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Fall / Automne 2003

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Revue Irish Studies
canadienne d'études
irlandaises

A photograph of a grassy hill under a clear blue sky. In the foreground, large, three-dimensional red letters spell out 'COOLOCKLAND'. The letters are arranged in a slightly curved line across the grass. In the background, there are several young trees of varying heights and a concrete wall. The overall scene is bright and clear.

COOLOCKLAND

Canadian Journal of Irish Studies • Revue canadienne d'études irlandaises
Volume 29, Number 2 • Volume 29, numéro 2 Fall 2003 • Automne 2003

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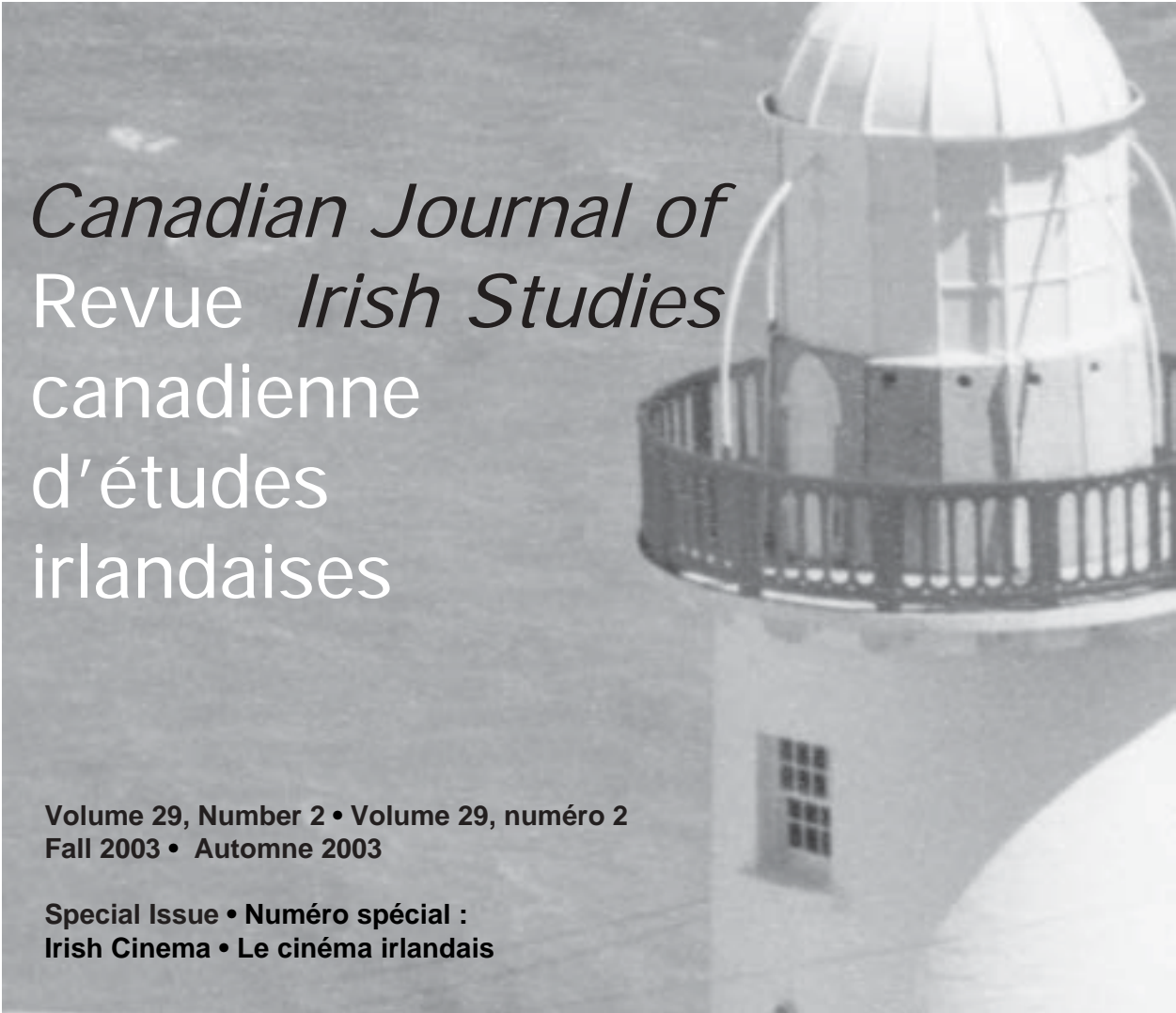
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Canadian Journal of
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Volume 29, Number 2 • Volume 29, numéro 2
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The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies is the official publication of the Canadian Association for Irish Studies and is published two times a year, from the University of Alberta.

CJIS publishes articles, reviews, interviews, and creative expression, in English, French or Irish, which promote an understanding and appreciation of Irish history and culture in their broadest terms. It has a special focus on the Irish experience in Canada and in the other countries of the Diaspora. It encourages a variety of critical and methodological perspectives and welcomes in particular multi- and interdisciplinary approaches. Articles should be aimed at both an academic and the interested lay reader, be written in an accessible and engaging style, and represent a new contribution to scholarship in Irish or Canadian Irish Studies. All articles are submitted to two referees before publication.

Submissions are currently being accepted for the following special issue:

Irish-Canadian Perspectives

Contact: Jason King
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Deadline: 15 June 2004

General issues will recommence once these special issues are published and a new editor has been appointed.

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La revue canadienne d'études irlandaises, revue officielle de l'Association canadienne d'études irlandaises, est publiée deux fois par année, à l'University of Alberta.

RCÉI publie des articles, des entretiens, des recensions et des œuvres de création, rédigés en anglais, français ou gaélique irlandais, qui favorisent la compréhension et l'appréciation de l'histoire et de la culture irlandais en général. La revue se concentre particulièrement sur l'expérience des Irlandais au Canada et dans d'autres pays de la Diaspora; elle encourage une variété de perspectives méthodologiques et critiques et accueille favorablement les approches interdisciplinaires et multidisciplinaires. Les articles s'adressent à un lectorat tant spécialisé que profane. Ils doivent être rédigés dans un style accessible et engageant et représenter un nouvel apport pour l'avancement des connaissances en études irlandaises ou canado-irlandaises. Tout article sera soumis à deux évaluateurs avant de publication.

Les soumissions pour le numéro spéciale suivant sont demandées :

Les perspectives canado-irlandaises

Contact Jason King, NUI/Maynooth, jkingk@yahoo.com
Date de limite: 15 juin 2004

Les numéros généraux recommenceront après l'appointement d'un nouveau rédacteur.

Prière d'adresser la correspondance éditoriale générale à :

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The Canadian Association for Irish Studies was formally established in 1973 to promote the study of Irish culture in Canada and, in particular, to attract young scholars to the field of Irish Studies. The Association published the semi-annual *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, and a semi-annual newsletter. It organises an annual conference at one of Canada's universities (and, from time to time, in Ireland), bringing together scholars, students, cultural figures and members of the public to discuss a variety of topics and to celebrate Irish culture and heritage.

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L'Association canadienne d'études irlandaises a été officiellement fondée en 1973 pour promouvoir l'étude de la culture irlandaise au Canada et en particulier, pour inciter les étudiants à se diriger vers les études irlandaises. L'Association publie deux fois par an une revue intitulée la *Revue canadienne d'études irlandaises* ainsi qu'un Bulletin de nouvelles. Elle organise une conférence annuelle dans une université canadienne (et, de temps en temps, irlandaise), rassemblant ainsi universitaires, étudiants, personnalités culturelles et le public pour discuter de tout un éventail de sujets et pour faire l'éloge de la culture et du patrimoine irlandais.

L'adhésion annuelle à l'Association donne droit à deux numéros de la *Revue canadienne d'études irlandaises* et du Bulletin des nouvelles.

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The Butcher Boy

Jerry WHITE

From the Coordinating Editor Du directeur générale

CONTINUING IRISH STUDIES IN CANADA

CONTINUER LES ÉTUDES IRLANDAISES AU CANADA

This is the first

issue of the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies / Revue canadienne d'études irlandaises* to be edited from the University of Alberta. We shall strive to uphold the high standards set by Michael Keneally at Concordia University these past few years, but no doubt readers will note some changes.

In addition to slight changes made to CJIS/RCÉI's design, we will be, for the time being, publishing the journal as a series of guest-edited special issues. The next issue will be edited by the Culture of the Cities project, a major international research initiative with Canadian offices at York and Concordia Universities. That will be followed by issues on the 19th century (edited by Julia Wright, who holds a Canada Research Chair at Wilfred Laurier University) and on new perspectives in Irish-Canadian literature (edited by Kevin James of the University of Guelph and Jason King of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth). Following these issues, we hope to have installed a new editor, and will resume publishing general issues.

There are many changes introduced by Prof. Keneally, however, which we hope to continue. We shall strive to make the journal as visual as possible, in keeping with important new trends in scholarship in Irish Studies. We will also retain the "Profiles of Irish Canadians" feature.

And keeping with CJIS/RCÉI tradition, we hope to make the book review section as lively as possible. Jason King will remain in charge of this from his post at NUI/Maynooth, but we really want to encourage the membership to keep us aware of new publications in their field of expertise.

We would also like to publish more articles in French, and will also welcome contributions in Irish.

We hope, in short, that CJIS/RCÉI will remain an important part of the scholarly life of Canada, in addition to taking part in the international conversation that is Irish Studies. We hope also that you will let us know how we are doing on this project.

Ceci est le premier

numéro de *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies / Revue canadienne d'études irlandaises* à être éditée par l'University of Alberta. Nous nous efforcerons de maintenir le niveau de qualité de ces dernières années que Michael Keneally de l'Université Concordia a insufflé à la revue. Il est toutefois certain que les lecteurs noteront des changements.

En ajout aux changements mineurs de la mise en forme de CJIS/RCÉI, nous publierons pour le moment la revue sous la forme de numéros spéciaux édités par un invité de marque. Le prochain numéro sera édité par le projet Culture des Cités, une initiative de recherche internationale majeure qui a des bureaux dans les universités canadiennes de York et de Concordia. Il sera suivi par des numéros sur le 19^e siècle (édité par Julia Wright, qui tient une chaire canadienne de recherche au Wilfried Laurier University) et sur les nouvelles perspectives de la littérature canadienne-irlandaise (édité par Kevin James de l'Université de Guelph et Jason King du National University of Ireland / Maynooth). Pour la suite des événements, nous espérons qu'un nouvel éditeur sera en place et renouera avec l'édition de numéros génériques.

Beaucoup de changements ont été apportés par le professeur Keneally que nous espérons cependant poursuivre. Nous nous efforcerons de rendre la revue aussi visuelle que possible et de continuer l'exploration de nouvelles approches académiques aux Etudes Irlandaises. Nous reprendrons aussi le concept des « Profils de Canadiens irlandais ».

En respect aussi avec la tradition CJIS/RCÉI, nous tenterons de rendre la section des recensions aussi vivante que possible. Jason King restera en charge de cela depuis son poste à NUI/Maynooth, mais nous voulons vraiment encourager les adhérents à nous tenir au courant des nouvelles publications dans leur domaine d'expertise.

Nous aimerions aussi publier plus d'articles en français et accueillir aussi des contributions en gaelique irlandais.

Nous désirerions, pour faire plus court, que CJIS/RCÉI reste, en plus de sa position dans les discussions internationales sur les Études Irlandaises, un élément important de la vie scholastique canadienne. Nous espérons aussi que vous nous ferez part de vos réactions dans cette entreprise.

Notes Sur *Contributors* Notes

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Jennifer CORNELL is Associate Professor of English at Oregon State University in Corvallis. She won the 1994 Drue Heinz Prize for her collection of short fiction, *Departures* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995) which was published in Britain and Ireland as *All There Is* (Brandon Press, 1995). She is the author of several articles on the representation of Northern Ireland in British television drama.

Dana HEARNE teaches at John Abbot College, in Montréal. Her research deals with literature, culture, history, Irish Studies, and feminist studies.

Cheryl TEMPLE-HERR is Professor of English/Cinema and Comparative Literature at the University of Iowa. She has published widely on Irish literature and culture. Her most recent books are *Critical Regionalism and Cultural Studies: From Ireland to the American Midwest* (University of Florida Press, 1996) and *Ireland into Film: The Field* (Cork University Press, 2002).

Keith HOPPER is a Junior Research Fellow at St Cross College, Oxford. He is the author of *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist* (Cork University Press, 1995), and is currently completing a full-length study of the films and fictions of Neil Jordan. He is text editor of *Ireland into Film*, a series of twelve critical monographs on adaptations of Irish literature (Cork University Press/Film Institute of Ireland).

Brian McILROY is Professor of Film Studies in the Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia. His most recent book is *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland* (Steveston Press, 2001).

Celia NICHOLS is studying History and Film at the University of Alberta.

Éilís Ní DHUIBHNE was educated in Dublin, at UCD and at the University of Copenhagen. She has a BA, an M. Phil in Middle English, Old and Middle Irish and a Ph.D in Irish Folklore. She has published four collections of short stories, four novels, five books for children, two plays and much non-fiction work. Most of her original work is in English, with a novel and two plays in Irish. Her fiction has been translated into German, Italian, French, Russian and Slovenian.

Des O'RAWE teaches film studies at the Queen's University of Belfast. His articles on Irish Cinema have appeared in the *Irish Studies Review* and the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*.

Jerry WHITE is Assistant Professor of Film Studies at the University of Alberta, and President of the Canadian Association for Irish Studies. He is co-editor (with William Beard) of *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980* (University of Alberta Press, 2002) and editor of *24 Frames: Canada* (Wallflower Press, 2005).

Ruth BARTON est titulaire de la bourse de recherche O'Kane au centre d'études cinématographiques à l'University College Dublin. Elle est auteur de *Jim Sheridan: Framing the Nation* (Liffey Press, 2002) et du livre à paraître *Irish National Cinema* (Routledge, 2004). Elle est co-éditeur avec Harvey O'Brien de *Keeping It Real: Themes and Issues in Contemporary Irish Films and television* (Wallflower Press, 2004).

Jennifer CORNELL est professeure associée au département d'anglais de l'Oregon State University at Corvallis. Elle a gagné en 1994 le prix Drue Heinz pour son recueil de nouvelles *Departures* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995) publié en Irlande et en Angleterre sous le titre *All There is* (Brandon Press, 1995). Elle est l'auteur de plusieurs articles sur la représentation de l'Irlande du Nord dans les fictions télévisées britanniques.

Dana HEARNE enseigne au Collège John Abbot, à Montréal. Sa recherche est basée sur la littérature, la culture, l'histoire, les études irlandaises et les études féministes.

Cheryl TEMPLE-HERR est professeur d'anglais, de cinéma et de littérature comparée à l'University of Iowa. Auteur de nombreuses publications sur la littérature irlandaise et sur la culture, ses ouvrages les plus récents sont *Critical Regionalism and Cultural Studies: From Ireland to the American Midwest* (University of Florida Press, 1996) et *Ireland into Film: The Field* (Cork University Press, 2002).

Keith HOPPER est titulaire d'une bourse de recherche au St. Cross college à Oxford. Il est l'auteur de *Flann O'Brien: The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist* (Cork University Press) et termine en ce moment une étude complète des films et des fictions de Neil Jordan. Il est éditeur du texte *Ireland into Film*, une série de douze monographies critiques sur les adaptations au cinéma de la littérature irlandaise (Cork University Press / Film Institute of Ireland).

Brian McILROY est professeur d'études cinématographiques à l'University of British Columbia. Son ouvrage le plus récent est *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland* (Steveston Press, 2001).

Celia NICHOLS est étudiante en histoire et en études cinématographiques à l'University of Alberta.

Éilís Ní DHUIBHNE a fait ses études à Dublin, à UCD et à l'Université de Copenhague. Il est titulaire d'un BA, d'une maîtrise en philologie sur l'anglais et l'irlandais du Moyen-Age, et d'un Ph.D en folklore irlandais. Elle a publié quatre collections de nouvelles, quatre romans, cinq livres pour enfants, deux pièces de théâtre et beaucoup d'autres travaux non fictionnels. La plupart de son travail est en anglais mis à part un roman et deux pièces de théâtre en irlandais. Sa fiction a été traduite en allemand, en italien, en français, en russe et en slovénien.

Des O'RAWE enseigne les études cinématographiques au Queens University Belfast. Ses articles sur le cinéma irlandais ont été publiés dans *Irish Studies Review* et le *Revue canadienne d'études irlandaises*.

Jerry WHITE est professeur adjoint dans la programme d'études cinématographiques à l'University of Alberta et président de l'Association Canadienne des Études Irlandaises. Il est co-éditeur de *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980* (University of Alberta Press, 2002) et éditeur de *24 Frames: Canada* (Wallflower Press, 2005).

Resumés

Cheryl TEMPLE-HERR : « Re-imagining *Man of Aran*: The 'First Wave' of Irish Cinema »

Cet essai tente d'intégrer *Man of Aran* dans un genre cinématographique international de méditation sur la vie insulaire. Ces films insulaires sont caractérisés par des thèmes tels que le désir simultané du départ et du retour et un intérêt notable pour l'authenticité. La ré-examen de ce film dans cette perspective et à travers le concept d'*habitus* pourrait enrichir de façon significative les arguments cruciaux des études sur le film irlandais.

Keith HOPPER : « Hairy on the Inside : Re-visiting Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* »

Bien que Neil Jordan ait déjà fait l'objet de nombreuses études privilégiant notamment son intérêt formel pour le fantastique et l'allégorie, cet essai tente de démontrer que le film illustre le concept de « théâtre de la forme » de Fredric Jameson en ce que la forme de *The Company of Wolves* de Jordan (1984) est aussi politique que son contenu. Après un retour sur l'histoire de la production du film, le film est abordé sous les aspects du conte et de l'incarnation féminine traditionnelle de l'Irlande, la « Dark Rosaleen ».

Jennifer CORNELL : « Walking with Beasts : Gary Mitchell and the Representation of Ulster Loyatism »

L'auteur de cet essai se penche sur la carrière de Gary Mitchell et plus précisément à travers les questions de la représentation des protestants dans le cinéma irlandais. Une attention toute particulière est portée sur *As the Beast Sleeps* (2001) adapté de la pièce de théâtre du même nom de Mitchell. Une lecture attentive du film permet à l'auteur d'explorer les implications de la visibilité croissante de Mitchell non seulement en tant qu'artiste mais aussi en tant que porte-parole du protestantisme en Irlande du Nord et de son rôle dans la diffusion de l'image du loyalisme en dehors des frontières de l'Irlande du Nord.

Jerry WHITE : « The Scandinavian Connection : Irish Cinema as a 'small' National Cinema »

Cet essai propose une réflexion sur la nécessité d'une ré-orientation des structures de comparaison pour le cinéma irlandais qui est à la croisée des chemins au même titre que d'autres industries cinématographiques nationales. La comparaison avec le cinéma scandinave exploré dans sa diversité se révèle riche en enseignements. La discussion porte aussi sur la production cinématographique et sur l'histoire cinématographique en gaélique irlandais ainsi que sur la différence entre les notions de cinéma européen et « cinéma d'art ».

Ruth BARTON : « The Ireland They Dream Of : *Eireville, Coolockland, and the Appropriation of Science Fiction and Fantasy Narratives in Short Irish Filmmaking* »

L'auteur de cet essai porte notre attention sur la production récente de courts métrages de science-fiction qui reprennent un certain nombre de courants discursifs dans la culture irlandaise contemporaine, et plus particulièrement dans la culture de la jeunesse irlandaise que la production locale a négligés. Une attention toute particulière est portée sur les qualités spécifiques du court métrage, dont ces films annoncent l'arrivée sur le devant de la scène dans leur forme dramatique spécifique.

