the geographical references in the titles, ranging from the most specific (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*), to the most general (*The Lonesome West*), passing through Connemara.

Indeed, location is far from immaterial in the incorporation process of *A Skull in Connemara* to the Galician system, as the following quote extracted from the Produccións Excéntricas web site suggests:

Os feitos acontecen en Connemara, mais podían pasar en Bergantiños se tivesemos alguén que os soubese escribir. Como non tiñamos, tivo Avelino González que domear en galego aquel bravo inglés que escribiu McDonagh. [“The events occur in Connemara, but they could come to pass in Bergantiños if we had somebody that knew how to write them. Since we didn’t, Avelino González had to tame into Galician the wild English that McDonagh wrote (in)”.] (Produccións Excéntricas 2013)

There is substantial emphasis placed on the fact that Galician authors were unable to provide original texts to match the performative and theatrical opportunities offered by McDonagh’s work. This implication is present not only in the quotes reflected above but also directly addressed by director Quico Cadaval in the course of the same interview, when he refers to “what Galician playwrights should be writing and don’t write” (Cadaval and González, pers.comm.). Avelino González added to Cadaval’s observation his view of how McDonagh’s cultural background gives him “a boldness that we do not dare to have”. This begs the question whether theatre companies or audiences would show the same degree of recognition, or even tolerance, towards similar portrayals of rural life that had originated in Galicia. Would these encounter similar criticisms to those triggered by Martin McDonagh’s work in the Irish context? The acceptability of realism in the Galician system is increased by the fact that the plays in question are translations from a more established source culture that is in many ways deemed more prestigious. Therefore, this example of realism can enjoy a higher level of acceptability as a form incorporated from a prestigious source culture than it would had it emanated from the Galician target system itself.

Martin McDonagh's drama has opened new creative pathways on the Galician stage. The translations of his works have initiated a sub-genre of realism previously unexploited in the Galician system—namely, a theatrical form that could be performed in a naturalist mode, although constantly bordering on the caricature, set in the rural milieu yet distanced from the “costumbrista” tradition, and framing sinister events in a misleading comedic manner. The status occupied by these translated texts in the target system is symptomatic of the status occupied by translation in the Galician dramatic canon. When explaining his “Laws of translational behaviour”, Gideon Toury states that the more peripheral the status of translation in a given culture, “the more translation will accommodate itself to established models and repertoires” (Toury 1995, 271). The place occupied by the *sui generis* realism cultivated by McDonagh in the Galician context and the acceptability enjoyed by *Un cranio furado* reflect the central role played by translation in this particular target system. At present, translation is considered in the Galician context as a very legitimate source of creative material for theatre practitioners. However, this was not always the case and the debate around the issue of translation was still very intense in the 1970s. Whereas many stakeholders advocated the legitimacy of supplementing the Galician corpus by means of translated plays, other sectors regarded translation as an inappropriate strategy in the process towards establishing a national theatrical canon (Pazó 2007). This controversy derived from the sociolinguistic situation, namely the minorised status of the Galician language and the divergent approaches to broadening its contexts of use. For the critics of translation, only original creations in Galician could contribute to the establishment of a Galician dramatic canon. Toury's Law of growing standardization states that “in translation, source-text textemes tend to be converted into target-language (or target culture) repertoremes” (Toury 1995, 268). The uncontroversial and successful incorporation of McDonagh's works seems to indicate that the target system does not require source texts to accommodate themselves to forms already present in the target culture. However, this may be down to the specific characteristics of *A Skull in Connemara*, rather than a general reflection of attitudes towards translation in the Galician system.

Taming Irishness for the Galician Stage

When questioned about the weight of the plays' “Irishness” in the decision to produce Martin McDonagh, both Avelino González and Quico Cadaval respond initially by downplaying this specific factor. However, as they developed their

various arguments, it became increasingly clear that it is not an aspect that can be overlooked. Indeed, Avelino González admits to being attracted to Martin McDonagh's works because they were classified as Irish drama in the bookshop where he first found them and, as he declares, "the myth of Ireland and Galicia reappeared in me again" (Regromou en min o mito de Galicia e Irlanda). In his own words, when he read McDonagh his reaction was to think "it is us" [Galicians] ("Somos nós"). When Produccións Excéntricas decide to stage the play, it is according to Cadaval for essentially pragmatic reasons—the company's permanent members are two male actors and *A Skull in Connemara* required them to cast just two more performers. Nevertheless, they revert to that powerful Galicia-Ireland connection: "Inflúe na librería pero non á hora de escoller as obras. É algo que se aproveita despois, porque ese imaxinario que eu tiña, o ten tamén o público" [It's influential in the bookshop but not when it comes to choosing the plays. It is something you make the most of at a later stage because that imaginery that I had, the audience also has it] (Cadaval and González, pers.comm.)