Brian McILROY : « Hollywood East? A Cautionary Tale of Irish Film Distribution in North America »

Cet essai apporte un certain nombre d'arguments et de réflexions sur les raisons de la difficulté de distribution des films narratifs en Amérique du Nord ainsi que les raisons pour lesquelles les films irlandais ou ayant un rapport quelconque avec l'Irlande ne reçoivent qu'une attention très modeste. La discussion porte sur différents schémas de production et de distribution et sur les résultats au box-office d'un certain nombre de films irlandais récents tels que *Bloody Sunday* (2001) dont la critique positive au festival du film de Sundance a soulevé des interrogations sur d'importantes questions telles que la promotion et la réception.

Abstracts

Cheryl TEMPLE-HERR: "Re-Imagining *Man of Aran*: The 'First Wave' of Irish Cinema"

This essay argues that *Man of Aran* is part of an international film genre that meditates on island life. Island films are characterised by themes such as the simultaneous desire to leave and return, and interest in authenticity. Crucial arguments in Irish Film Studies would be enriched by a re-examination of the film through this lens, paying particular attention to the concept of *habitus*. Close readings of crucial sequences are offered to support this argument for an interpretive re-framing.

Keith HOPPER: "Hairy on the Inside: Re-visiting Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves*"

Although Neil Jordan has been the subject of numerous auteurist readings, often privileging Jordan's formal interest in fantasy and allegory, this essay seeks to argue that the film illustrates Fredric Jameson's concept of "drama of form," showing that Jordan's 1984 film *The Company of Wolves*' form is as political as its content. After discussion of the film's production history, the film is discussed both in terms of fairy tale and in terms of "Dark Rosaleen," the traditional female embodiment of Ireland.

Jennifer CORNELL: "Walking With Beasts: Gary Mitchell and the representation of Ulster Loyatism"

This essay examines the career of Gary Mitchell, particularly in terms of ongoing questions about representations of Protestants in Irish cinema. Particular attention is paid to the 2001 film *As the Beast Sleeps*, adapted from Mitchell's play of the same title. Through a close reading of that film, the paper explores the implications of Mitchell's increasing visibility, both as an artist and as a spokesperson for Ulster Protestantism, for the image of Loyatism outside Northern Ireland.

Jerry WHITE: "The Scandinavian Connection: Irish Cinema as a 'small' national cinema"

This essay argues for a re-shifting of comparative frameworks for Irish cinema, which stands at a crossroads along with other small national cinemas. The cinemas of Scandinavia are offered as a particularly fruitful point of comparison, and there is also some discussion of filmmaking and film history in Irish Gaelic, and a consideration of the difference between notions of European cinema and "Art Cinema."

Ruth BARTON: "The Ireland They Dream Of: *Eireville, Coolockland, and the Appropriation of Science Fiction and Fantasy Narratives in Short Irish Filmmaking*"

This essay argues that recent short science fiction films emblemise a number of significant discursive strains in contemporary Irish culture, particularly in contemporary Irish youth culture that, by and large, indigenous filmmaking has neglected to address. Particular attention is paid to the specific qualities of the short film, as these films announce the coming of age of the short film as a specific dramatic form. There is also attention to the role that films in Irish Gaelic have played in the development of the form.

Brian McILROY: "Hollywood East? A cautionary tale of Irish film distribution in North America"

This essay provides a number of arguments, reasons and reflections upon why the distribution of narrative films is so challenging in North America and why only certain kinds of Irish and Irish-related material achieve a modest degree of attention. There is discussion of different patterns of production and distribution, and of the box-office results of a number of recent Irish films, including *Bloody Sunday* (2001), whose favourable showing at the Sundance Film Festival brings many important issues around promotion and reception to light.

Guest Editor's Introduction

THE FIELD OF IRISH CINEMA

In editing this special issue on motion pictures relating to

Ireland, I have been given an opportunity to review my own nearly 20-year association with the subject. When I first began seriously researching Irish film in the mid 1980s, it was a very lonely experience, with little prospect of capturing anyone's attention, given the tidal waves of Irish literature and literary studies, compared to which film production and film studies appeared as a minor stream. Also, there was no solid infrastructure to aid research, nor much in the way of financial support for Irish filmmakers to realize their own visions. At times, it felt as if I were writing on colonial flotsam and jetsam drifting on the sea of Anglophone culture.

Much has changed, particularly in the last ten years with the re-establishment of the Irish Film Board in 1993, and the founding a year previous to that of the Irish Film Centre in Dublin, with its two cinemas, library and archive. And across the border, the later establishment of the Northern Ireland Film Council contributed to the hope in that troubled land. As Rod Stoneman points out in this issue, the second Irish Film Board has been involved with up to twelve feature films each year for the last ten years. Another sign of a rite of passage is the Lifetime Achievement Award presented in 2003 to Neil Jordan by the Irish Film and Television Academy, an organization that now boasts 450 members.

Irish film studies has emerged strongly in the last two decades, with a slew of books, many cited in the bibliographies of this special issue's essays. But it would be remiss not to mention the pioneering and engaged work in Ireland of Liam O'Leary in the 1940s, Proinsias Ó Conluain in the 1950s, Louis Marcus and George Morrison in the 1960s, and Ciaran Carty in the 1970s. Yet, it was in the United States in the 1970s that the first Ph.D. dissertations on Irish cinema were written, and it was also there through the journal *Eire-Ireland* and through commentators such as James MacKillop that the subject gained international respectability. For the Irish film historian, there was a recurring theme among writers and intellectuals from the 1940s to the 1980s – "Towards an Irish Film Industry." What should it look like? How can it be achieved and sustained? What should its proper relationship be with Hollywood and the British film industry? Should it be a national cinema or a popular cinema? What role should Irish (and British) Television play? What role should Government take? Ironically perhaps, we are

still grappling with these questions as filmmakers and critics, even now that there is an industry in Ireland, one that services both off-shore productions and home-grown ones.

The essays and interviews in this volume, completed and conducted in 2003, engage with these concerns and many others. Cheryl Temple-Herr and Keith Hopper revisit Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* and Neil Jordan's *The Company of Wolves* respectively, films thus far that have been bracketed and understood in a certain way, and both writers bring different theoretical strategies to bear to rethink these films' effects. Jennifer Cornell examines Gary Mitchell's provocative and timely *As the Beast Sleeps*, a television drama that confronts the new situation working class loyalists now find themselves experiencing in Northern Ireland. Jerry White argues for a distinctive Irish cinema to emerge by taking the example of other successful small European nations. Ruth Barton turns to genre theory and postmodernism to explore a challenging selection of recent Irish short films within the Science Fiction genre. In my own essay, I try to raise issues of distribution and exhibition in the selling of Irish films in the North American market. Interviews with Rod Stoneman conducted by myself, and with Kevin Rockett conducted by Des O'Rawe round out the issue, along with a brief history and celebration of Montreal's Cinégaël.

The future of Irish Film and Screen studies appears to be very positive. This issue does not even begin to address the long history of Irish documentary filmmaking, nor the more recent animation and experimental work, and this is also not the place to quibble over the differences between television drama and film narratives. The digital era may finally relegate film to historians, but there seems to be an avid interest in Ireland and the Irish on screen – my own online Irish Cinema and Culture course at UBC runs three times a year, with forty-five students in each section. A quick "googling" of Irish film courses brings back a respectable number of hits. Many students are embarked on master's and doctoral studies within the discipline, and an increasing number of academics are attracted to this field of study. I hope this special issue of *CJIS* will further advance that interest in Canada and abroad.

Re-Imagining *Man of Aran*

THE 'FIRST WAVE' OF IRISH CINEMA

This essay revisits the critique

of Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934) central to the first wave of academic Irish film criticism. In contrast to the received view, I position *Man of Aran* as part of an international film genre that meditates on island life. In island films, place is construed as *human* geography, and the emphasis falls on socially specific practices and traditional behaviors. Viewing Flaherty's film from this perspective re-opens the possibility of analysis for films that the Irish academy has deployed, in the main, ideologically. Recent film conferences have addressed the need for new approaches to film culture in Ireland. In my view, the next move is to trade an insistence on a national cinematic approach that privileges political ideology for a Bourdieuan analysis in which bodily hexis and contextual habitus are brought forward to link moments in global cinema culture.

The resulting critique of embodiment and cultural embeddedness inevitably situates Irish films in ways that attend to but also exceed the national. Drawing on larger human geographical frames of reference not only avoids the cul-de-sac of the national cinema debate and its privileging of ideological critique but also directs our attention to the medium of film without returning to a purely aesthetic analysis. The specific axis that I explore, then, may be described as a convergence of camerawork with the individual actor's body and the habitus in and through which actions take on cultural meaning. Such a reading remains politically attuned without becoming trapped in discussions about national identity and nostalgic readings thereof.

Such a reading also points the way towards a feminist film criticism, which has been strikingly absent in Irish cinema culture.

In 1993, when the Institute for Cinema and Culture held a contemporary Irish film symposium, the assistant in charge of advertising asked me to provide a still of a "generic scene in Irish film." What came to mind was an individual standing on a beach. A reader may think that I was referencing *Man of Aran*, but what actually occurred to me was the end of *Lamb* (1986), where the priest, having kidnapped a boy to rescue both of them from the cul-de-sac of life in a Catholic industrial school, takes him to a beach, allows the boy to play in the surf for the first time in his life, and then drowns him. Although Pat O'Connor's

Lamb has a number of cinematic problems, it captures the feeling, so prominent in Irish movies of a certain vintage, that there is simply no place to go, that geography and behavior cannot be separated.

The issue of staying or going is never far off in the genre that I think of as "island films." By this term I mean movies like Alfred Hitchcock's *The Manxman* (1929), Jenny Brown's *The Rugged Island* (1934), Werner Kissling's *Eriskay* (1935), Michael Powell's *The Edge of the World* (1937), Richard Bird's *Men of Ireland* (1938), David MacDonald's *The Brothers* (1947), Clive Rees's *When the Whales Came* (1989), John Sayles's film *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994), and yes, Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran*. Taken together, such films (and many island scenes in world cinema) carry on a fascinating conversation about what happens when land and sea meet one another – about rootedness and entrapment, tradition and loss, nature and society, geography and behavior.

In island films, when one leaves, part of one wants to return. When one stays, part of one yearns to leave. In either case, the resulting emotional struggle inflects the depiction of traditional practices and mores on the island in question. Ambivalence is thus the dynamic heart of a coherent body of work created not only by Irish filmmakers but also (and this is crucial to my argument) by American, German, English, and other international directors. Island life has captured the creative attention of filmmakers across national cinemas and continues to unfold even in contemporary reality TV shows such as *Danger Island*, *Temptation Island*, and *Survivor*. That the island movie is not primarily a specifically Irish or national genre, but a genre of world cinema, is a fact largely overlooked by Irish film history to date.

Island life is valued partly for what can be called, with suitable reservations, its "authenticity." Island films offer solace in a world subject to the invasions of a relentless modernity. In all such cases, the visual and narrative opportunities afforded by island geography and its emotional subtexts bring into question the extent to which filmed "reality" blurs into contrivance. Certain questions routinely present themselves: to what extent do our romanticized preconceptions about island life colour our reception of these works? To what extent did the ever-present tendrils of prefabricated sentimentality express themselves in the filmmakers' visions and manipulations of lived experience?



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It is in exploring such issues that Flaherty becomes crucial to university cinema programs. Helping film students to understand that documentary – a form to which Flaherty is eternally linked – is never entirely uncontrived is a basic function of *Man of Aran* in cinema classes around the world. The film student comes to recognize that Flaherty cobbled together an ideal, highly photogenic family to stand in for the people on the island. The film student hears that Flaherty framed the film so that issues of absentee landlordism and religious conflict did not enter the picture. The same student learns to connect Flaherty's so-called documentarism with "salvage ethnography" – that is, the widespread anthropological practice of recording native peoples performing tasks and rituals not as they were lived in the penumbra of modernity but according to the protocols of living memory. The instructor reveals that Flaherty had to convince the men in his film to learn how to hunt basking sharks, a practice that had passed into history a generation earlier. While the debate over the development of documentary and the nature of the form shows no signs of slowing down, *Man of Aran* is guaranteed a place in university classrooms, so overtly manipulated is Flaherty's so-called documentary work.

At the same time, within *Irish* cinema studies, *Man of Aran* has been accepted as a seminal motion picture that instructs us in politically and historically charged doxa about Ireland. For instance, in the landmark *Cinema and Ireland* (1988), Kevin Rockett connects Flaherty's work with "a depoliticised notion of documentary" (Rockett 1988: 73). Similarly, Luke Gibbons's "Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema" (also in *Cinema and Ireland*) has become a central text for anyone studying Irish film. The essay has mapped key issues in Irish film studies for a whole generation of scholars. Like many instructors before him, Gibbons points out that in *Man of Aran* "the everyday grind of work and

production is desocialised and transformed into a heroic struggle between humanity and nature" (Rockett 201). Gibbons takes this view forward to claim that the film devalues both "language and community" (Rockett 202) – a view that enables Gibbons to address his recurrent concern with the language-image tension. Then, to get at Flaherty and his influence, Gibbons explores aesthetic history by way of Victorian melodrama, Benjamin on photography, Raymond Immerwahr's "comprehensive study of the origins of European romanticism" (Rockett 204), Lady Morgan's *Wild Irish Girl*, Hegel, Ossian, Perry Miller on the American puritan imagination, Ruskin, Poussin, and "romantic theorists ranging from Rousseau to Emerson" (Rockett 227).

Gibbons brings such material to a focus in his discussion of Ervin Panofsky on pastorality in order to unfold the distinction between so-called soft primitivism and so-called hard primitivism. Dividing the pastoral vision into an idealized view of country life and an entirely unenviable one, Gibbons explains: "It is in hard primitivism . . . that the drift towards realism can be detected, not as a means of challenging Romanticism but, on the contrary, as a way of authenticating it, of adding credibility to what are otherwise characteristically romantic situations" (Rockett 200). Gibbons goes on to explain the applicability of this statement to *Man of Aran*. He argues that the overstatement in which Flaherty indulges as he shows Tiger King breaking rocks to make soil depends for its meaning on the Rousseauian view of "an imaginary 'state of nature' before the eventual fall from grace brought about by civilization, and, in particular, the invention of metallurgy: 'It was iron and corn', wrote Rousseau, 'which first civilized men, and ruined humanity.'" Having put both Rousseau and modernity in the picture, Gibbons agrees with those early reviewers of

Man of Aran who detected in King shades of the Noble Savage. This is not realism, avers Gibbons: it is hard primitivism, a mythos that makes all of the footage into epic, allegory, and a profoundly unsocial view of the world.

Thanks to Gibbons, the idea of hard primitivism has found a permanent home within Irish film studies: the essay has been generative for many scholars. Their critical conversation deals with the tensions between idealized images and an ever-receding “real Ireland” as stress lines unfold from the Synge-inspired suasions of Flaherty’s masterwork. Succeeding film histories – Lance Pettit’s *Screening Ireland* (2000) and Martin McLoone’s *Irish Film* (2000) as well as several essay-length studies – ably respond to and carry forward the probing of Romanticism in Irish cinema. However, we shall see that they do not sufficiently question Gibbons’s thesis and its grounding of his field of inquiry.

I have worked my way through Gibbons’s argument with several film classes. Students from outside Irish studies who are interested in all kinds of cinema often question the direction in which this argument unfolds. First, they note that the Panofsky distinction between soft and hard primitivism hardens into a sharp dichotomy that a later viewing of Flaherty’s film actually destabilizes (and that the larger contexts of salvage ethnography in cinema handily subsume). Second, the arraying of European Romantic thinkers in relation to *Man of Aran* seems over the top when discussing a film made in the early 1930s; some argue that we do not require the heavy artillery of Romanticist thought to detect the presence of idealizing pastoral ideology within Modernity. Third, students find Gibbons’s style of historical discussion less than persuasive in the absence of close reading of scenes and shots. And I would agree: displaying a positive avoidance of assessing camerawork and its inevitable complexities, Gibbons belabors Panofsky’s dualism in ways that have imposed a fixed view of *Man of Aran* on a generation of scholars who have come to Irish cinema through Gibbons’s classic essay. Although we do not often discuss it, there is a continuing disconnect between Irish film studies and international cinema studies that surely requires scrutiny. Once we acknowledge that in the eighties and nineties Irish scholars had to claim institutional ground for the study of indigenous media, we are left with a body of work that has not yet made a place for itself in international cinema studies programs and that has ideologically rigidified over the past decade.

To recapitulate, the aim of this essay is to look at a classic text for Irish film studies and to move the discussion forward from that point rather than simply finding more evidence to support the given thesis. In practical terms, my aim is to read *Man of Aran* while bracketing the struggle between Romanticism and realism, while remaining acutely aware of the Irish-based argument about this film, and while desiring stronger connection with emergent film theory. In particular, encountering Flaherty’s film through the discourse of visual ethnography rather than in terms of the prevailing dichotomies of eighteenth-century Romanticism enables us to move the background forward and to address the less compromised role in *Man of Aran* of the woman of Aran.

My point of departure is the emergent field of “practice theory” in cinema studies. I first broached the argument of this developing school of thought in my contribution to Cork University Press’ “Ireland into Film” series, *The Field*. There I cited the ethnomethodological work of Pierre Bourdieu as the basis of this field of inquiry, and I reprise that argument here. Bourdieu wants to work out a sociology of practices. His distinctive turn towards customary behaviors addresses the classic, deep dualisms played out in twentieth-century philosophy and ethnography: subject and object, individual and system. Starting an analysis from attention to practices means seeing both individuality and social structure emerging out of ongoing, shared, routine activity, precisely the sort of background activity that many film narratives take for granted.

Among the more revealing of Bourdieu’s comments on his own anthropological work is a passage in *The Logic of Practice* in which he describes his efforts to tabulate in one diagram all the variants in the structuring oppositions of traditional life among the Kabyle of Algeria. Mapping onto a single chart: rites of cooking, planting, the life cycle, the periods of the day, going out and coming in, and other recurrent activities led to “countless contradictions” that could not be resolved back into fundamental oppositions. His fieldwork, that is, resisted the structuralist management of dichotomies that he had expected to discover in traditional Kabyle life. His synopsis of this cultural evidence showed him the need for a logic of social practices grounded in the notion of what he called a “generative *habitus*” (Bourdieu 1990: 11, 9).

Defining “habitus” is tricky because the mechanism occupies the background of a given social field. Habitus is actually a system “that operates from within agents, though it is neither strictly individual nor in itself fully determinative of conduct” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:19). A given performance may involve challenges to the received sense of how things are done. Know-how cannot always be fully specified but remains partly habitual – embodied by the actor and embedded in the behaviors and systems that make up the society. The notion of habitus, then, offers resistance to outright changes in collective practices; habitus is essentially conservative. But the routine background activities of any given group are not strong enough to rule out any and all social change or adaptational improvisation as circumstances demand. We might say that habitus represents a flow of behaviors that interlock to form the character and texture of a culture within a given historical period.

Given Gibbons’s turn to Panofsky for the definition of “hard primitivism,” it is noteworthy that Bourdieu took the term “habitus” most immediately from Panofsky’s *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Jenkins 1992:74). For Panofsky, the concept signifies the ideological categories and assumptions that human beings embody without articulating, possibly without being able to make explicit. This aspect of reality is behavioral rather than intellectual, everyday rather than extraordinary, structural rather than idiosyncratic. Bourdieuan commentator Richard Jenkins explains,

. . . the objective world in which groups exist, and the objective environment – other people and things – as experienced from the point of view of individual members of the group, is the product of the past practices of this generation and previous generations. . . . Here we have a process of production, a process of adjustment, and a dialectical relationship between collective history inscribed in objective conditions and the habitus inscribed in individuals. (Jenkins 74-75, 80).

Habitus always stands in dialogue with the often strategic, improvisational, fluid behavior of individuals who perform tasks not only in space but also over time.

Repeated behaviors, routines learned by children brought up within those activities, habitual and untheorized skills, routine sociation, taken-for-granted structuring mechanisms, uninterrogated kinetic knowledge, post-dualistic human-world interfaces – such terms are used by a wide variety of writers on “practice” theory, from Anthony Giddens to Andrew Pickering, from Jeff Coulter to Stephen Turner. The effort to account fully for an individual’s style, or for a society’s symmetries and asymmetries, leads many of these writers, following Bourdieu, to appreciate the simultaneous overdetermination and underdetermination of social realities and of the fact that “mastery of this logic is only possible for someone who is completely mastered by

it, who possesses it, but so much so that he is totally possessed by it” (Bourdieu 14).

Cinema is the medium par excellence for capturing practices as they are embodied in what practice theorists term bodily “hexis” – ways of acting and behaving characteristic of a given community, especially in performing a familiar activity. Whatever a director asks an actor to do will be mediated by the individual’s bodily know-how and usual deportment, especially when the actor draws on her own experience to handle the background minutiae of embodied activity. The camera can bring a viewer into close proximity to this know-how: camerawork responds intuitively to the practical body, bringing into focus not only facial expression but also hands at work, feet in motion. *Man of Aran* tells us a great deal about embodiment and embeddedness on an Irish island in the early 1930s, about practices, hexis, and habitus – especially regarding the activities of the woman of Aran and her child. The work of the film is to foreground the background by displaying the terms of habitus and hexis, of embedding and embodiment, terms that the film sutures together through insistent cutting and a fondness for MCUs.

A consideration of the opening third of the film already makes clear the extent to which it is actually grounded in



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everyday practices of the early 1930s. After the title card ponderously directs the viewer to the allegorical struggle between Man and the Sea, we view an MCU of a boy on some rocks by a seaweed-filled pool of water. The boy leans forward to capture a crab with his hand. A resilient bending into and toward the oncoming wind and tide is soon revealed as the characteristic hexis of boy and woman as both comport themselves along the rocky terrain. As the camera follows the boy, he stands up and navigates among the stone slabs of the shore. Then he sits down, and we witness his delicate handling of the crab, while the creature's own claws echo the play of human fingers. Briefly making his escape, the crab is recaptured and deposited gently in the boy's cap. It would be difficult to imagine a more direct address to the theme of embodiment. Mining all available nooks and crannies applies not only to ferreting soil out of rocks (the theme of the middle section of *Man of Aran*) but also to discovering the body's elasticity.

At this point, the editor cuts to the floor of a cottage where a hand holding tongs stirs a fire; the pan moves right towards a hen and her chicks pecking for grain. The delicate movement of their feet resonates with the fingers and claws of the previous scene. The camera pans left to encounter the fire and up towards a full view of the woman of Aran, Maggie Dirrane, as she withdraws tongs from the fire and moves her arm smoothly from the floor to the blanket on a baby's cradle. This silky movement doubles itself in the smoothing of the child's blanket, one arm held protectively on the curved hood of the cradle. Were we to turn to Deleuzian vocabulary, we would isolate Dirrane, the floor, the fire, and the cradle as a purposeful human-equipmental assemblage. As Dirrane bends, checks the baby visually, and rocks the cradle, there is a cut to a hen roosting in a basket and back to the chicks picking and beyond to a lamb and dog sleeping, almost cuddling, by the fire. The sentimentality of this scene and its painterly quality seem to speak less of hard primitivism than of precisely the idealized prior state to which Gibbons refers. However, we can also read this unit as the nursery of a way of life: all of the elements hang together in a cozy domesticity.

Outside, the sea swells. Showing the inside, the camera pans right towards a bright window where Dirrane now stands looking out. She looks both ways and turns around smiling. She takes up her shawl, and we view a series of quick cuts: from sea to Dirrane rocking the baby to the boy looking out over the sea. Gradually the camera develops the everpresence of sea, whether calm or stormy, against which domestic practices emerge as routine, hexis and habitus revealed in mutual accommodation while the images inhabit a rhythm as sure and strong as the waves.

Dirrane exits the cottage, the wind in her hair as she climbs onto a rock or small wall and calls for her son, who hears her and turns round. This call-and-response structure emphasizes the intense alertness of Flaherty's family members. Throughout the movie, they always seem to be tuned in to the approach and needs of the others. Dirrane wraps a shawl around her head, then shakes it down to her shoulders, crosses the ends and ties them behind her in a smooth, habitual motion. As she heads down a path, her

boy turns homeward. Only now do we cut to a view of the waves carrying a tiny boat with three black figures in it. The boy and Dirrane climb the rocks while the scene cuts back and forth between cliffs and ocean. This environmental suture broadens our sense of habitus and has tutored many filmmakers in the skill of suggesting a complete environment.

The closer to the sea Dirrane gets, the more her hair flies and the more she leans into the wind. The two scramble down to the water's edge to help the men land the curragh. Dirrane partly pulls the boat towards shore and partly uses the curragh to hold herself up in the waves. The collective activity of the three men, woman, and boy suddenly intensifies: we see two hands, belonging to the men on either side of Dirrane, holding her arm and pulling her up out of the swell. She is entirely soaked, and her skirt has ridden up so that we view her knee and see that she wears a sort of knee sock. It takes a good strong pull to haul her out of the water's control. As the angle shifts to show Dirrane from the front, the filmmaker captures a look of undisguised and genuine distress. In fact, the men's faces also looked strained as they struggle against the plunge and lift of the waves. We hear Dirrane say quite clearly, "I was nearly drowned at that time," and although these words were caught in the studio rather than live, Dirrane's voice betrays genuine relief at having been saved.

As the five turn the boat to empty the water that it has gathered, we see that a piece of clothing has been used to plug a hole. One man says "nice and gently, lift her [the curragh] up" – and the camera caresses the view of a boat being carried by bodies made unsteady in wind, water, and rock. Dirrane follows behind, not really lifting but perhaps guiding, and all the while looking about her. Her characteristic way-of-being involves an almost primordial, constant surveying of the scene in which she is enmeshed. So it is that she notices that the surf is dragging out the heavy fishing net. As the tide comes in, the water becomes even more threatening. The four adults grapple the net from out of the water and off the rocks, but as the tide surges, all four rush away, Dirrane requiring steadying by the men. Merely keeping one's footing at the verge of sea and shore emerges as a crucial aspect of the constitutive intersection of hexis and habitus. Once again the net seems to be recaptured, and again it's abandoned to the waves. A third time Dirrane bends to the net and grabs it, saying, "Pick it up, quick, quick." As they move upwards to the apparent shelter of a cliff wall, a huge wave covers them all with foam and leaves them gasping in its wake. One man grabs Dirrane by her hair, while we hear, "Lift her up, lift her up." In these basic moves of daily life – bending, grasping, and lifting, we see the integrity of purposeful improvisation and the knowledge of how these things are done.

Such practices are not necessarily without difficulties: Dirrane's legs are literally dragged onto the pumice-textured rocks until she can regain her footing. Once more Dirrane returns for the net and this time is successful in retrieving it. The family struggles to carry the torn netting above the dangerous rock, and on Dirrane's face is a weary exhilaration. High-angle views of the three dark figures making their way home against the foam-white play of the sea on the flat

rocks offer a satisfying comfort. CUs of King and Dirrane show them working together to arrange the net in a manageable load on King's back. The exchange when the three have reached safety from the grasping sea feels spontaneous:

King – "We're all right now, thank God."
Dirrane – "So we are."

Throughout, the many shots of the surf emphasize its relentless hold on the island and strengthen the view that mutually agreed work is the essence of human behavior on the island. The screen then goes dark before the second strophe of this tone poem begins.

If *Man of Aran* were complete at this point, criticisms focusing on the filmmaker's contrivances would certainly be much less persistent. Similarly, if the introductory statement about man, land, independence, and the sea were omitted, the complex weaving of camerawork, hexis, and habitus would be a far more obvious target of critical attention than it has been to date. By redirecting our attention away from Dirrane and towards King, by turning away from homely activities and towards the exoticism of the shark hunt, and by including awkward titles to signal the three basic units of the film, Flaherty obscured the praxiological bias of his filming and also of his own involvement with the camera apparatus. Irish film critics have followed Flaherty's lead.

It is, of course, the improvisational nature of the first strophe that is so appealing to viewers. Beaching the boat is accomplished in circumstances that demand attention to both embodiment and equipment. The sequence smoothly conveys the film's theme of capture and reminds us of the opening in which the boy catches the crab. In many ways, the filmmaker-camera assemblage is identified with this child in the process of making nature seem to be his own. The crab struggles to get free; Flaherty's subjects offer various kinds of resistance to his preconceived view of them. But there is a certain authenticity in the boy who recovers his crab. And this realism carries over to the implied filmmaker, who wrests images from the ensemble activities of crew and environment.

Indeed, a rough environment was good for Flaherty's art: he thrilled to recalcitrant conditions, which clearly released a side of his personality that clamored, periodically, to breathe. Stories about Flaherty emphasize that in the midst of making films he became moody, temperamental, even angry, as he struggled with his own considerable fears of failure and turned them to a sort of victory – over the elements, over the Hollywood moguls and cinematic money-brokers. Flaherty's repeated insistence that the camera used him to operate it according to its own visual logic suggests that for Flaherty making a proper film necessarily meant staying the course against challenging elements that could never be fully vanquished. The people of Aran live with the sea; Flaherty lived with the demands of movie producers. Flaherty's project was to search the not-yet-fully-modernized world, bringing camera and projector into that space, to capture images of non-mechanized ways of dealing with

distinctive environments. Immersed coping, full engagement in the practical business of life, limitation of equipment to the most basic tools for the job at hand: these elements made up Flaherty's concept of what film should depict and what filmmaking should involve.

A practice approach to cinema directs our attention to the places that can be found in almost any film where immersed coping takes over from directed activity. Some of that immersed coping involves women as well as men, even though women's work is often backgrounded both cinematically and culturally. That said, what is worthy of study here is not only the abundantly documented fact that *Man of Aran* comprises a slippery point of departure for thinking about inaccurate representations of Irish life. It is not only that Flaherty's film is an historical-cultural artifact that demands to be read in terms of past and emergent national ideology. Rather, it is that Flaherty sought in his own way to explore the intricate inter-animations of hexis and habitus, of female and male, of routine practices under the pressure of challenges both everyday and extraordinary.

Of course, the very nature of Flaherty's enterprise is contradictory. He introduced the camera apparatus into semi-closed communities and infected them with the idea of performing themselves. While not wanting to defend Flaherty's manipulations of indigenous communities and obviously ideological framings of a man-versus-nature thesis, I find his enterprise valuable because of its exploration of practical activity, embodied struggle, and yes, women's ordinary activities (almost always under-represented in Irish film discourse), in relation to the motion picture camera. Even while upping the ante, recovering the ways of the past in order to make his film more exotic and more interesting to theater-bound viewers, Flaherty kept a grip on the minutiae of everyday activity as something interesting in itself. His refusal of any but the most flimsy narrative excuse for his strung-together images can serve to focus our attention on the place of habitus at the heart of the development of both documentary and less realistic modes of presentation. The claims of Romanticism on these representations abound, but at this cultural moment a practice-oriented analysis offers a way to think beyond the limits of the first wave of Irish film scholarship and even to savor what Flaherty's camera succeeded in capturing.

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Hairy on the Inside

RE-VISITING NEIL JORDAN'S *THE COMPANY OF WOLVES*

As with all great art, the fairytale's

deepest meaning will be different for each person, and different for the same person at various moments in his life. The child will extract different meanings from the same fairy tale, depending on his interests and needs of the moment. When given the chance, he will return to the same tale when he is ready to enlarge on old meanings, or replace them with new ones. (Bettelheim 12)

In their recent full-length study of the films of Neil Jordan (though not of his fiction), Emer and Kevin Rockett profess their scepticism towards any "auteurist-driven attempt to locate intentionality and timeless interpretation." Furthermore, given "the richness and depth" of his oeuvre, they warn against interpreting Jordan's films "as two distinct strands of creative output in which one is focussed on Ireland or politics and the other on fantasy and allegory" (2). I tend to agree, but would like to take these observations further. In the first instance, I think this traditional view of auteurism needs to be updated to take account of more recent developments in film theory;¹ in the second instance, I wish to propose a more fertile interaction between politics and fantasy – and between the national and the transnational – in Jordan's films and fictions.

This basic thesis is part of a much larger work-in-progress, which cannot be rehearsed at any great length here. However, this thesis is predicated on two central propositions. First, that the complex (and often contentious) politics enshrined in Jordan's "Irish" work – i.e. those films and fictions set in, or about, Ireland – can only be fully understood in terms of his formal interest in fantasy and allegory; and second, that the elements of fantasy and allegory in Jordan's "transnational" productions – i.e. those films set elsewhere, but which still bear the trace of the auteur's signature – may be usefully interpreted in terms of his Irish background and heritage. Given Jordan's self-conscious fascination with literary and filmic form and his relentless rewriting of originary national narratives, I argue (following Fredric Jameson) that these "external social and historical situations are reproduced in the work as a drama of form, and in that sense form itself is as political as the ideological content and the overt positions often taken to be the only important issues when we talk about our politics" (1). For the purposes of the present paper I will focus on *The Company of Wolves* (1984), often regarded as one of the "least Irish" of Jordan's films (Clancy 38).

In the Company of Wolves

In 1982, following the bitter rows in Ireland over his debut film, *Angel*, Jordan began to pursue funding opportunities in England.² Given the success of Palace Pictures' groundbreaking distribution strategy with Channel 4, Jordan was keen to work with Stephen Woolley, who was then setting himself up as a producer. He showed Woolley an unfinished script entitled "The Soldier's Wife," the first draft of what would eventually become *The Crying Game* (1992). However, Jordan had no idea how this story ended – a perennial problem in his scriptwriting approach – and, in any event, a film with a similar scenario was then in production (*Cal*, dir. Pat O'Connor, 1984). So for his second feature film (and Palace's debut as a production company), Jordan turned his attention to adapting Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves" (1979) – a post-Freudian, feminist reworking of Charles Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" (1697).

Jordan had first met Carter in 1979 when she was a member of the adjudicating panel that had awarded him the *Guardian* Fiction Prize, and they were reacquainted in 1982 at a writers' festival in Dublin marking the centenary of Joyce's birth. Carter had been commissioned by Channel 4 to write a thirty-minute screenplay based on "The Company of Wolves," which had already been broadcast as a radio play in 1980. Jordan felt the story had the potential to become a full-length feature, and with the financial support of the National Film Development Fund he and Carter began collaborating on a new screenplay at her home in Clapham. As Jordan later recalled: "After a while [...] the script lost all touch with common decency. It became gothic and sensual, acquiring a special kind of horror. Images began to come from nowhere, lurid and illogical, but somehow perfect" (qtd. in Finney 68).

Due to the brevity of the original short story, Jordan suggested developing it into a "Chinese Box" structure, using the dream of the young protagonist, Rosaleen, as the primary diegetic narrative, and fleshing it out through a series of "nested" or embedded sub-narratives. This portmanteau structure – inspired in part by *The Sargasso Manuscript* (dir. Wojciech Jerzy Has, 1964) and *A Thousand and One Nights* (dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1974) – enabled the integration of other stories and themes from Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), as well as key images and motifs drawn from Jordan's

1983 novella, *The Dream of a Beast*. As Jordan noted: “Once we had agreed on the structure, the writing seemed to flow quite naturally from it, since it gave free rein to Angela’s own taste for narrative subversion” (qtd. in Bell 507).

Jordan and Carter mapped out an outline of proposed scenes which she then wrote up, and by July 1983 they had finished a third draft. By this stage it was clear that the visual design demanded by the script would far exceed the initial £800,000 budget agreed upon with Channel 4, but Stephen Woolley negotiated a deal with ITC Entertainment to finance the entire £2.25 million production. The spiralling costs were largely due to the special effects required to show the physical transformations from man to wolf. Although the art and technology of animatronics was still in its infancy, Jordan considered it crucial to the film’s visual and moral aesthetic:

The imagery in films like *Alien* [dir. Ridley Scott, 1979] and *The Thing* [dir. John Carpenter, 1982] conveyed a very deep hatred of sexuality, a pathological disgust with the human form [...]. *The Company of Wolves* was to be about sex, not about hating it. A wolf that crawls out of the skin of a man covered in various red and yellow liquids wouldn’t hold much attraction for a thirteen-year-old girl.³ (qtd. in Finney 70)

Jordan began shooting at Shepperton Studios in January 1984. With the notable exception of the opening framing sequence most of the film was shot inside, thereby abandoning the realist verisimilitude normally associated with location shooting in favour of a more baroque expressionism. The production designer, Anton Furst (who later won an Oscar for designing Tim Burton’s *Batman* in 1989), spent most of his limited budget building eight three-dimensional model trees, which could be moved around the set to create different spatial effects. As a visual index of

the atmosphere he wished to evoke, Jordan showed Furst a series of landscapes by the nineteenth-century pastoralist Samuel Palmer, as well as Gustave Doré’s erotic illustrations for a popular Victorian version of “Little Red Riding Hood” (1872).⁴ In emphasising the visual over the verbal, Jordan made a clear-cut distinction between two different traditions of fantasy: the European mode, exemplified by Jean Cocteau’s surrealist-influenced *La Belle et la Bête* (1945); and the American mode, exemplified by “silly comic book stories such as *Star Trek* and other recent American productions which are great fun, but which use the resources [of fantasy] without really exploring them” (qtd. in Park 90). From this European perspective, fantasy is less a form of escapism and more a stylised representation of unconscious desire, or as Jordan commented: “When I was a kid, the pleasure I got [...] from *Night of the Hunter* [1955] or *The Wizard of Oz* [1939] was more to do with recognition than interpretation. We tried to build each set so that it reminded you of something you had seen but weren’t quite sure of what it was” (qtd. in Taylor and Jenkins 266). Thus, in keeping with the Freudian sub-text of the tale, *mise-en-scène* is both a means of invoking the *uncanny*—“that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud 220)—and a way of overcoming conventional narrative and generic categories:

When you are writing, particularly in Ireland, everything is referenced to everything else. [...] I went into film hoping that it was free of all that, and suddenly you find that there’s even more of this baggage [...]. Genre is a critical way of looking at films, but it’s also a way of marketing them, and I would like this film to help free people from those straitjackets. (Jordan, qtd. in Taylor and Jenkins 266).



In the Company of Wolves



In the *Company of Wolves*

However, one of the key problems with this type of fantasy, at least from the point of view of the producers and distributors, was how to market it. As Paul Webster, the managing director of Palace Pictures, remarked: “We were frankly puzzled with the film when it finished shooting. It had no straight narrative, was not a fantasy, horror or art film, [...] and after many discussions we decided to market it as an enigma” (qtd. in McFarling 14). In order to attract mainstream as well as art-house audiences, Palace embarked on a highly innovative marketing campaign. While the film was still in post-production, they showcased a thirteen-minute promotional reel at the Cannes Film Festival to help generate the initial media hype. Given that the American distribution rights had yet to be sold, the film needed to make a major impact in Britain first. Consequently, £150,000 of their £200,000 advertising budget was spent on direct advertising in Britain, including ten different concept posters depicting erotic and lurid images from the film. But when the British Board of Film Censors unexpectedly imposed an “over-18” certificate, many of these images were banned by the London Transport Authority (which had power of approval over all film posters). As Paul Webster commented: “When we showed the finished film to the censors, we found the absence of a moral lesson created some outrage. A film with little nudity and less sex was seen as an erotic enticement to teenage girls” (quoted in McFarling 14).⁵ In response, Palace quickly capitalised on the fact that Sara Patterson, the film’s thirteen year-old débutante, was thus prevented from attending the world première (21 September 1984), and this anomaly garnered considerable attention in the tabloid press. Consequently, *The Company of Wolves* opened at the 2,000-seater Odeon Leicester Square – the biggest cinema in London – in a blaze of publicity, taking £69,000

in its first week alone. Overall it grossed £1.6 million at the UK box office, earning more money than Richard Attenborough’s much-fêted *Gandhi* the previous year.