The way in which the Leenane Trilogy has been marketed as Irish drama in the Galician context is particularly noticeable in the case of *A Skull in Connemara*. The visual language is unequivocally evocative of the Irish brand. In addition, the original title and the author's name feature very prominently on the promotional materials, highlighting the fact that we are faced with a translation and encouraging audiences to assume the "Irishness" of the play.

In his work *The Translator's Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti defines translation in the following terms: "Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader" (Venuti 1995, 18-19). He identifies a predominant tendency to fluent translation in Anglo-American culture, where the public has—in his opinion—become accustomed to translations that read like works originally produced in the target language, hence the idea of the translator's invisibility.

By producing the illusion of transparency, a fluent translation masquerades as true semantic equivalence when it in fact inscribes the foreign text with a partial interpretation, partial to English language values, reducing if not simply excluding the very difference that translation is called on to convey.
(21)

Venuti sees domesticating translation strategies utilised to achieve fluency and transparency as examples of the "ethnocentric violence" exercised by the target culture on the source culture. The alternative he presents as "highly desirable today" is a foreignizing approach to translation that "signifies the difference of

the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language.” (20)

When Venuti discusses the “violent effects” (19) intrinsic to the translation process, he does so from the perspective of an established, even dominant, culture. Yet, the concepts of domesticating and foreignizing translation can only be applied to cultural manifestations in minorised languages such as Galician with some nuances. Indeed, there are many instances of domestication in the strategies followed in the incorporation of Irish (or Irish-themed) dramatic works to the Galician system, a number of which can be recognised in the adaptation of *A Skull in Connemara*. However, the aim is not to conceal the translation process as such, since the translational aspect plays a crucial role in the acceptability of the sub-genre of this piece as explained above. On the contrary, instead of silencing the foreign quality of the plays or suppressing cultural references, the perceived “Irishness” of the incorporated cultural products is often brought to the fore and high-lighted by utilising conventions that are deeply set in the collective imaginary of the target culture, whether consciously or unconsciously. This treatment of culturally coded elements, exemplified by Produccións Excéntricas’ adaptation of *A Skull in Connemara*, requires another angle of Venuti’s postulates on the invisibility of the translator from the perspective he associates with English-speaking cultural contexts.

As opposed to creating the illusion that a play belongs to the target culture by erasing any trace of otherness, the preservation of foreign cultural references challenges the audience to confront aspects of a different cultural reality that they are probably not familiar with. Conversely, theatre-goers are also presented with additional references to the source culture easily recognisable to them. To an extent, this domesticating strategy, similar to the process of exoticisation of vernacular networks critiqued by Berman (2000, 294), represents a balancing act to facilitate the play’s connection with its audiences by utilising symbols that have been internalised in the collective consciousness. In the case of *Un cranio furado/A Skull in Connemara*, these include the use of Irish traditional music and the display of clichéd Irish iconography on the stage. For instance, the decorative elements in Mick Dowd’s house include a calendar depicting John Wayne characterised as Sean Thornton in *The Quiet Man*, newspaper cut-outs of rugby games and a picture of St Patrick. These are not necessarily characteristic of an Irish country kitchen but they fulfil their purpose because, in the eyes of the target audience, they are clearly evocative of Ireland. When queried about his stance in relation to realistic representation

and characterisation, director Quico Cadaval shows a very pragmatic attitude towards recreation at the service of a vision:

Que funcione é suficiente. O problema do teatro é un problema de convención: canto antes consigas que o espectador acepte, antes empezamos. [...] Canto máis naturalista sexa o escenario, máis vai mirar a xente o que lle falta. Hai que acadar ese equilibrio entre naturalista e simbólico, no teatro ten que haber certa estilización. [If it works, that's enough. The problem in theatre is a problem of convention: the sooner you get the audience to accept, the sooner we get started. [...] The more naturalist a set is the more people are going to look at what is missing. One must find that balance between naturalist and symbolic, in theatre there must be some stylisation] (Cadaval and González, pers.comm.)

The issue of spectator's acceptance is also present in the construction of the characters. For instance, Thomas Hanlon—a gard “in full uniform”, as stipulated in McDonagh's stage directions—is incarnated in *Un cranio furado* by Víctor Mosqueira, perfectly attired as a “policía local”. He is immediately identifiable as police, on account of his uniform and his gun. Had the choice been to characterise him as an Irish garda for the sake of accuracy and realism, the audience would have soon wondered where his gun was, unfamiliar with the fact that the Gardaí are for the most part an unarmed force. Another matter—certainly worthy of further exploration—would be whether this decision derives from a lack of knowledge of the Irish cultural context or it is a consciously incorporated “impossible equivalent”, to use John London's words. As well as raising questions with regards to the issue of authorship and fidelity, London illustrates the long-lasting effects of the transformation of cultural references on the reception of translated dramatic works. (London 2010, 202-6).