For its American release, Palace secured a deal with the Cannon Film Group run by Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus, then notorious for their sex-and-horror films. Cannon promoted it as a horror movie rather than an allegorical fable, and ambitiously booked it into 995 cinemas across the USA for March 1985. When Jordan secretly attended a public screening in New York, the audience, expecting to see a slasher movie, gradually began to boo. Spectators seemed genuinely baffled by its art-house narrative(s) until one disgruntled viewer, with twenty minutes to go, loudly proclaimed its “sub-text”: “Yo man, this is Little Red Riding Hood!” *The Company of Wolves* grossed only \$4.3 million at the US box office, and failed to recover its exorbitant print and advertising costs (Finney 79-83; McFarling 17).

Little Red Riding Hood?

Aside from its lavish visual imagery, the most complex feature of *The Company of Wolves* is its portmanteau structure, and its problematic (and problematising) relationship with its various source materials. In this respect, it is worth briefly separating the *fabula* (the pattern of relationships between characters and actions as they unfold in chronological order) from the *discourse* (the artistic organisation or deformation of the causal-chronological order of events) in order to begin deciphering the different narrative and intertextual codes.

The film opens (and ends) with a mimetic framing sequence set in a large Georgian house in the English countryside. Rosaleen (Sara Patterson), a pubescent girl, is asleep in bed when her parents (David Warner and Tusse

Silberg) arrive home from a shopping trip. Her older sister, Alice (Georgia Slowe), accompanied by the family's Alsatian dog, is sent to wake her up, and these basic characters and events provide the material substance of Rosaleen's subsequent dreams. As Rosaleen begins to dream, the camera tracks through her bedroom window into the hinterland of her adolescent subconscious. In the opening sequence of the primary diegesis, a pack of wolves devour the spiteful Alice. After the funeral, Rosaleen goes to stay with her grandmother (Angela Lansbury), who tells her cautionary tales about men who are "hairy on the inside" and whose "eyebrows meet in the middle."

The first of four embedded sub-narratives involves Granny's tale of a travelling man (Stephen Rea) who marries a village girl. On their wedding night, he goes outside to urinate and subsequently disappears – the victim, it is assumed, of marauding wolves. Several years later the woman has remarried, this time to a man "not too shy to piss in a pot." One night, the bedraggled traveller returns unexpectedly. Angered by the sight of her children, he transforms into a wolf but is decapitated by her second husband. The sequence ends with the second husband beating his wife in a jealous rage, and the camera cuts back to the primary diegesis. Rosaleen, appalled by the story, declares: "I'd never let a man strike me," to which Granny retorts: "Once the bloom is gone the beast comes out." Afterwards, Rosaleen is unnerved by a glimpse of her parents having sex. Her mother, counterbalancing Granny's puritanical influence (and foregrounding Carter's overt feminist moral), reassures her that "If there's a beast in men it meets its match in women too."

The second embedded sub-narrative is told by Granny in the grounds of the village church and concerns a young man – "a priest's bastard" – who is given a magic lotion by the Prince of Darkness (a suave cameo by Terence Stamp). After applying the lotion, the man sprouts hair all over his body, and becomes trapped within a distorting mirror; the camera cuts away violently, as Rosaleen calls an abrupt halt to this grotesque story. This sequence seems somewhat vague in purpose, but Granny supplies the latent moral: "So if you should spy a naked man in the woods, run."

The following Sunday at church the priest reads from the Book of Isaiah: "The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb [...] and a little child shall lead them."⁶ Afterwards, Rosaleen and a rather ugly village boy go walking in the woods, unchaperoned; he tries to kiss her but she runs away. She climbs a tree and finds a giant nest containing a vanity mirror and four eggs. After she puts on some red lipstick the eggs crack open, revealing tiny figurines in the form of human babies. Later, when Rosaleen shows one of these dolls to her mother, it sheds a tear.

At this point in the narrative, Rosaleen's father goes wolf hunting. To keep her mother company, Rosaleen tells her one of Granny's stories (the third embedded sub-narrative), about a peasant woman who becomes pregnant by her aristocratic lover. At his wedding to another woman, the peasant woman casts a spell in a distorting mirror. When the mirror cracks, the wedding guests transform into wolves,

and each night thereafter their howling serenades the baby to sleep.⁷ Back in the primary diegesis, Rosaleen's father returns from the hunt. He explains how he had cut off the forepaw of a dead wolf as a trophy, but that the paw had since transformed into a human hand. "Seeing is believing," says her father, but this time Rosaleen queries the legitimacy of the moral: "Is it? What about touching?"

The following day, Rosaleen goes through the woods to visit Granny. En route she meets an exotic huntsman (Micha Bergese), whose eyebrows meet in the middle. After a sexually-charged conversation, Rosaleen agrees to a bet: if he reaches Granny's cottage first he wins a kiss; if she gets there before him she will receive her "heart's desire." The huntsman wins the race and kills Granny (her decapitated head smashing into pieces like a china doll). When Rosaleen arrives he feigns innocence, but she remains unconvinced: "They say seeing is believing but I'd never swear to it."

The huntsman seduces Rosaleen and compels her to throw her red shawl into the fire (in the published screenplay she throws *all* of her clothes into the flames). Sensing his growing savagery, Rosaleen shoots his gun at him (but misses). He removes his shirt and claims his kiss: "Jesus, what big teeth you have!" she exclaims; "All the better to eat you with!" he roars. Rosaleen shoots again and wounds him, and he transforms into a wolf. Strangely unafraid, Rosaleen takes pity on the animal, and tells him a story about a wounded she-wolf (the fourth and final embedded tale). In this story a she-wolf emerges from the depths of the village well; she is shot and takes sanctuary in a church. When the priest finds her, the wolf has transformed into a feral child and, despite not knowing whether she is a creature of God or of the Devil, he takes pity on her. Her tears of gratitude turn a white rose red, and she slinks back to the netherworld – "And that's all I'll tell you because that's all I know," whispers Rosaleen.

At this point, Rosaleen's parents and some of the villagers arrive, and the wolf escapes by jumping through the glass window. A second wolf appears out of nowhere but, just as Rosaleen's father is about to shoot it, her mother recognises the crucifix around its neck: Rosaleen, too, has been transformed. With her mother's intervention, she escapes into the forest and joins the company of wolves, at which point the diegetic dream narrative segues back into the mimetic narrative that originally framed it. As Rosaleen awakens from her dream, the wolves burst through her bedroom window and into the "real" world. She screams in terror, but as the final credits roll we hear her calm voiceover recite the "moral" of the tale:

Little girls this seems to say,
Never stop upon your way.
Never trust a stranger friend,
No one knows how it will end.

As you're pretty so be wise,
Wolves may lurk in every guise.
Now, as then, 'tis simple truth,
Sweetest tongue has sharpest tooth.

"Sweetest Tongue has Sharpest Tooth"

Although most British critics lavished praise on the film's sumptuous visual imagery – Philip French compared it to the “Anglican Romanticism” of Powell and Pressburger (27) – there was much less consensus about the success of its portmanteau structure. Tim Pulleine found a lack of thematic clarity – “we don't consistently feel that the assorted episodes are projections of the sexually-awakening heroine's sensibility” (37) – while Paul Taylor thought the opposite: “the splintering of the dream into discrete narrative encounters [...] does suggest the piecemeal and partial process by which adolescent self-knowledge is acquired” (265).

Other critics drew attention to the cohesiveness of its framing structure, and the fluid interplay between mimetic and diegetic modes. As John Coleman noted, “[Rosaleen's] broken dreams or nightmares form the surreal substance of what follows, her uneasy sleeping and last, rude awakening being – as it were – opening and closing brackets round the bizarre affair. This may be of comfort to those who prefer things tidy” (42). Richard Combs, however, thought it all a little *too* tidy, and questioned its “self-defeating literalness” and “deadening literary quality”: “What should have been a riot of storytelling [...] tends towards a stilted explication of the content of all these stories” (299). John Collick reluctantly agreed, finding its intertextual and synchronic patterns somewhat laboured: “The problem with this web of signification is that it actually signifies very little, other than a string of familiar metaphors. What is being offered appears to be a parody of the Freudian dream work in which the dream symbols [...] turn out to be familiar literary images” (286).

To be sure, the prologue to the film seems determined to forge a logical chain of connections between objects and events in the “real” world and their symbolic referents in the dream world. In the published screenplay these connections are somewhat over-determined by the *mise-en-scène* of Rosaleen's bedroom: posters of Douanier Rousseau's “Carnival Night” and Lon Chaney in *The Wolf Man* (1941); some “dog-eared copies of fairy tale books” (including *The Classic Fairy Tales*, opened at Doré's erotic illustrations for “Little Red Riding Hood”); and a copy of *Make it Happy* (a sex-instruction manual for adolescents). This symbolic economy is reproduced throughout the prologue, where a host of visual signs (and product placements) – the Georgian house, her parents' Volvo, their Sainsburys's shopping bags – quickly establish a world of bourgeois comfort and domesticity which just begs to be rent asunder. However laboured this may be, the transition from mimesis to diegesis does contain a radical metaleptic (frame-breaking) potential, or as Tim Pulleine approvingly notes:

Indeed, the film can be seen explicitly to turn its back on what might be considered the ‘natural’ habitat of British cinema [...] in the way that the heroine's well-to-do middle class home, glimpsed from the outset, is almost immediately banished from the ensuing action, and is in the end quite literally over-run by the products of her imagining. (37)

Consequently, as Laura Mulvey notes, the dreamer – along with the spectator – is abruptly “thrown into the

insecurity of a radically reversed story space” where familiar middle-class comforts are no longer automatic guarantees of safety and stability (238). This “reversed story space” – which we enter through the bedroom window/cinema screen – is the pseudo-medieval, Anglo-Saxon cosmology so chillingly described in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* collection: “It is a northern country; they have cold weather, they have cold hearts” (211). In Carter's gothic Otherworld, the latent sub-text of Perrault's “Little Red Riding Hood” – a girl on the verge of womanhood, her impending menstruation encoded in the image of the red shawl – is more graphically and overtly rendered:

Children do not stay young for long in this savage country. There are no toys for them to play with so they work hard and grow wise but this one, so pretty and the youngest of her family, a little late-comer, had been indulged by her mother and the grandmother who'd knitted her the red shawl that, today, has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow. [...] And she has just started her woman's bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month. (215)

The conventional literary metaphors for menstruation – the red shawl, red roses – are supplemented in the film by more ambitious Freudian and Jungian images derived from Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (the very title of which echoes this menstrual theme) and Jordan's *The Dream of a Beast*. Indeed, the most striking of these cinematic images – the eggs with the baby dolls, which crack open when Rosaleen puts on the red lipstick – contains genetic material from both the “male” and “female” parent texts. In Jordan's novella this image is intertextually sponsored by Yeats's “Leda and the Swan” (1923), where in a key scene the nameless narrator (the eponymous Beast) sees a swan and a woman sexually entwined. The Beast watches as they fly away, leaving behind a clutch of eggs in a pool of water: “Were they the swan's, or the woman's, I wondered and lifted one of them out. The heat of my unruly paw was anathema to it [...]. The sheaves of egg fell away and a cherub stood there, creaking its downy wings” (51). But in Carter's original story, the corresponding egg image is clearly more feminine (though no less violent): She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight by a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing. (215)

The fluid ambiguity of Carter's imagery – simultaneously signifying menstruation, virginity, sexuality and violence – is crucial to the success of her fable, and especially its revisionist ending. As Maggie Anwell notes, “the virgin [in this version] is resolutely pagan; she has no intention of retaining her virginity once it is no longer useful to her.” Moreover, in her final confrontation with the wolf, “she fears the blood she must spill, but will it be her lifeblood or the sign of her discarded virginity?” (79-80). However, from this avowedly feminist literary perspective, Anwell argues that the fertile power of Carter's imagery is lost in the transition from page to screen:

Like the partial substitution of the dreaming girl for the folk heroine, the film exchanges an overelaborate cinematographic process for a finely drawn imaginative concept. [...] The blood and violence of the transformations are linked to sexuality in a way that recalls the standard horror movie, in which the girl is seen as victim – no room for the confident folk heroine successfully expressing her desire. (84)

The key problem with this particular critique is that it fails to acknowledge the psychological complexity and mythopoeic potential of Jordan's febrile *mise-en-scène*. The visual depiction of the menstrual motif – however “overelaborate” it may be – is still a reminder that menstruation remains a taboo topic in popular culture, not least in the cinema. Indeed, as Katha Pollit points out, Stephen King's *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976) – one of the few mainstream works to tackle this topic – “is not a reversal of the taboo but its confirmation: periods are still connected with disruption, the uncanny and death – including Carrie's death” (13). Of course, it could be argued that these negative associations are also reproduced in Jordan's film: the familial disruption caused by Rosaleen's pubescence; the constant slippage between the rational and the irrational; the deaths of Alice and Granny. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Rosaleen does not die at the end of the film but is, in fact, symbolically reborn.

In Carter's original story (and in her own radio version), when the wolf threatens to eat Rosaleen she immediately “burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat,” and it ends with her lying in her dead granny's bed, “between the paws of the tender wolf” (219-220). Thus, from a feminist perspective, Rosaleen comes to terms with her nascent sexuality, and overcomes her fears. Moreover, from a Freudian perspective, she also reconciles “the selfish, asocial, violent, potentially destructive tendencies of the id

(the wolf) with the unselfish, social, thoughtful and protective propensities of the ego (the hunter)” (Bettelheim 172). However, Jordan's film takes these Freudian and feminist interpretations a whole lot further through a series of *multiple* endings: firstly, when Rosaleen shows her compassion for the wounded wolf and becomes a wolf herself; secondly, when the wolves break through her bedroom window into the “real” world; and, finally, when Rosaleen calmly recites a more lyrical version of Perrault's traditional moral over the credits. As John Collick notes:

[These images make] explicit what has been implicit throughout the movie: that writing, filming and watching dreams [...] involve the adoption of inadequate and false positions of scientific objectivity. [...] A false, liberal and comforting conclusion is offered, and then effaced by the shot of the wolf bursting through the glass (which parallels the destruction of the audience's position of authority as the incomprehensible meaning of the film ‘bursts’ through the screen). [...] The repressed ‘unconscious’ tale that lurks behind Perrault's moral and Carter's conclusions, comes back to us, literally through the screen. (286)

Originally, Jordan and Carter had envisaged Rosaleen waking up from her dream and returning to the world of domestic security. This conventional act of closure was rejected in favour of a magical realist ending, where Rosaleen wakes up, dives through the floorboards, and vanishes – the ending, in fact, which appears in the published screenplay:

The floor ripples, with the aftermath of her dive. Gradually it settles back into plain floor again. We see the room, for a beat, half-forest, half-girl's bedroom. There is a whining at the door. [...] First the he-wolf enters, then the she-wolf. They nose their way around [ROSALEEN'S] things. END. (Carter and Jordan, 242)



However, given the available special effects technology and his limited budget, Jordan was unable to realise this ending in concrete terms. Nonetheless, he was determined to conclude the film on a more dramatic note, where mimetic and diegetic worlds collide: “I wanted to make it an ambiguous ending, with the final scream and the poem [...] and the girl’s voice to strengthen the ambiguity. I didn’t want the film to end up with the girl under threat; it’s a liberation in a way” (qtd. in Taylor and Jenkins, 265). For feminist critics, however, this deliberate ambiguity seemed more reactionary than subversive, or as Maggie Anwell comments:

It is [Carter’s] pivotal image of the girl confident of her own desire for sexual experience that the film cannot handle. [...] The disturbing image of the girl asleep in the arms of the wolf is gone: in the film the girl metamorphoses into a wolf and they escape together into the forest. This image is not so much disturbing as mystifying. Has she become a she-wolf from choice or necessity? Is wolfishness no more than a symbol of simple animal physicality? In many folk tales metamorphosis of this kind is a common strategy for survival, but that is hardly the same thing as a free expression of desire. (81)

Leaving aside her implicit insistence on textual fidelity – rendered redundant, in any case, by virtue of Carter’s own collaboration on the screenplay – Anwell’s resistance to the film’s ambiguous ending(s) does seem overly literal. As Marjorie Bilbow notes, “Under Neil Jordan’s inventive direction this film has the intangible menace of a half-remembered nightmare which leaves you uneasily aware that it may have contained a warning that only your subconscious mind could decipher” (18). Although clearly sympathetic to the polemical nature of Carter’s feminist fable, Anwell fails to acknowledge that the symbolic economy of dreams embodies a quite different narrative logic, or as Bruno Bettelheim reminds us: “Fairy stories speak to our conscious and our unconscious, and therefore do not need to avoid contradictions, since these easily coexist in our unconscious” (175). From this broader psychoanalytical perspective, Jordan’s ambivalent ending does seem liberating – in several respects.

Firstly, the film functions as a corrective to Perrault’s own double ending: the tale itself (where the wolf gobbles up Little Red Riding Hood), and Perrault’s pedantic, appended moral: “Children, especially pretty, nicely brought up young ladies, ought never to talk to strangers; if they are foolish enough to do so, they should not be surprised if some greedy wolf consumes them” (25). Secondly, Jordan’s film functions as a corrective to Carter’s own studied revisionism. In her feminist re-writing of Perrault’s tales, Carter removed the “moral tags that temper their darkness and magic with good-natured cynicism,” and in their place emphasised the validity and power of female desire (“About the Stories” 126). But Jordan strenuously resists all forms of moralising – feminist or otherwise – by restoring the dark, *unknowable* potency that Bettelheim insists the fairy tale must have. Or as John Collick comments: “The film adopts the same conclusion [as Carter] but, in reworking the tale as a quasi-Freudian dream, simultaneously reveals the inadequacy of this, and any, attempt to control the sexual ‘darkness’ of fairy tales” (285).⁸ However, in the final

(psycho)analysis, Jordan’s reworking of the tale as “a quasi-Freudian dream” may well be better understood in Jungian rather than Freudian terms. As Bettelheim remarks:

Freudian psychoanalysts concern themselves with showing what kind of repressed or otherwise unconscious material underlies myths and fairy tales, and how these relate to dreams and daydreams. Jungian psychoanalysts stress in addition that the figures and events of these stories conform to and hence represent archetypal psychological phenomena, and symbolically suggest the need for gaining a higher state of selfhood – an inner renewal which is achieved as personal and racial unconscious forces become available to the person. (36)

Instead of just revealing the repressed sexual desires that underlie fairy tales and dreams (*à la* Freud), Jordan is more concerned with reconciling those desires in the living/waking world (*à la* Jung). In Carter’s story, the heroine overcomes her fears and gratifies her libido, but in Jordan’s film she also finds a soul-mate – her *animus* – which explains why she transforms into a wolf. With her mother’s blessing, Rosaleen and her mate initially return to the sanctuary of the woods (the id). However, one of the functions of the Jungian animus is to act as a kind of spiritual guide, connecting the id with the ego – which is why the wolves burst through the bedroom window and into the “real” world. Only then is Rosaleen’s quest for *individuation* – the process whereby different aspects of the divided psyche become whole – finally realised, signified by her calm voiceover over the closing credits.

The Return of the Repressed: Dark Rosaleen

Jordan’s restoration of the Jungian unconscious can also be read in terms of Fredric Jameson’s *political unconscious*: the idea that “every text is at its most fundamental level a political fantasy which in contradictory fashion articulates both the actual and potential social relations which constitute individuals within a specific political economy” (MacCabe xi). On the level of content, *The Company of Wolves* would seem to be the least “Irish” of Jordan’s transnational texts – “the most pointed reference to the [Irish] political situation lasts for about half a second [when] an image of a British soldier in battle dress fleets by subliminally” – and, indeed, “those who say that Jordan’s cinema is a cinema of surfaces, or of aesthetics over politics, commonly use this film in their argument” (Clancy 38). However, as John Orr comments:

Overlaying the sexual reading of the tale there may well be a political fable in the animal invasion. Rosalee’s [sic] prosperous English family seem to live in a safe world but she dreams herself back into a world of ancient danger, the Anglo-Saxon settlement threatened perhaps by a Celtic or barbarian menace, personified by the wolf-man with his eyebrows joined in the middle. (125)

This speculative post-colonial reading finds ample support in the sub-textual gestures and intertextual margins of the film. Firstly, there is the essential Otherness of the “barbarian menace”: in contrast to the West Counties English accent spoken by the villagers, the huntsman/werewolf (Micha Bergese) speaks with a central European

accent; the spurned peasant woman/witch (Dawn Archibald) with a Scottish accent; and Stephen Rea, as the travelling man/werewolf, retains his Irish accent. Secondly, in tandem with its implicit rejection of the British “Heritage” cinema of the 1980s, several (British) critics have suggested that *The Company of Wolves* renews the tradition of fantasy established by Powell and Pressburger in the 1940s. But the Otherworld inscribed in the film has several other antecedents, or as Jordan’s screenplay variously describes it: “the mysterious forest of the European imagination”; “a brooding Disney forest”; “redolent of the world of the Brothers Grimm, perhaps, *but much else besides*” [my emphasis] (187-89). Certainly the image of the Big House that dominates the mimetic frame suggests much else besides, not least the nineteenth-century Irish Gothic tradition, exemplified by Stoker and Le Fanu. From this perspective, Jordan’s restoration of the Irish Gothic – first hinted at in *Traveller* (1981), vouchsafed in *High Spirits* (1988), and embedded in *Interview with the Vampire* (1995) – can be seen as an antidote to the “soft primitivism” normally associated with traditional cinematic representations of Ireland.⁹

Thirdly, there is the suggestive symbolism of Rosaleen’s name, which evokes the image of “Dark Rosaleen,” the traditional female personification of Ireland: “My Dark Rosaleen!/My fond Rosaleen!/You’ll think of me through Daylight’s hours,/My virgin flower, my flower of flowers,/My Dark Rosaleen!” (Mangan 26).¹⁰ “Roisin Dubh” (Little Black Rose) was originally composed during the reign of Elizabeth I, to celebrate the Irish rebel chieftain Red Hugh O’Donnell. In his seminal collection of Irish ballads, *Irish Minstrelsy* (1831), James Hardiman suggests that the allegorical meaning of “Dark Rosaleen” “has long since been forgotten, and the verses are now remembered and sung as a plaintive love ditty.” However, as Seamus Deane points out, James Clarence Mangan’s 1846 rendering of the poem so emphatically restored this “lost” allegorical meaning that it immediately became an integral part of the Irish nationalist repertoire (Deane, “Poetry and Song” 17). Since then, the figure of Dark Rosaleen has provided inspiration for Irish artists and musicians as diverse as W.B. Yeats (*The Rose*, 1893), Seán Ó Riada (*Mise Eire*, 1966) and Thin Lizzy (*Black Rose*, 1979). Significantly, this personification finds an echo throughout Jordan’s work as well: in Rose, the teenage protagonist of *The Miracle* (1991); in Rose de Vrai, the woman at the heart of the love triangle in Jordan’s historical novel, *Sunrise with Sea Monster* (1994); and in Jordan’s debut novel, *The Past* (1980), where Mangan’s “Dark Rosaleen” is directly quoted.

What is the cultural significance of such allegorical material, if any? In an interview in 1998, Jordan spoke about the overwhelming anxiety of influence bequeathed by the Irish literary tradition:

When I started writing I felt very pressured by the question: How do I cope with the notion of Irishness? [...] I was, of course, profoundly moved by [...] Yeats and Joyce. But how was I to write about the experience I knew, as someone born in Sligo but growing up in the suburban streets of Dublin in the sixties? [...] My most acute dilemma was – how to write stories about contemporary urban life in Ireland without being swamped in the language and mythology of Joyce.

[...] Almost every work of fiction I’ve indulged in has been an escape to an alternative landscape – to a space and time not associated with the traditional themes of great Irish literature. (And it *is* great – whatever one might think of revivalist nationalism or Joyce’s obsession with his homeland.) [...] For me, to make films was to escape from these questions.

(“Imagining Otherwise” 196-97).

According to Seamus Deane, there are two dominant ways of “reading” Irish literature and history. The first is a romantic conception, exemplified by Yeats, “which takes pleasure in the notion that Ireland is a culture enriched by the ambiguity of its relationship to an anachronistic and a modernised present”; the second is a more modernist conception, exemplified by Joyce, “which denies the glamour of this ambiguity and seeks to escape from it into a pluralism of the present” (“Heroic Styles” 45). In the first instance, Yeats’s revivalist project, and in particular his valourisation of fairy lore, has proved to be a deeply problematic enterprise for successive generations of Irish writers, including Jordan. Yeats’s depiction of the fairy world, which had its roots in the gothic translations of James Clarence Mangan and Samuel Ferguson, deliberately diluted the dark eroticism of his precursors in favour of a more chaste and respectable vision of Irishness¹¹ – a romantic manoeuvre which had quite profound ideological repercussions.

This romantic world-view is brilliantly deconstructed in Hubert Butler’s seminal essay, “The Eggman and the Fairies” (1960) – the harrowing account of a young Irishwoman, Bridget Cleary, who was burned alive by her family and neighbours in 1895 on the grounds of fairy possession. In the course of his research, Butler unearths the original transcripts of the murder trial that followed. Scanning through these documents he comes across a stray mention of the “Eggman” – a travelling salesman whom, Butler infers, may have had an affair with the victim. Rather than deal with the reality of adultery and female sexuality, the villagers thus assigned Bridget’s behaviour a supernatural cause: “They lived in a fairy-haunted world, whose thoughts and feelings can be measured by no ordinary rule. The poet is apt to overestimate its charm, the moralist its cruelty” (67). In his conclusion to this tragic story, Butler issued a withering broadside against the appropriation of the fairy world by cultural nationalism: “A great deal of Irish poetry and romance is born of isolation and the nostalgia of those who escape it. Eyes that are dim with tears are not particularly perceptive; focused on the fairies they never give the eggman his due” (74).

The second mode of “reading” Ireland, dominated by Joyce’s modernism, is the one that Jordan broadly subscribes to, but not uncritically. Like Joyce, Jordan is fascinated by libidinal energy, and throughout his work he attempts to forge connections between sexuality and Irish history through the trope of sexual/political infidelity. But Jordan remains sceptical of Joyce’s wholesale rejection of Irish folklore, as well as his strategic deployment of European myth as the basis for a more stable, modern epistemology. Eyes that are dim with tears may not be particularly perceptive – but neither is a purely humanist vision that ignores the atavistic potency of its mythic materials. And it

is this gap between the rational and the romantic that Jordan wishes to explore: “[All my films are] basically about the clash between the real world and the world of imagination and unreality [...] and whether human beings answer to rational modes of thought or are inspired by things quite irrational and unknown to themselves” (Jordan, qtd. in McIlroy, *Irish Cinema* 114).

In this respect, Jordan’s restoration of the Irish Gothic marks a significant gesture in the re-telling of the national narrative. By reverting to a mode of discourse that pre-dates and prefigures the towering legacy of Yeats and Joyce, Jordan opens up an entirely different set of aesthetic (and political) possibilities. Moreover, in so doing, Jordan revitalizes an Irish sensibility that is both archaic and modern at the same time, and which is therefore amenable to modification across a range of generic forms (both national and transnational). Oddly, and until very recently, the gothic impulse in Jordan’s work has been all but ignored. However, in two recent essays, Brian McIlroy and Desmond O’Rawe separately suggest the value of such a gothic-orientated reassessment. For McIlroy, “The horror that Jordan’s Gothic brings to Irish society is one predicated upon an inner knowledge that the healthy imagination cannot express itself in a suffocating institutionalized culture” (McIlroy, “Irish Horror” n.pag.). Similarly, for O’Rawe, “Jordan’s films accommodate a distinctly Gothic vision, a vision that is nothing if not alert to the reality that progress is never entirely ‘progressive’ and that the end of history, in Ireland as elsewhere, is merely the beginning of new histories and new anxieties” (189).¹² In contemporary Ireland, as Seamus Deane has argued, “Everything, including our politics and our literature, has to be rewritten – i.e. re-read. That will enable new writing, new politics, unblemished by Irishness but securely Irish” (“Heroic Styles” 58). From this perspective, Jordan’s rejuvenation of the Irish Gothic proposes fertile territory for future critical and creative explorations of the modern Irish imaginary.

Notes:

¹ As Robert Stam notes: “Auteur studies now tend to see a director’s work not as the expression of individual genius but rather as the site of an encounter between a biography, an intertext, an institutional context, and a historical moment. [...] Most contemporary studies have jettisoned the romantic individualist baggage of auteurism to emphasise the ways a director’s work can be both personal *and* mediated by extrapersonal elements such as genre, technology, studios, and the linguistic procedures of the medium” (Stam 6).

² *Angel* was boycotted at the Third International Festival of Film and Television in the Celtic Countries, Wexford (31 Mar. 1982), by the Association of Independent Producers (Ireland). Briefly, the controversy arose after the newly-established Bord Scannán na hÉireann (Irish Film Board) had allocated its entire annual production budget for 1981 to *Angel*, and because the British filmmaker John Boorman – Jordan’s mentor, and a Film Board member – was also the film’s executive producer and a director of its production company. After an acrimonious public debate Boorman resigned from the Film Board, but resentment against

Jordan continued to linger. For a detailed account see Dwyer, “10 Days that Shook the Irish Film Industry,” 24-28; and K. Rockett, “History, Politics and Irish Cinema,” 119.

³ John Landis’s *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) had taken nine months to prepare similar animatronic sequences. Jordan used Leonardo Da Vinci’s anatomical drawings and Francis Bacon’s portraits of “screaming heads” as visual templates for the transformation scenes. See Finney, 70.

⁴ Samuel Palmer (1805-80) was an English painter and etcher strongly influenced by William Blake. As Jordan commented: “If you want to see how to eroticise landscape, look at [Palmer’s] paintings” (quoted Falsetto 165). Gustave Doré’s erotic illustrations for “Little Red Riding Hood” first appeared in *Fairy Tales Told Again* (1872), repr. Iona and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (1974). Bruno Bettelheim praises Doré for visually restoring the sexual subtext elided by Charles Perrault’s stringent moralising (176).

⁵ This marked the first of several rows between Jordan and the British censor over certification – namely *Michael Collins* and *The End of the Affair*. In an interview in *Marxism Today* (Nov. 1984), Angela Carter argued that the film “was about the deep roots of our sexual beings. The Thatcherite censorship certainly found it subtly offensive. They couldn’t put their finger on it, but they knew that something was wrong” (Carter, qtd. in Anwell 85).

⁶ In the published screenplay, this sermon inspires another embedded fantasy when Rosaleen imagines a menagerie of biblical animals invading the church. This sequence was cut from the final film but the motif reappears, in modified form, in *The Miracle* (1991).

⁷ The wedding sequence is derived from a brief paragraph in Carter’s original story. In the original the witch’s lover spurns her, but there is no mention of her pregnancy. Jordan only later realised that Carter herself was pregnant during the writing of the screenplay (see Finney 68).

⁸ In an interview in 1999, Jordan claimed not to have read Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment*: “I still haven’t. Angela wrote the story as a feminist metaphor, really. I was following her imagination” (see Falsetto 165).

⁹ According to Erwin Panofsky, soft primitivism “conceives of primitive life as a golden age of plenty, innocence and happiness – in other words, as civilised life purged of its vices” (qtd. in Gibbons 198).

¹⁰ In Carter’s original story the heroine is unnamed, and in her radio play she is simply called “Red Riding Hood.” Interestingly, both John Orr (125) and Catherine Orenstein (155-176) mistakenly refer to her as “Rosalee.” In terms of the soft Somerset burr spoken by the villagers in the film, this error may be understandable. However, at best, the name Rosalee tends to Anglicize the heroine; at worst, it evokes Gypsy Rose Lee (the American striptease artist of the 1930s).

¹¹ Compare, for example, the wistful yearning of Yeats’s “The Stolen Child” (1889) to Samuel Ferguson’s erotically-charged lyric “The Fairy Thorn” (1833), on which the former is based.

¹² Within the terms of his own argument, O’Rawe underestimates the effect of the Gothic vision in *The Company of Wolves* – a film which surely displays much more than just the *auteur’s* “technical proficiency and commercial *savoir faire* when working within the British and Hollywood conventions of the gothic-horror genre” (194).

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Walking with Beasts

GARY MITCHELL AND THE REPRESENTATION OF ULSTER LOYALISM

In his keynote address to the Institute

of Irish Studies at Liverpool University in November 2001, Dr. John Reid, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, warned that the North could soon become “a cold place for Protestants” (Reid 2001). The phrase was embraced by Protestant community leaders, who recognized themselves and their constituents in Reid’s description of a people whose confidence has declined in inverse proportion to the ever increasing “coherence, dynamism and energy” of the Catholic community in the North.¹

One of the factors sending a chill through the house of Protestant Ulster is the perception that disproportionate public attention has been and continues to be paid to the experience, past and present, of Northern Irish nationalists. A particular source of grievance, exacerbated by the broadcast on British television in January 2002 of two high-profile docu-dramas commemorating and exploring the event, is the ongoing Saville Inquiry into Bloody Sunday.² While some of those who decry the cost and duration of the Inquiry are without doubt informed by a willful refusal to accept that unarmed civilians were shot dead that day, more moderate voices also have expressed resentment, not that the Inquiry has been convened, but that other atrocities – for example, the IRA’s 1987 attack on a Remembrance Day procession in Enniskillen – have not been the subject of public scrutiny.³

One could argue, of course, that what happened in Derry on 30 January 1972 was unlike any previous or subsequent event in the history of the Troubles, and therefore demands special attention and review. But such an analysis would not alter the fact that many Northern Protestants, particularly those in working-class and interface areas, feel that their stories are rarely told, and that those that are typically fail to reflect the reality of their experience.

I have argued elsewhere that since the Downing Street Declaration was released in 1995, political developments in the North have coincided with a (r)evolution in the representation of Irish Republicans in film and television drama.⁴ Once depicted almost exclusively as gangsters, psychopaths, fanatics or dupes, Republicans today are more often portrayed as ordinary men and women whose allegiances and aspirations are clearly informed by the social, economic and political realities of life in Northern Ireland.

The same can not be said of Loyalists, who, when not ignored altogether, continue to be characterized by bowler hats, butchery, and a brutish unwillingness to adapt to

changed times.⁵ Indeed, televisual and cinematic images over the last decade suggest that Loyalism has replaced Republicanism as the native demon threatening public and private life in the North.⁶ Even when spared its usual association with sectarian violence, Protestant culture is portrayed as monochromatic (i.e., synonymous with Orangeism), and as such, empty, unappealing, and easily replaced,⁷ while its more positive elements – e.g., courage, commitment, independence of thought – are belied by those who represent it on screen.⁸

It was in this representational milieu that Gary Mitchell emerged as a writer for radio and stage in the 1990s. Born in 1965 and raised on the infamous Rathcoole housing estate in North Belfast where he still lives, Mitchell writes both about and from within the Loyalist community. The winner of several major writing awards⁹ and a former writer-in-residence at the National Theatre in London, he has received nearly unanimous praise from critics, who have described him as “breaking new ground” by examining Northern Irish politics and society from a Loyalist perspective (Wolf 2000). He also has been credited with dispelling “the kind of Irish stereotypes peddled by the media” and with rekindling interest, particularly on the British mainland, in “the Northern Irish issue,” a subject usually greeted by “groaning fatigue” (Billington 2000).¹⁰

Following the release of his first feature film, interest in Mitchell’s work has reached a new high. Adapted by the writer from his 1998 stage play of the same name,¹¹ *As The Beast Sleeps* premiered at the 55th Edinburgh International Film Festival in 2001, and was screened subsequently at film festivals in London, Montreal, Belfast, Wales, Gothenberg, Boston and New York before its broadcast on BBC2 on 3 February 2002.¹² Through a close reading of that film, this essay explores the implications of Mitchell’s increasing visibility, both as an artist and as spokesperson for Ulster Protestantism,¹³ for the image of Loyalism outside Northern Ireland. Specifically, it seeks to evaluate the claim that Mitchell’s work constitutes a departure from familiar representations of Protestants,¹⁴ and the assertion of *Beast’s* executive producer, Robert Cooper, that viewers will emerge from the film “with a total empathy” for its characters, and a new understanding of the Loyalist community (BBC 2003).¹⁵

Set in Rathcoole in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, *As The Beast Sleeps* explores the frustrations of rank-and-file Loyalists who, having been groomed for war, are forced to redefine themselves when their commanders decide to take part in the peace process. The transition is difficult. No longer rewarded for the strong-arm tactics that once sustained the movement, they feel betrayed by their political leaders and by their community, from whom they no longer command respect.

Their frustration is embodied in Kyle (Stuart Graham), who, before the ceasefire, headed a successful four-man team whose criminal activities filled the coffers of the local Loyalist social club. Now that the club is run as “a legitimate business,” Kyle and his team are dismayed to discover that they’re no longer permitted to drink there for free. This insult is compounded when, in a bid for political legitimacy, the leadership issues an order restricting the activities of all companies throughout the North. Speaking for Central Command, Larry (Colum Convey) outlines the new policy:

[T]here’s to be no further military action, no further punishment action, in fact no further action of any description is likely to get a green light for the foreseeable future. No means no. No wee jobs, no capers, no robberies, no shootings, no hijackings, no knee-cappings, no feuds, no settling of scores

– to which Kyle adds dryly, “No surrender.” Back at the club, Larry tries to explain things to him privately, but the changes remain difficult to accept. “Where would this place be without us?” he demands. “You owe us. Everyone who comes in here owes us.” Larry offers him “a few quid” to tide him over, but Kyle refuses to take his money: it’s acknowledgement, not charity, that he desires. He grabs a stack of pint glasses, a curtain, and a couple of pool cues and heads for the door. “My team paid for all this,” he reminds Larry, adding, “Tell Alec” – Larry’s superior – “I’ll be back for his balls.” In these changed times, however, Kyle knows his threat has no teeth. His problem now is the same as Larry’s – i.e., how to sell the new policy to his team, and particularly to Freddie (Patrick O’Kane), his closest friend.

Kyle’s wife Sandra (Laine Megaw) is also fond of Freddie, as is their young son. But whereas Kyle is intelligent, reasonable, and levelheaded, Freddie is easily riled, prone to violence, and difficult to control. Only Kyle seems able to soothe him. “As soon as this process is finished we’re back in business,” he assures Freddie. “As soon as that happens everything’s going to go back to exactly the way it used to be...But it’s the Taigs have to fuck it up, not us.”

Kyle’s powers of persuasion are stretched to the limit when he’s told to transform his team into a punishment squad, an assignment to which he himself has a visceral aversion. Such is the strength of their friendship, however, that Freddie agrees even to this. But the strain these developments place on their relationship soon proves too great. In the course of “disciplining” a group of renegades, Freddie disobeys a direct order from Kyle. Hurt and humiliated by Kyle’s rebuke, he steals £36,000 from the social club, ostensibly to finance an immediate war against nationalists. “If we wait on the Taigs starting it,” he warns Kyle, “the troops will be gone, the police will be relaxed,

and you and all the other stupid fuckers will be too busy sorting out your own backyard to do fuck all about it.”

Well aware of what will happen to Freddie if he doesn’t cooperate, Kyle urges him to confess; he refuses, and is beaten unconscious as a result. Appalled by what she sees as her husband’s betrayal of Freddie, Sandra – who has been hiding the stolen money on Freddie’s behalf – packs her bags. Thus, despite his best efforts to “stay loyal” – to his friend, by keeping him on the straight and narrow; to his family, by choosing paid work, however abhorrent, instead of unemployment; and to the Loyalist movement, by following orders and obeying the chain of command – Kyle ends the film alone.

There are broadly two ways of reading Mitchell’s film: first, as a thoughtful and provocative metaphor for the roots of Protestant alienation in the North, and for the challenges facing Loyalism in the twenty-first century; and second, as a conventional “Troubles narrative,” whose only distinction is its author’s home address. In the first reading, Mitchell’s study of disaffected Loyalists does indeed break new ground by both reflecting and affirming his characters’ sense of betrayal. As depicted in *Beast*, the movement to which Kyle and his team have devoted their lives made them into thieves and thugs, and rewarded them as such for as long as was profitable. Now that they’re a liability, however, their leaders have disowned them, and have turned their attention to other pursuits in which they’re permitted to play no part.