In the translation of drama for the stage, the concept of performability replaces the idea of readability and this imposes a series of specific demands to be met by the translator. Certainly, the actors must be able to deliver the text and this requires a certain degree of “naturalness of expression”, to use Eugene Nida's words (Munday 2001, 42). As per present day conventions, the translator of the performance text should remain invisible. In realistic theatrical modes, the invisibility of the actors is also desirable, since they must give way to the characters, while ensuring a convincing delivery of their lines. This combination of fluidity and fluency required of the performance text hinders any attempt at the foreignizing strategies advocated by Lawrence Venuti.

Avelino González's attitude towards theatre translation exhibits a marked emphasis on performability, speakability and the overall dramaturgical viability of the texts he produces. In his own words, the work of the translator is “at the

service of a concept of *mise en scène*” (ao servizo dun concepto de posta en escena) (Cadaval and González, pers.comm.). His ideas resonate with Hans J. Vermeer’s *skopos* theory, as the function of the translation—in this case, performance—provides the rationale behind the linguistic choices. In fact, lexical alternatives are often favoured on the basis of feedback from performers obtained during the rehearsal process. González’s working method favours this creative dialogue—when he comes across a play that he sees potential in, he prepares a draft translation which he circulates amongst prospective companies. If there is interest, he then proceeds to work on a performance text which is by no means a definitive version but rather a malleable material for the director and the performers. There is no doubt that his experience as an actor informs his approach to translating a dramatic text, as does the fact that he is not a translator by trade. In his own words: “I am not a translator, I find myself translating” (Eu non son traductor, atópome traducindo). When he reads a play, he does so from the perspective of a performer, with its advantages and limitations. Whilst he has the benefit of an awareness of what works on stage and benefits from the opportunity to closely collaborate with the performers, his methodology relies to a great extent on an intuitive identification of phraseology and context-specific elements.

While the use of Irish symbols in the adaptation of *A Skull in Connemara* can be linked to the above-mentioned mythical connection with the Irish nation within the Galician context, these stereotypes are also commonplace at a global level as markers of the Irish brand. Although different in many ways from the early 20th century identification utilised by the incipient nationalist movement in Galicia, there is a common strategic aim in the utilisation of visual elements, as well as in the manner in which the play is framed. Several production choices suggest that the success of the play relies on convincing the audience of the proximity of Ireland, an idea that is expressed in the following terms on the hand programs distributed at performances: “Os feitos acontecen nun país de chan ácido e alta pluviosidade. Pode ser Connemara como pode ser Bergantiños” [The events take place in a country with acidic soil and high pluviosity. It can be Connemara or it can be Bergantiños] (Produccións Excéntricas 2013).

This quote paraphrases the text from the company’s web site reproduced above. There, we find a revealing choice of words—Avelino González did not just translate, he “tamed” (“domou”) Martin McDonagh’s language. The implication is that the source text contained an irreverent essence that the target culture lacks and desires, a trait that can only be taken by force. The way

in which this act of appropriation is presented echoes Venuti's words on the violence of the translation process, despite the supposed affinity between the two nations and the recurring attribution of prestige to the source culture.

Overall, the approach taken by Avelino González and Producións Excéntricas has resulted in a successful production. Their realistic reading of McDonagh's works, the codes of identification with the Irish context and the linguistic choices have connected with both audiences and critics, judging from the responses it has obtained in the media, reviews, blogs, etc. Whereas the Irish may see a caricatured representation of Ireland through a compendium of stereotypical features, non-Irish audiences will just identify Ireland and Galician audiences may also recognise themselves. I interpret the distillation of Irish identity present in *Un cranio furado* not so much as an attempt to open the eyes of the Galician public to a different culture but as an introspective view into how Galicians perceive their own ethnicity, their own national identity. It works not because it's about the other but because it is about the "us".

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Notes

¹ Despite the changes in legislation carried out during the democratic era, language-related prejudices and stereotyped associations continue to exist, raising questions not only about the efficacy of linguistic policies but also about the rationale behind them (Freixeiro Mato 1997, 137) .

² Avelino González' translations of Martin McDonagh's play are in actual fact the result of his collaboration with directors and performers, rather than a starting point for production work, , as described in the final section.