Mitchell draws a clear parallel between Kyle and Larry.¹⁶ Like Kyle’s, Larry’s potential for leadership is dismissed by Central Command, represented in the film by the character of Alec (David Hayman). “The UDP’s a very small party,” Alec replies evasively when Larry tells him that he wants to move into politics. “A small party can only look after so many people.” Although Larry insists he doesn’t want to be “looked after,” he wants “to help,” all Alec will promise is “to talk to some people” on his behalf, claiming, “That’s the best I can do for now.” But Alec’s best isn’t good enough for Larry:

LARRY: You have to promise me, mate.
ALEC: Are you threatening me?
LARRY: I will not be left behind.
ALEC: Have I ever lied to you?
LARRY: Let me put it this way. You’ve never lied to me and I’ve never threatened you.

In an echo of this conversation, Kyle resists appointment as the head of a punishment squad. “All I’m saying to you is, I’m better than this,” he tells Larry desperately, “I have more to offer than this.” Clearly he does – and yet Larry fobs him off with the same kind of vague, empty promise with which Alec previously dismissed him: if he agrees to “discipline” “renegades,” then “people who count...will see you do this and they’ll remember you.”

Larry knows better than most that in these changed times a willingness to do unpleasant work on behalf of the movement is no guarantee of future reward. Nevertheless he tells his men, “I’m still doing my best and I expect you to do the same.” In fact, there is little else that either he or they can do. While Kyle’s obvious gifts as a leader may have been honed while employed by the UDA, the experience

has not prepared him for ordinary work. To drive this point home, Mitchell has Kyle confront a desk clerk at the DHSS office. Though not unexpected, the fact that he'd "need a business degree just to be considered" for the positions advertised there clearly defeats him. "I'm completely fucked here," he tells Sandra later, trying to explain why he's accepted Larry's proposal. "Unless you want me to get a job sweeping the roads, because that's all I'm qualified for. This is the only option I have."

This pattern of promise, assurance, backtracking and abandonment has been essential to the Unionist perception of Northern Ireland's relationship with Great Britain since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. At the other end of the ideological spectrum, it is also key to a Marxist analysis of the historical relationship between working-class Protestants in Northern Ireland and the British State. Whether destined for the dole queue, the factory, or the battlefields of France, the men of this community, Mitchell's film suggests, have been and remain disposable, and therefore disempowered. As volunteers for the Loyalist cause, men like Kyle and Larry have sacrificed their potential if not their lives. Although the Republican threat seems to them to be greater than ever, they've been told their services are no longer required, while their fears for the future – which are understandable, given how unfit they are for any other pursuit – are ignored by the very people who claim to be giving them a voice.¹⁷

In conventional "Troubles narratives," by contrast, those who claim to be politically motivated use such rhetoric to disguise less noble reasons for their behaviour. Alternatively, their rhetoric is rendered illegitimate by other aspects of their characterization. Less like soldiers than godfathers of organized crime, neither they nor the simpletons and psychopaths they command are capable of controlling the violence they unleash, and are powerless to prevent the destruction of domestic harmony that is its inevitable result.¹⁸

Judged by these criteria, *As The Beast Sleeps* conforms well to convention. The film opens with a friendly football match between rival members of the same social club. At this point Freddie and Kyle are literally on the same team and enthusiastically supported by Kyle's wife and son. By the end of the film this happy family (both nuclear and extended) has been torn asunder, in part because of the actions of "renegades" whose self-serving criminality – they rob a betting shop in order to buy drugs¹⁹ – triggers a series of events that swiftly spirals out of control, towards ever-greater degrees of violence.

The squad assembled to punish such transgressions operates at the pleasure of people like Alec who runs an organization that, despite its new veneer of legitimacy, is no less violent or criminal than before. Following the robbery at the club, for example, its manager, Jack (Frank McCusker), a protégé of Alec's, under-reports the amount stolen by £31,000 and tells the police that he can't identify the culprit so that Alec can "discipline" Freddie himself. "You bring me this fucker's eyes," Alec tells Larry, and "I'll show him what he put you through." Once Freddie is apprehended, however, Alec keeps his own hands clean: it is Larry who

supervises the beating in "the punishment room" – now euphemistically called "the back room" – at the club.²⁰

Alec is anxious that the club's stolen money be returned quickly as he needs the cash to fund a publicity tour of the US. "Do you realize how important it is that people like me represent us at the very highest levels?" he asks Larry:

How are the Yanks supposed to know what's going on from our point of view if no one's available to tell them? It's vital we maintain our high profile as serious political representatives. That means we have to be seen in the right places, we have to be seen by the right people, and when we are seen we have to fit the bill, and that bill costs money...I mean serious suits, serious styles, serious transportation. None of this about wearing masks or blocking roads or singing "God Save the Queen" around a bonfire with a crate of beer.

This preoccupation with his own image deflects attention from the viewpoint that Alec's many meetings with "very important people" throughout the film are, presumably, designed to promote. Unable to sell on their own merits, it's implied, the cultural and political aspirations of Loyalists must be dressed up to succeed.

But it is through the depiction of Freddie that Mitchell's film most closely conforms to established conventions. Although Kyle – good-looking, responsible, earnest, even open-minded²¹ – is a complex character and as such provides some counterbalance to that of his friend, Freddie is such a Neanderthal his portrayal simply cannot be rescued from stereotype. Tall, with a low, heavy brow and long, dangling arms, he seems to struggle to follow most conversations, let alone articulate his own thoughts. In agreeing to join the punishment squad, for example, he tells the rest of the team, "I want it on the record with the Inner Circle, Inner whatever the fuck you call them, that me, I, do not agree with the current strategy but am willing to give it a go and see how things..." "Go?" someone suggests eventually. The ensuing laughter at his expense annoys Freddie, who replies angrily, "What do you think I am, illegitimate like you?"

Like the passion for football cards he shares with Kyle's boy, this exchange suggests that Freddie is less a political actor than a child playing a game he does not understand. And it is as a child that others treat him throughout the film, even when his remarks are more sophisticated, as when he tells Kyle:

Taigs hate us and we hate them, that's the way it is and that's the way it's going to stay. They were fighting like fuck for ages because we were on top and now we've got to do the same...Better to die on your feet than live on your knees.

This analysis, albeit inelegant and obviously incompatible with the process of peace, nevertheless implies an appreciation of the relationship between oppression and resistance, or at least, between inequality and social unrest. Yet Kyle's response is to call Freddie "a fucking child" who is "talking shite" and to insist once again that "all we have to do is wait."²² "I've *been* waiting!" Freddie retorts. "Waiting on Paisley, waiting on Robinson taking over, waiting on people like Larry there! Well I'm all waited out." As an expression of the roots of Loyalist frustration, Freddie's argument is clear and cogent – and immediately undermined

when Kyle rejects it. “It’s not three against two,” he explains gently when Freddie suggests they make a break for it together: “It’s thousands against you.”

Freddie makes one last attempt to win Kyle over, but his vision of the future should the border disappear merely confirms that his fears have no basis in reason. “I see a picture, Kyle,” Freddie tells him, “a picture of you in a united Ireland. You’re standing there, just watching, while wee Joe is getting fucked by a priest.” Instead of sharing his horror at this prospect, however, Kyle gives up in despair. He surrenders the interrogation to Larry, and the brutal beating begins.

In this, too, Freddie is archetypal: although directed towards others, his violence is ultimately self-destructive. At the same time, his actions jeopardize the efforts of his superiors to take part in a process to which, like it or not, Northern Ireland is fully committed, and which therefore represents the Loyalist community’s only real opportunity to improve its position. As Kyle tells Freddie during his interrogation, “This isn’t happening to you because of me. This is happening to me because of you.”

Read metaphorically, Kyle’s observation reflects the view of moderate Loyalists who feel their efforts are hampered by the actions of extremists – who themselves accuse moderates of betraying the cause. And yet, although others, too, have reservations (pressured by Alec to order his men to accept the new policy, for example, Larry suggests that “the reason I can’t un-convince them about the struggle is that I was so right the first time”), Freddie’s own doubts about the ceasefire are obscured by his extreme volatility, which in the film appears to be the true catalyst for his actions.

Undeniably, there are elements within Loyalism whose motivations are more pathological than political. Likewise it is true that the aversion felt by some Northern Protestants towards the prospect of a united Ireland is rooted in an (at best) outdated understanding of Southern Irish culture and society. It is equally true, however, that the chill described by Dr Reid is felt not only by disgruntled former thieves and murderers whose chief complaint about the peace process is that they’re no longer allowed to steal or kill.

Yet there is little evidence of this in Mitchell’s film.²³ The critique of Loyalism that this suggests is underscored by the growing tendency of people in other parts of the United Kingdom to distance themselves from the notion of Britishness.²⁴ Even in England, the country most commonly connoted by the term, only 22 per cent of those responding to a recent BBC poll identified themselves as British, as compared to 31 per cent in 1981.²⁵ The ironies of the Unionist position in the face of such attitudes are not lost on Mitchell:

No one in Scotland wants to be British, no one in Wales wants to be British any more, and the English never thought of themselves as British in the first place. So you have got us, who are not even in Britain, saying the most important thing to us is to be British. Us and bloody Al Fayed, of course.
(qtd. in Gibbons 2000)

Viewed in this context, the violence Mitchell’s film depicts is not simply irrational because, according to convention, all violence is irrational, but because the principle it is used to defend – the desire to be British, and therefore, the very concept of Loyalism itself – is at odds with the prevailing will of Britannia herself.

Of the two readings outlined above, the second is the most likely among ordinary viewers, by which I mean those with no special knowledge of Northern Ireland’s socio-political history, whose views of the conflict in recent years have been shaped by news images of Loyalist violence at Drumcree and Holy Cross. Historically, the most successful films about Northern Ireland are those that, like Mitchell’s, are “most likely to correspond to the expectations of an international audience” (Hill 1988); the same is true of “films concerned primarily with character,” which tend to “repress history and politics for fear of distancing non-Irish audiences” (McIlroy 107). This success comes at a price, however: such films do little to advance understanding of the conflict or its participants.

Even when the writer is on hand to guide the viewer’s response, a more subtle reading is not guaranteed. The clip shown during Mitchell’s live interview with *BBC Breakfast* on the Friday morning before *Beast’s* television premiere, for example, showed masked gunmen in the midst of a robbery – familiar images of Troubles violence which effectively undermined Mitchell’s description (delivered in voiceover as the clip rolled) of his characters as people who “saw themselves very much as heroes of the community, people that were defending the British Protestant interest in Northern Ireland, and they saw it all being torn away, with their own government, as they see it, giving concession after concession to their enemies.”²⁶

Mitchell has said that what scares him most when his work is produced is the thought of “someone leaving the theatre saying...that I haven’t been completely truthful” (qtd. in Gibbons 2000). Nevertheless, Mitchell’s work is frequently praised for its authenticity, while Mitchell himself is typically described in terms that honour his willingness not only to expose and confront difficult truths, but also to explore them objectively. Reviewing the stage version of *Beast* in 1998, for example, Karen Fricker argued that “what makes it such important...viewing is that [Mitchell’s] interest is not in judging these people on the morality of their lifestyle, but rather taking them on their own terms” (Fricker 1998). Likewise, Michael Hayden, reviewing the film, which is “shot in a verité, almost documentary style” (BBC 2003), praised its “realist look and non-judgmental tone” (Hayden 2001). Other reviewers have called Mitchell a taboo-tackler and “an unflinchingly honest chronicler of life within the Protestant community” (Dixon 2000). Such tributes must hearten a playwright who clearly feels a keen sense of artistic responsibility. “When things are so obviously fucked up, no one wants to listen to the guy pointing to the sties in everyone’s eyes,” Mitchell explains. “But if you’re a playwright, that’s your job” (Gibbons 2000).

It is of course difficult, if not impossible, for any artist – or indeed any individual – to be *completely* truthful, and it is for this reason, chiefly, that Mitchell’s growing prominence is cause for concern. With his working-class roots and

current connections, his ready admission that he “did some bad stuff to some people” as a youth (Gibbons 2000) and his “bravery” in choosing to remain “among the very community he is critiquing” (Wolf 2000), there can be no doubt that he speaks with authority on the subject of Loyalism. But if, as John Reid has argued, Northern Protestants must first “be convinced that their culture is really understood, let alone respected” by others before they can tackle sectarianism effectively within their own ranks (Reid 2001), then Mitchell’s work – praised for its “unabashed portrayal of the violence and lawlessness” of his community (Fricker 1998) – must not come to define what it means to be Loyalist.

This is particularly true in the absence of other voices. Graham Reid and Marie Jones, two other high-profile Protestant writers, tend to explore aspects of the Nationalist/Republican identity with which they often seem to feel more sympathy. When set among Loyalists, Reid’s more recent work, such as the 1996 BBC drama *Precious Blood*, has demonstrated a level of criticism which verges on self-loathing,²⁷ while Jones’s has tended to extol the historical experience of the Protestant working-class while poking fun at the practice (and practitioners) of contemporary Loyalism, as in the musical comedy *Weddins, Weeins and Wakes* (2001).

Having been described so often as “a rare beast” because he writes from a Loyalist perspective (Gibbons 2000), it is hardly surprising that Mitchell is called upon regularly to represent that viewpoint in essays, articles and books about the Protestant tradition in the North.²⁸ Although he resists identification as “the voice of

Loyalism”,²⁹ his growing prominence as an artist casts him ever more frequently in that role. He wrote *Marching On*, for example, to combat “what he felt was the failure [of the media and of Protestants themselves] to tell the full story” of the Orange parades, and “to counter the cartoon images of Protestants that feature in Hollywood movies about the Troubles” (O’Liathain 2000).

While the stories he tells are truthful, they are nonetheless only partial truths. Yet such is the extent of his exposure as an artist that audiences both within and outside Northern Ireland may come to accept his vision as the only one needed to understand a community which is, in fact, more diverse than Mitchell’s body of work so far would suggest.³⁰ In the absence of other, equal truths – ones, for example, that explore the energy, ingenuity and determination of working-class Protestants who have organized themselves into residents’ associations, action groups, and community councils dedicated to the constructive pursuit of their political aspirations and the creative expression of their identity³¹ – *As The Beast Sleeps* will only confirm stereotypes of Ulster Protestants, despite its author’s commitment to challenging them.³²

Of course, it may not be Gary Mitchell’s responsibility to tell those stories. In one of a series of articles on political theatre produced for *The Guardian*, Arnold Wesker argued that “a theory about what art must do and the way people must conduct their lives rather than perceptions about the way people do conduct their lives is more to do with wish-fulfillment than with truth” (Wesker 2003). Other writers, however, like Naomi Wallace and David Edgar, contested



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the view that “ideas and political theory are limiting for writers...and that truth springs from the individual, unencumbered by the blinkers of politicking” (Wallace 2003). While it seems Mitchell, himself a contributor to the series, identifies more with Wesker’s view,³³ nevertheless, until other, less familiar stories are told, whether by those who have lived them or by someone else, the Protestant community will continue to feel silenced, and may come to believe there is no means but violence by which to make itself heard.

Concluding his address to the Institute of Irish Studies, Dr. Reid summarized the three strands of his argument as follows. First, “the two communities in Northern Ireland are both in need of ‘persuasion’: each community needs to persuade the other “not of some barren political ideology and constitutional fixation,” but that each is committed to creating a new society founded on inclusivity and mutual respect.” Second, “Northern Ireland needs more leaders who can share publicly [their] vision of [that] new society,” and, third, “establishing this vision is inseparable from the task of tackling sectarianism.” If the peace process is to succeed, Reid concluded, “Northern Ireland needs to hear urgently from those with the energy and commitment to lift their people beyond the present horizon to a time and place where cooperation and compassion replace suspicion and strife.”

“How can two uneasy, sometimes frightened, communities give sufficient reassurance to each other to move forward?” Reid asked the assembly, and how can they “move beyond their insecurities to share the hopes they hold in common?” Such questions are the fuel of artistic exploration. What’s more, like the experience of loss, betrayal, frustrated desire, and the uncomfortable inability to fully belong – themes that dominate Mitchell’s work – they probe aspects of the human condition with which we can all identify.

Notes:

¹ Journalist Susan McKay confirms Reid’s analysis: “The future [for Northern Protestants] is uncertain. There is a lot of fear” (McKay 2000b).

² The first of these, *Bloody Sunday*, starring James Nesbitt, was written and directed by Paul Greengrass and took the World Cinema Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 2001 and the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 2002. Its doppelganger, *Sunday*, written by Jimmy McGovern and directed by Charles McDougal, was broadcast a week later on Channel 4 and was followed by *The Sunday Debate*, a live, 45-minute discussion of the film by survivors, academics, politicians, military officials and a diverse studio audience.

³ When the North Belfast Community Action Project held the last of sixteen public meetings in the Spectrum Centre on the Shankill Road on 16 April 2002, among the issues discussed was the representation of the area in the media. Describing the BBC as the “Biased Broadcasting Corporation”, one participant denounced the lack of attention paid to the plight of Protestant residents, and the reliance on Sinn Féin for information and confirmation of events at the Woodvale-Ardoyne interface. (For further allegations of BBC

bias, see MacVicar.) Another criticized the mainstream media’s unimaginative interpretation of so-called “balanced” reporting, which apportions blame to both sides equally without investigating the claims or accusations of either. For a summary and analysis of the issues raised by the Project Team see Adams et. al.

⁴ See Cornell (1999), (1998), and (1997). In fact, the phenomenon predates the current peace process. In his seminal work on images of violence in Irish cinema, John Hill argues that British films about Ireland typically “reworked and refashioned the old images according to changing political circumstances.”

⁵ See McIlroy (1998), in which “the limited – or lack of – treatment of the Protestant community” in Irish and British films, television dramas and videos about the conflict is a recurring theme.

⁶ Two especially egregious examples are Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s *Nothing Personal* (1995) and Marc Evans’ *Resurrection Man* (1998), both of which involve characters whose violence is based on that of the Shankill Butchers. For a factual account of that group’s activities in the 1970s, see Dillon. See also Graham Reid’s BBC drama *Precious Blood* (1996).

⁷ See, for example, John Forte’s *Skin Tight* (1994), Pat Griffin’s *The Cake* (1994), and Tracy Cullen’s *Surfing with William* (1998), all of which were produced by the BBC.

⁸ And on stage. Marie Jones’s didactic yet widely acclaimed *A Night In November* (1995) returned to the Lyric Theatre in Belfast in June 2002. The play is set on the night of the 1994 World Cup qualifying match between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and, according to the Lyric’s 2002 summer season brochure, “is about *the bigot* and a night that changes him irrevocably” [emphasis mine]. The word choice confirms the story as an allegory: its only character is an unhappy Protestant who, by the end of the play, literally sheds his restrictive Orange colours for a more tolerant, inclusive, and fulfilling shade of Green.

⁹ These include a BBC Radio 4 Young Playwrights Festival Award for *The World, The Flesh and The Devil* (1991), the Stewart Parker Radio Drama Award – the first to be won by a Northern Irish writer – for *Independent Voice* (1994), the Irish Times Theatre Best New Play Award (1997) and the Belfast Arts Drama Award (1998) for *In A Little World of Our Own*, and the Pearson Best Play of the Year Award for *Trust* (1999). Mitchell also has received The George Devine Award and the Evening Standard Charles Wintour Award for Most Promising Playwright for *The Force of Change* (2000).

¹⁰ According to Robert Cooper, Head of BBC (Northern Ireland) Drama, “Despite the ceasefires, the television audience considers Northern Ireland an unlikely setting for popular series drama” (Cooper 2008). Such is the appeal of Mitchell’s work, however, that it may be able to defeat this bias. Cooper’s department, which co-produced *As The Beast Sleeps*, is developing *The Force of Change* as a two-part drama series. See Mitchell (2001a).

¹¹ The stage version of *Beast* premiered at the Abbey’s Peacock Theatre in Dublin in June 1998.

¹² The film also featured at the Edinburgh Showcase in New York and joined the London Film Festival On Tour in Newcastle, Bradford, Manchester, Bristol and Cardiff.

¹³ While he insists his themes are universal, Mitchell describes himself as a Protestant writer: “I don’t think of myself as Irish in any way. It annoys me when I see my plays in the Irish section in bookshops. I ask why I’m not in the British section...I believe in

the dignities of Protestantism, in it being a radical force in the world, being truthful, being loyal” (qtd. in Arnold 64).

¹⁴ According to Patrick O’Kane, who has played Freddie in both the film and stage versions of *Beast*, Mitchell “began writing in the first place” because “he looked around and saw Protestant leaders complaining that they were being represented in an unfair light, so he decided to do something about it” (BBC 2003).

¹⁵ According to Cooper, Mitchell’s film “tells us more about the Loyalist community in Northern Ireland than any number of documentaries. It drops you right into their world and helps you understand it – perhaps for the first time – because this story is utterly universal” (BBC 2003).

¹⁶ Announcing the moratorium on military action, Larry tells the men under his command, “Times have changed. The way we do things has changed. And our role in society has changed, and like many of you I’m finding the adjustments very difficult to get used to.” Kyle delivers virtually the same speech to his own men, and later, sensing Freddie’s resistance, takes him aside to explain the need for change just as Larry previously tried to reason with him.

¹⁷ The “Central Command” of the UDA is indistinguishable in Mitchell’s film from the leadership of the UDP, whose democratic pretensions Mitchell explicitly debunks. Central Command calls meetings “to pass on decisions that have been made,” Larry reminds the rank-and-file, “not to hold them up for debate or test the water out to see what you think of them.”

¹⁸ Again O’Sullivan’s *Nothing Personal* provides an excellent example. For an historical analysis of these conventions, see Hill.

¹⁹ Although they announce themselves clearly (“This is the UDA, we’re here to collect some funds”), they don’t appear to be taken seriously: one of the customers caught in the raid asks for (and receives) permission to cash his winning ticket before they clear the tills. That they are dangerous despite their ineptitude, however, is obvious when they panic and shoot a bystander.

²⁰ The thematic significance of this room is more developed in the stage version of *Beast*. In a lengthy exchange between Larry and Alec (lost in the film), Mitchell uses Larry’s account how and by whom the room was once employed not only to explore the relationship between ethnic allegiance, disloyalty, and the need for discipline, but to acknowledge collusion between Loyalist paramilitaries and the RUC, reveal the complexity of cultural identity (by describing a Loyalist who married a Catholic and a Catholic who was a committed Loyalist), and to express (through Alec) a class-based critique of Unionist politics. See Mitchell (2001b 16-23).

²¹ “See Taigs?” Freddie observes bitterly as a pregnant Catholic woman enters the DHSS office with her children. “They don’t want to be British but they’ll take the Queen’s money.” “Leave her alone,” Kyle answers mildly. “She’s just the same as us.”

²² “Do you think all this stuff that’s happening out there is going on just to make you unhappy?” Kyle demands. “Tell [Larry] what he needs to know and we can fix this before anybody gets hurt.”

²³ Curiously, it is in this that Mitchell’s film differs most strikingly from his play (Mitchell 2001). Although he’s described by Jack as a “nutcase” (35) whom “no one can handle” (44), all Freddie’s aggression takes place off-stage whereas the beating he receives is vividly dramatized (84-94), thus positioning him more as a victim than a perpetrator of violence. He’s also far more articulate and

self-reflective in the play than he is on screen. Musing on the tension between him and Kyle, for example, he tells Sandra, “[We] always seemed to be on the same wavelength. Mine was maybe a wee bit more, you know, in your face. His maybe...better thought out or something but after this – Fuck it, it’s not just with him. It seems to be with everybody” (54). The most significant difference between the two texts, however, is that in the play, Freddie does not rob the club alone. He does so with Sandra, who shares his frustration with Kyle and other moderates for failing to recognize how “serious” the current socio-political situation is. “We’re going to have to make him listen,” Sandra declares, “[w]e’re going to have to make everybody start listening.” The only way to do that, they agree, is to act: “[W]e need to start doing. Something big. Something that’ll get everybody sitting up and taking notice” (55-56).

²⁴ According to Susan McKay, author of *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People*, “What [Protestants] traditionally regarded as the glory days of the old Unionist regime, is an era regarded by the rest of the interested world as a time of shame and injustice. They cannot easily take pride in the past, and there is little sympathy for their stance in the present” (McKay 2000b).

²⁵ Likewise only 9% identified with the United Kingdom, whereas 63% favored the establishment of regional assemblies throughout the UK. See BBC (2002).

²⁶ The use of this clip must have disappointed Mitchell himself, who clearly intended *Beast* to subvert such stereotypes. Responding to a question from Jeremy Bowen, he reiterated that Kyle and Freddie would not see themselves as terrorists: “there are people involved in [the UDA], as the play demonstrates, that are conflicted and feel the organization is a proper organization, an appropriate organization to protect themselves and their friends and families” [emphasis mine]. Similarly, in his interview with Susan McKay, Mitchell “took issue with [her] use of the word ‘assassinations’ to describe the killings carried out by the UDA,” insisting that local “people don’t see the UDA as the bad guys. If your community is under constant attack, it is hard to find a strategy” (McKay 2000a 114).

²⁷ In fact, Reid’s success in getting “plays about Protestants” on TV has been attributed to his unflattering portrayal of the characters. According to Gary Mitchell, “[a]n actor who had changed his name so people would think he was an Irish Catholic instead of a British Protestant” once suggested that Reid’s work was produced “because he made [Protestants] look so bad” – a charge Mitchell claims has been leveled at his work, too, though he rejects it: if he is being critical, he argues, then he is “criticizing the human experience and not the Protestant community of Northern Ireland alone” (Mitchell 2003).

²⁸ See, for example, Stewart (1998) and McKay (2000a).

²⁹ “[The phrase] doesn’t annoy me, but it’s not accurate...I write about it but I don’t try and put words in people’s mouth and I don’t try and speak on anyone’s behalf” (qtd. in Connolly 2000). More recently, Mitchell has sought to distance himself even from this modest association, declaring, “I don’t write about Northern Ireland. I write about people” (Mitchell 2003).

³⁰ While the habit is hardly unique to Mitchell, the incomplete nature of the truth he tells is obscured somewhat by his tendency in interviews to refer to “Protestants” generally when describing a Loyalist viewpoint which itself is identified closely with supporters of the UDA.

³¹ Some of these stories were on display at the Greater Shankill Community Exhibition and Convention held in May 2002; see Hall.

³² "I've had to fight against all the stereotypes," Mitchell told Susan McKay. "The Protestant as the hardworking, decent, upright, very religious person... The working classes as scum. I want to look at Protestants in a realistic way" (McKay 2000a 117).

³³ In fact, Mitchell's position in this debate is difficult to pinpoint. While he argued in his own essay that audiences liked his work because "it wasn't about Protestants, it was about people, human beings, in a predicament" (Mitchell 2003), one week earlier Naomi Wallace had listed him as one of "a growing community of courageous playwrights who are working – on and, importantly, off the stage – to confront and resist racism and empire" (Wallace). Two weeks after Mitchell's piece appeared, David Edgar, citing Wallace, asserted "there is no contradiction between writing about politics and writing about people" (2003).

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The Scandinavian Connection

IRISH CINEMA AS A “SMALL” NATIONAL CINEMA

By way of introduction, I want to briefly

describe the most recent event of Montréal's Cine Gael, a group that those who live in *La belle ville* know has done great work to increase Irish cinema's visibility. This most recent event was a tribute to Milo O'Shea, a veteran Irish character actor; Cine Gael brought him to Montréal and screened two of his films.

The first was *The Hebrew Lesson*, a 1972 short written and directed by Wolf Mankowitz, featuring O'Shea as an old Rabbi who takes in a young gunman fleeing the British during the War for Independence. At first the scared young man is hostile and threatening, but gradually he warms to the old man, and they begin to exchange lessons in Hebrew and Irish, with a bit of Yiddish thrown in for good measure. Various connections are made between Jewish and Irish culture, sometimes through obviously silly speculations about how the Irish are descended from the lost tribes of Israel (“I don't think they could have gotten that lost” says O'Shea's rabbi, rolling his eyes). Some talk of the life of Ireland's Jewish community at the beginning of the century is also smoothly, economically integrated. The film was relatively conventional formally, and did nothing to alienate the large, diverse crowd in attendance; still, it never felt lazy or derivative. It was, in short, a sophisticated, original examination of a little-known aspect of Irish culture, and although constituted as an accessible piece of work, it was clearly made with little concern for its commercial possibilities. It was a genuine surprise.

The feature film shown that night could not have been more different. Called *The Mystics*, it was a comedy featuring O'Shea playing an old man who runs, with his aging friend, a phoney spiritualist racket; they claim to channel people's dead relatives. Their scam clips along until the family of a deceased gangster demands that they contact their whacked relation so that they can recover the proceeds of a lucrative diamond heist. It turns out that the men really can channel departed spirits, and most of the film is a comedy of errors featuring competing factions trying to recover the loot. Operating safely within the expectations of a light genre film, *The Mystics* was basically indistinguishable from a middle-of-the-road Hollywood film, except for a few Irish references (the old mystics used to have a variety show that went from village to village, one of the gangsters insists that the two have a cup of tea – “aw, c'mon, ya will!” – made from the water that he's about to boil someone alive

in, etc.). Almost nothing about it was surprising.

The differences between these two films speak to a broader transformation in Irish cinema over the course of the last three decades, and I am not convinced that this change is unambiguously for the better. During the Q&A session in Montréal, O'Shea spoke of how hard it was to make films in Ireland when *The Hebrew Lesson* was produced, and how much easier it is now, how much more welcoming the climate has become. No doubt this is true. And yet, I wonder how many more films like *The Hebrew Lesson* can be produced these days, how really open to surprise a renewed Irish cinema remains. More substantively, perhaps, I wonder whether or not the shift towards commercial, internationally-distributable feature production that has characterised Irish cinema since the mid-1990s has come at the expense of the sort of innovation that only the lower stakes of short and low-budget independent production can really lead to.

What I want to argue for here is a re-shifting of comparative frameworks for Irish cinema, which I think stands at something of a crossroads at a moment that is also very important for national cinemas all over the world. It is becoming more and more difficult for small national cinemas to compete against a globalised Hollywood for presence not only on international screens but on domestic ones as well. Despite that country's cinematic boom of the 1970s and 80s, today it is not very easy to see Australian films on Australian screens; I do not think it is getting much easier to see Irish films in Ireland's movie theatres, and I have no problem visualising an “Australian Scenario” in Ireland ten or fifteen years down the line. Massive national film industries like India's are an exception to the tendency of diminishing prospects for small national cinemas, but such instances are getting more and more rare; even Egypt's once-mighty film industry is finding itself having a harder and harder time.

The comparative framework I want to argue for, though, is neither Indian nor Australian; it is essentially Scandinavian. These cinemas share with Irish cinema a history of being shut out of an American-dominated international distribution system. They also have a long history of both positive and negative state intervention, and so have long been part of a (sometimes conflictual) semi-commercial, semi-cultural framework. The “Scandinavianisation” in Irish cinema points, I believe, to the need to conceive of Irish



The Hebrew Lesson

cinema not in terms of a kinder, folksier version of commercial, Hollywood-style narrative, but in terms of a (perhaps particularly internationally visible) small national cinema, one that has development needs quite different from those of Hollywood.

I am not, of course, the first to discuss this Nordic connection to Irish cinema. Indeed, this connection was discussed at a very early stage by figures heavily invested in Irish-language filmmaking. Proinsias Ó Conluain's 1954 booklet *Ar Scannáin Féin*, which dealt with a barely-existent Irish cinema, was largely a set of proposals and comparisons with other national cinemas. Ó Conluain also brings in Italian cinema and Canadian cinema, and seems particularly impressed by Cinecittà (a studio built by Mussolini but still flourishing) and the NFB. But the first international comparison in the booklet is with Denmark, about which he writes:

An Danmhairg go speisialta, is minic a mholtar dúinne in Éirinn aithris a dhéanamh uirthi mar thír talmhaíochta, agus thiocthadh linn treoir a glacadh uaithi go tairbheach i gcúrsaí scannánaíochta comh maith. Tá an daonra céanna, beagnach, ag an Danmhairg atá againn féin (má chuirtear na Sé Chondae san áireamh) sé sin, 4,000,000. Tá a dteanga féin, ar ndóigh, ag an cheithre mhíllún daoine sin, chan ionann agus muidinne, agus b'fhéidir go bhfuil baint éigin nach suarach aige sin le tionscal briomhar scannán a bheith acu le pictiúirí dúchasacha a sholáthar.... Cibé mar tá sin de, is mór an chreidiúint atá ag dul do rialtaisí fad-radharca na Danmhairge a chuidigh le bunú a tionscail sa tír sin trí reachta ciallmhara misniúla a chur i bhfeidhm agus trí spreagadh a thabhairt do léiritheoirí ar dhóigheanna éagsúla.

(3)

[Denmark especially: a lot of people in Ireland often think we should imitate that agricultural country, and that it would be profitable to come to accept their direction in cinematic matters as well. Denmark has the same population, more or less (if the Six Counties are included): 4,000,000. Their four million people have an excellent command of their own language, unlike ourselves, and maybe there is some kind of connection there with a dynamic film industry which produces indigenously-made films.... Whatever the case, there is a lot of credit to be given to the far-sighted Danish government for helping the foundation of an industry in that country through sensible, brave laws which create and inspire in different ways.]

The comparison with Denmark crops up throughout the book, and it is generally along the lines he outlines there; Denmark has about the same number of people, it has a distinctive culture, it tries to invest in that culture and protect it through governmental intervention, and so on. A few years later, George Morrison, in a 1965 article calling for the establishment of a film archive for Ireland, seemed to be formed primarily by his experiences at the meetings of the Brussels-based Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film (FIAF), a very internationalist organisation where the primary split was between the Western European and Soviet blocs, not just between Anglophone and non-Anglophone countries. Lamenting the cheapness of the early-Republic era government, he writes that:

Should it seem that the expenditure outlined above is out of the question in our present economic position, it should be remembered that Norway and Finland have established collections of this character and that Denmark, so often compared with us, has established what is in point of importance the third most important collection in the world.

(52)

I think it particularly notable how casually Morrison refers to how often Denmark is compared with Ireland; for him, as for Ó Conluain, the Scandinavian comparison is simply instinctive. Morrison, of course, is most famous for his two films *Mise Éire* (1959) and *Saorise?* (1960), both compilations of newsreels from the War of Independence period that had a voice-over entirely in Irish, and which have never been subtitled. Both of these films have been generally thought of as bastions of conservative nationalist approaches to recent Irish history (Lance Pettitt calls *Mise Éire* "a cinematic swan-song of nationalism at the end of the 1950s" [2000:81]). It seems to me very important that an aspect of Irish culture generally held to be synonymous with inward-looking, nostalgic nationalism – the revival of the Irish language – has actually been a considerable source of internationalism for Irish cinema. I will return to this Gaelic connection later in my discussion.

While the path-breaking study *Cinema and Ireland* is relatively narrow in its focus, comparing Irish cinema almost exclusively with Hollywood or British film making, more recent scholarship has admirably sought to place Irish film in a broad, small-cinema context. The exemplary case here is no doubt *Border Crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe*, an anthology based on a conference held at the University of Ulster in 1992, still a bit before Irish cinema had really jumped onto the international commercial stage. Essays by

Paul Hainsworth, John Hill and Kevin Rockett consider EU funding programmes in great detail; Steve McIntrye and Colin McArthur offer discussions of Scottish cinema as being directly relevant for the Irish case and typical of broader European developments; and Martin McLoone's essay on critical regionalism freely deploys comparisons to Cuban cinema and writing on the cinema as well as the French New Wave, in addition to engaging with a wide variety of Irish independent films. McLoone followed this tendency in his book-length history of Irish film, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*, published in 2000; links to Jean-Luc Godard and Third Cinema are again brought into the picture.

It's scholarship like this that reminds us that although Irish filmmakers like Neil Jordan or Jim Sheridan have had their films widely exhibited on Irish, British and North American screens, for Irish cinema this kind of wide exhibition is both a recent phenomenon and a relatively unusual one. The films thought of as putting Irish cinema "on the map," so to speak, include work such as *The Crying Game* (1992), *Into the West* (1993), *In the Name of the Father* (1994), *Michael Collins* (1996) or *The Boxer* (1998). Some of these benefited from subsidy from Bord Scannán na hÉireann, the government board charged with developing Ireland's national cinema. But all had significant co-production monies from American or British film companies. I tend to think of these films in the same terms as Kevin Rockett described the pre-Bord-Scannán² films like *My Left Foot* (1989), *The Field* (1990), *The Commitments* (1991), *The Playboys* (1992), and *Far and Away* (1992): "While these films bring in significant sums to Ireland by way of employment, spending on services, and taxation for the Irish exchequer, not all would be regarded as having made a significant contribution to an indigenous Irish film culture" (1994:132).

The "indigenous Irish film culture" to which Rockett refers was not well-distributed during this period, and it remains relatively difficult to see such work. The films he has in mind, I suspect, include roughly contemporary work like *Anne Devlin* (Pat Murphy, 1984), *Pigs* (Cathal Black, 1984) *Reefer and the Model* (Joe Comerford, 1988), *Hush-A-Bye-Baby* (Margo Harkin, 1989), *December Bride* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1990) *The Bishop's Story* (Bob Quinn, 1993), or *High Boot Benny* (Comerford, 1994). These films grew out of a small-scale film-production infrastructure that, although it had some connection to the international film festival and cinémathèque / media arts center circuit, was basically domestically oriented. These are films made essentially for Irish audiences, and indeed films whose narratives assumed a working knowledge of Irish politics and history. This environment is quite nicely described by Tytti Soila, Astrid Söderbergh Widding, and Gunnar Iversen, in the introduction to their book *Nordic National Cinemas*. They sound like they are describing "indigenous Irish film culture" when they write that "[a]s opposed to several other countries' film cultures, Nordic cinema has been national in the specific sense that it has not, or to only a limited extent, been exportable to other countries.... Even within the Nordic countries the different nations' domestic films are only

exported to a limited extent" (3). Ireland has Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan, Denmark has Lars Von Trier and Sweden has Ingmar Bergman or Bille August. The rule for all these national cinemas, though, has long been marginalisation and not wide circulation.

The "indigenous Irish film culture" they invoke here is largely a state-supported enterprise, and it is important not to underestimate the importance of state involvement in Irish cinema. Again, this is an important point of Scandinavian contact. Soila, Söderbergh and Iversen write of Nordic cinema that "[t]he connection between the government authorities and the film industry in a number of aspects is something which unites the cinema in all the Nordic countries, and which separates them from film production in the rest of the world" (234). They overstate the uniqueness of this arrangement; this positive and negative state involvement is actually a characterising feature of smaller national cinemas, and Ireland provides a good example. They also write of Nordic state involvement that "censorship has been directed towards a limiting function with regard to production as well as import [e.g., the films that can be imported were limited by government censors], while the production subsidy has on the contrary been aimed at performing a stimulating function" (234). Censorship, of course, has long had a key role in Irish cinema. Writing about the Censorship of Films Act (1923) and the Censorship of Publications Act (1939), Martin McLoone laments that "[t]he operation of these two acts resulted in one of the most extensive and punitive censorship regimes in Europe and represents, in many ways, the most inglorious chapter in recent Irish history" (2000:25). But it's the history of subsidy that merits the most discussion in the context of a future direction for Irish cinema, given how relaxed present-day censorship regulations are in Ireland.

Although Wicklow's Ardmore Studios (and its later incarnation, the State-owned National Film Studio of Ireland) has spectacular facilities, it is well known for being so expensive to use as to only rarely be accessible to local filmmakers; given this, the State-run body Bord Scannán na hÉireann has surely been the most important funding body in the creation of an indigenous Irish cinema. First established in 1981, its de-activation in 1987 was a major blow to the local film scene, and its re-activation in 1993 seemed to herald a new day for the national cinema. One of the important aspects of this re-birth was that the new Bord seemed to be possessed of a primarily cultural rather than an industrial mandate, although some connection with economic matters quite reasonably remained. Indeed, the minister responsible for Bord Scannán, Michael D. Higgins was Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht. That Gaeltacht connection is worthy of particular consideration. Those politically responsible for the Gaeltacht clearly have an economic-development mandate, given how economically depressed many of those regions are. And yet, nobody seriously believes (I hope) that Tory Island will ever be as economically dynamic a region as Dublin or Galway, or that it can really benefit from economic models used to develop urban areas such as these. Similarly, it seems to me reasonable to believe that Irish cinema is, for all practical purposes, a

small, wind-swept outpost in the North Atlantic which nobody can seriously expect to benefit from models formed by American or even British commercial film production norms. Kevin Rockett has written that “[u]ntil the 1980s, Irish state policy for fiction film production largely ignored the cultural value of film in favour of an industrial policy which sought to develop film as no more than a branch of manufacturing” (1994:126). Clearly film production is more than this, especially in a country like Ireland, whose cinematic representations have until very recently been disproportionately found in films that Irish people had very little to do with. This period of the mid- to late-1990s marks a period when Irish film policy began to recognise this, and in so doing made important progress in finding a balance between the “culture vs. industry” tension that has long defined the national cinema (and many small national cinemas).

This push and pull between economic activity and cultural development can be a creative force, and I think it crucial for those interested in European cinema to abandon a simple “Art Cinema vs. Hollywood” binary when distinguishing European from American film. Ireland has the potential to lead the way here, but this has happened in fits and starts. Lance Pettitt’s short book on *December Bride*, for example, makes very fruitful connections between that film and other European films like *Le Bonheur* (Agnès Varda, France, 1965) or *Day of Wrath* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, Denmark, 1943). But in trying to tease out the complexities of considering *December Bride* a “European” film, he writes “there are a number of traits associated with the term ‘European Cinema.’ The films produced for this cinema are characteristically small to medium budget, often funded partly with state support, with a small production team that privilege the writer and/or director’s control and self-expression. Art cinema invariably presents *auteur* films in which classical continuity editing takes a back seat to stylistic, expressive qualities in the *mise-en-scène*” (2002:46). Pettitt moves here from a perfectly reasonable differentiation in

production practices (state support, medium budget, small crew) to a *very* broad generalisation about aesthetic matters.

Clearly he is influenced here by David Bordwell’s 1979 article “The Art Cinema as Mode of Film Practice,” although it does not appear in the book (perhaps Bordwell’s most influential book, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, co-written in 1985 with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, is cited). In this article, Bordwell sets out some of the formal and thematic patterns of the “art film,” such as the fact that it “motivates its narratives by two principles: realism and authorial expressivity” (57) or that “[t]he art cinema is classical in its reliance on psychological causation; characters and their effects on one another remain central” (58). I must admit, though, that I find the whole idea of the existence of a distinguishable group of “art films” little more than a marketing ploy that has achieved wide popular currency; this redundant term has no more place in serious film criticism than the concept of “literary fiction” has in serious literary criticism. Bordwell seems to sense as much; he writes at one point that “[a] banal remark of the 1960s, that such films make you leave the theatre thinking, is not far from the mark: the ambiguity, the play of thematic interpretation, must not be halted at the film’s close” (61). As Bordwell states, that remark is indeed quite banal, and his more intellectualised re-phrase is not much less so. Despite the fact that Pettitt’s work on *December Bride* is quite refreshing in its internationalism and in the detail of its discussion, a tiny bit of this sort of banality does seem to be hiding in the background.

Again, I think that a Scandinavian comparison can clarify the problem with these kinds of generalisations about what “European” or “Art” films look like. I agree wholeheartedly that *December Bride* shares a great deal with *Day of Wrath*; both are highly composed films that make intentional use of the landscape and deal with serious, moral/ethical problems. But there is just as strong a connection between Paddy Breathnach’s self-conscious gangster film *I Went Down* (1997) and Lucas Moodyson’s



December Bride

1970s slacker comedy *Together* (2000). Both films are made on a small budget, and both films received state subsidy in one form or another. This small budget and reduced imperative to perform commercially means that making references to local cultural quirks (the bogs and narrow roads of Ireland, the goofiness of Swedish leftism circa 1977, etc.) is possible, even though it may make the film less distributable internationally. The production values of both the films feel decidedly modest, and both eschew the flashiness associated with Hollywood; they are both shot on location, and both feature little-known actors (except Brendan Gleeson in *I Went Down*). Neither *Together* nor *I Went Down* would be generally categorised as an art film, but both are distinctly, unmistakably European. Recovering that European sensibility, without conflating that with a stereotypical understanding of what “Art Cinema” is supposed to look like, is a crucial part of sustaining Irish cinema.

Godfrey Cheshire seemed to be encouraging Irish filmmakers to make more of these kinds of distinctions when he addressed the Galway Film Fleadh in 2001. His statement, later published in *The Irish Times*, encouraged those interested in Irish cinema to move beyond a glorification of films that dealt with socio-political topics using a realist form. Calling for “more playfulness” in Irish cinema, he wrote:

I would say that politics, topicality, and prosaic realism have generally been overvalued in Irish cinema, and that they threaten to keep that cinema from making its next creative leap. To put it another way, works of genre or imagination (ghost stories, romances, action films, say) here tend to be viewed as *inherently* commercial, i.e. frivolous, while realistic depictions of social strife or family dysfunction are seen as *inherently* serious, worthy, artistic.

Irish cinema is right now nearing a crossroads that will determine whether it simply continues to develop as an industry and cultural project or will grow as an art. To cite the most positive mode of the latter I can think of, consider Italian cinema in the decades after World War II: Neorealism, which treated social problems in a realistic style, was followed by the great imaginative works of Fellini, Antonioni, Visconti, Bertolucci, et al., which came in such dazzling profusion from the late 1950s to the 1970s. That leap happened because the filmmakers didn't allow themselves to be shackled to the initial paradigm; they shifted their focus from “Italy” to “cinema” without at all abandoning the former. (9)

The problem for Irish cinema that Cheshire is identifying here is also a problem faced by European cinema at large: the need to avoid cinematic essentialism and embrace a wide variety of film making styles, while at the same time retaining some sort of cultural specificity. This is indeed a tricky business, and like Cheshire, I think it's more complex than simply saying that it's time for Irish filmmakers to be less interested in Ireland.

By way of brining this discussion full circle, then, I would like to briefly discuss an example of a film that I think nicely fits Cheshire's model of a dynamic Irish cinema, Robert Quinn's short film *An Leabhar* (The Book, 2001). This is a particularly important film from an institutional point of view, because it is part of the last gasp of non-commercial film making in Ireland. According to Bord Scannán na hÉireann's guidelines (available at their website, www.filmboard.ie) they now give funding in the form of

loans. “Production loans are offered on the basis of repayable loan / equity participation of a proportion of the total budget” is how they put it. Production loans for documentaries are given on the same terms, and development loans for documentaries are “repayable on the first day of principal photography.” The only outright grants that seem to be given are as part of their “Low-Budget Feature Initiative” (which proposes to participate to the tune of up to 60% of the budget for productions with budgets of less than 1 million Euro) and the Irish-language “Oscailt” programme, which finances short 35mm films on a sliding scale (“up to approximately 75,000 Euro may be awarded to a project of 26 minutes shot on 35mm or up to approximately 30,000 Euro for an animation piece of up to 10 minutes”). This initiative is a cooperative venture with the Irish-language broadcaster TG4; all the films are broadcast at some point. The only part of the national cinema that Bord Scannán seems able to exempt from a fairly strict commercial framework, then, is what must seem to be the *obviously* un-marketable form of the short film in Irish.

Matters are not so simple in Quinn's film, which was made as part of “Oscailt.” *An Leabhar* centres around an Irish-speaking college student who finds himself drawn into a very elaborate international intrigue when he stumbles into an assassination while working at a hotel in France. When he returns to Dublin (where the announcements at the airport are made only in Irish) he winds up caught between the police, who believe he is responsible for the assassination, and the killers themselves, who believe that he is heir to an ancient clan of warriors and so the custodian of an ancient manuscript detailing various forms of killing. At one stage he seeks council from a professor of Celtic Studies at what looks like Trinity College Dublin. The point that I want to make here is that the film is absolutely rooted in the mores, urban geography, and cultural arcana of Ireland. And at the same time, it is explicitly presented as a thriller, and it obeys the generic laws of that form with tremendous attention and efficiency. It's distinct from a middle-of-the-road film like *The Mystics* not only in the way that it better integrates Ireland but also in the way that it pays serious attention to its chosen form. *The Mystics* isn't a very good Irish film or a very good comedy; *An Leabhar* is an excellent Irish film and a very well-made thriller. And to really bring us around full circle, it reminds me very much of the Swedish film *The Last Contract* (Kjell Sundvall, 1998). Centered on the assassination of Olaf Palme, it relied on some knowledge of Swedish politics (such as the fact that Sweden, under Palme's leadership, was adamant about its status as a nuclear-free zone), and made great use of the urban landscape of Stockholm. But it also obeyed the rules of the thriller closely; Sundvall was clearly taking the genre seriously. *The Last Contract* is as far from Ingmar Bergman's films as *An Leabhar* is from *December Bride*. All of these films, though, are unmistakably part of a vision of European cinema that seeks to strike a middle path between the dominance of Hollywood and the desperation and eventual absorption of Hollywood aspirants.



An Leabhar



The Last Contract

As the once-simple institution of the national cinema starts to shift radically, this middle path seems to me worthy of special attention. George Bush's attempt to divide up the world into a "with us or against us" formula seemed to many (myself included, of course) the epitome of inane simplification. Similarly, a world-view made up of national cinemas that are either "with Hollywood" and generally absorbed by it – Australian cinema of the 70s and 80s, which saw its best talents go Hollywood and never come back, is for me the seminal example – or "Against Hollywood" – Korean cinema, say, which is heavily protected domestically by government controls over importation of foreign films but so indifferently distributed outside Korea by those same government agencies as to be impossible for anyone but the most determined champion to get a sense of – is just as obviously inadequate. Scandinavian cinema is neither with Hollywood nor against Hollywood. These are the terms that I would like to see Irish cinema discussed in, especially now, as the initial enthusiasm of re-birth begins to fade and the hard work of sustaining a small national cinema gets underway in earnest.

Notes:

¹ Proinsias Ó Conluain's *Scéal na Scannán* (Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1953) has to be one of the first considerations of cinema to be published in Ireland, and it is written in Irish. Since I am discussing questions of Irish cinema in an international context, I'd like to note here that this first Irish film book is a survey of *world* cinema, although it has a chapter on early Irish fictions (which is a rival to Kevin Rockett [1988] and Brian McIlroy's [1988] work on the period) and some information on early Irish documentary.

² As I go on to explain, Bord Scannán na hÉireann / The Irish Film Board was originally founded in 1981, de-activated in 1987, and re-activated in 1993; hence my "pre-Bord-Scannán" classification.

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The Ireland They Dream Of

EIREVILLE, COOLOCKLAND AND THE APPROPRIATION OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY NARRATIVES IN SHORT IRISH FILMMAKING.

Irish cinema is not commonly associated

with genre filmmaking, and most particularly not with science fiction. Laying aside dubious contributions such as *Zardoz* (1973) filmed by John Boorman in Wicklow and featuring unmistakably Irish faces as extras and *Space Truckers* (1996), Stuart Gordon's low-budget Dennis Hopper vehicle, shot in Ireland for tax-break reasons, the only Irish SF features to date have been Geraldine Creed's *Chaos* (2002), *Sunset Heights* (Colm Villa, 1998) and Enda Hughes' *The Eliminator* (1996). Of these, the latter was a low-budget independent production, shot by a young director and his friends that did not gain commercial distribution. Hughes is also director of the SF short, *Flying Saucer Rock 'n' Roll* (1997), which sees aliens land in Northern Ireland in 1958 drugging and abducting its youth until the intervention of a rock 'n' roll hero on a tractor who can change history in the making; and *Comm-Raid on the Potemkin* (1999), a piece that reimagines the Eisenstein classic as a computer game. The storyline of *The Eliminator* is irrelevant to any understanding of the film's overall project but might be roughly understood to draw on the Mad Max formula as well as multiple low-budget chase/fantasy films. What is notable about it is its irreverent interpolation of Cu Chulainn, Finn McCool and St. Patrick into a slasher/chase movie, which culminates in a final explosion accompanied by Stiff Little Fingers' "Alternative Ulster" on the soundtrack. *The Eliminator* is an iconoclastic send up of a culture in thrall to its historical and mythical figures and, of the above-mentioned works, is closest in spirit to the main bulk of films that make up the Irish SF and fantasy canon, namely short films by young and independent filmmakers.

The reason I have chosen to focus on such films in this article is that they appear to me to emblemise a number of significant discursive strains in contemporary Irish culture, particularly in contemporary Irish youth culture that, by and large, indigenous feature filmmaking has neglected to address. They are also formally interesting and represent what appears to be a new energy in Irish short filmmaking practices, much of which has accrued in the burgeoning Irish language production sector.

Martin McLoone has outlined many of the issues that are specific to the making of short films; these are, in brief, that such productions are highly subsidised by the Film Board, RTÉ and TG4 (the Irish language television station, formerly TnaG) and are therefore relatively free of the

commercial pressures under which feature filmmaking operates (McLoone 2000: 151-162). This ought, in theory, to allow short filmmakers to produce challenging works that are defined by a commitment to formal and thematic experimentation. Instead, he concludes that such works are marked by, "a certain conservatism in form and content and a tendency towards traditional narrative norms" (156).

While it would be stretching the point to suggest that the films mentioned in this article constitute the kind of radical cinema that McLoone argues for, they are marked by an awareness of the possibilities and restrictions associated with short filmmaking, in so far as they are not simply feature films in miniature but are more fluid in construction and less dependent on the three-act structure still widely favoured by Hollywood and non-Hollywood practitioners alike. Nor do they actively confront social issues; however, they are highly attuned to the "new Ireland" of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath. In particular, they express a sense of unease that is specific to Ireland while equally reflecting a kind of universal *anomie* associated with global youth culture. These films are particularly notable for their adherence to and playfulness with non-indigenous generic forms and their dismissive attitude towards the conventional signifiers of Irishness, specifically iconic Irish historical and literary figures.

The popularity of Science Fiction and Fantasy as a framework for short filmmaking practices should not surprise us greatly. The demographic group most closely associated with the short film is also one that is particularly prone to the consumption of these related genres, namely student filmmakers and young males. Although it is simplistic to collapse the boundaries between SF and Fantasy, both genres are informed by, as Paul Coates reminds us, a combination of poesis and mimesis, in which the referent is at once separated from but also related to the sign: "a novelist's experience may inform the work's style and tenor rather than furnishing its material, but is omnipresent nevertheless, while the conscious mind that flees mimesis simply pursues a more convoluted mimesis, such as appear in dreams" (37). These films often develop a kind of dream logic that reminds us of reality while also not being quite "real". Further, for SF to work, the worlds it creates must bear some similarity to our own, in particular if it is to function as social comment. SF commonly extrapolates and

then magnifies a set of anxieties in popular circulation to create its fictional universe, which, particularly in cinema, allows for an almost inevitable correlation between Utopia and its dysfunctional alter-ego: “the perfection of utopias must be total and ordered; the totality, ordered and perfect. In order to achieve this, without denying the nature of man [sic] or society, there must be discipline of a totalitarian kind.” (Davis 39) The central conflict in this dystopian vision thus emerges as one between individuality and institutional control. The motif of the time traveller, so frequently deployed in this genre, becomes a vehicle to move backwards and forwards along an imagined historical continuum, describing an evolutionary process that commonly ends in catastrophe.

Coates’s mention of dreams is a convenient point at which to insert Irish SF and Fantasy films into a universal generic framework. The title of this article, of course, is taken from de Valera’s often-quoted St. Patrick’s Day address to the nation: “That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis of right living . . . [etc].” (qtd. in Brown 146) As befitted his dual origins, de Valera’s rhetoric fused two foundational paradigms: the dream of republicanism and the (exile’s) dream of return. By virtue of its colonial history, Ireland has been constructed and re-constructed by the imaginations of successive generations as an idealized space, a utopian vision whose realization, as Colin Graham reminds us, is always deferred (6-7). Further, Ireland has functioned as a longed for homeland by generations of emigrants and exiles, less in this instance as a political entity than a symbol of plenitude, quite divorced from the social and economic reality of the geographic space. And again, as a major tourist

destination, Ireland is routinely promoted as a dream space, an escape from the reality of the everyday. In recent years, the changes wrought by the financial boom, or Celtic Tiger, have given rise to a new sense of internal alienation, a feeling that Ireland has become in certain ways unrecognisable.

The idea that the dream has become a nightmare informs any number of Irish SF and fantasy shorts. This intense pessimism is articulated via a number of themes, primarily the critique of official policies, a distrust of government, and a revisionist attitude towards Irish republican history. The less formally rigorous genre of Fantasy draws on, while disassociating itself from, the absurdist tradition in Irish literature associated with Beckett and Flann O’Brien and characteristically lampoons the Irish literary tradition.

A sub-genre is engaged with gender politics and includes *Retribution in the Year 2050* (Brendan Muldowney, 1999) and *White* (Emer Reynolds, 2001). Of these, the former displays a somewhat simplistic attitude towards its material, in particular in its “role-reversal” denouement. The story opens with a young woman, Victoria Turtle (Sheila McDonald) coming to retrieve her grandfather, Victor Turtle’s (Philip Bredin) head from cryogenic freezing. He is depicted as having been a wife abuser and general sexist pig. The head is able to communicate with its rescuer and all goes relatively smoothly until Victoria brings Victor out onto the street and reveals the new world order to be one in which dominatrix figures lead men around like dogs, characters described in the credits as “feminists” and “pets.” While this is a neat visual gag, it raises wider problems regarding the gendering of fantasy, specifically in terms of feminist attitudes to the dominatrix imago. On the other hand, *White*



Éireville

is a sophisticated work that contains a genuinely nightmarish vision of the Ireland of the future. The state is in a condition of post-apocalyptic turmoil expressed through fleeting shots of teeming, rundown streets and massive video screens from which authority figures deliver quasi religious/fascistic slogans. Pregnant women are abducted to prevent them from having abortions and an unspecified official eugenic policy controls conception and birth. The story opens with the central young couple, Ali (Úna Kavanagh) and Yao (Jason Kavanagh), fleeing the state police. They take refuge in an abandoned Church and Yao promises that he will see that Ali has her abortion. When she wakes up from the operation, she is still pregnant and appears to have a massive, distended uterus that suggests some kind of monstrous inhabitant. The film closes with the realisation that her boyfriend—“One of our best agents”—was complicit in her betrayal. *White* is enormously assured technically and, in its magnification of state and conservative opposition to abortion, draws attention to the existing lack of individual rights for Irish women who wish to terminate their pregnancies. Nor is it simply a “right to choose” tract. It also touches on the anxieties felt by such women who have to travel outside their familiar surroundings for terminations (Ali has last-minute doubts about her decision) and a general sense that the medical profession engages in practices that are hostile to women’s wishes.

Overall, gender concerns feature infrequently in SF and Fantasy short filmmaking, and I wish now to turn to two films, *Eireville* (James Finlan, 2002) and *Coolockland* (Brian Tucker/Ronan Carr, 2001) that seem to me to articulate many of the concerns that these productions otherwise have in common. I am particularly interested in *Eireville*, given its genesis in the Irish-language sector. Both films were well received critically, particularly at local festivals and are located at the cutting edge of the new wave of short films that make free use of new digital technologies.

Shot on video in colour but transferred to black and white in post-production, *Eireville* is an homage to Godard’s *Alphaville* (1965), which is in turn relocated to an Ireland of the future that could equally be the past. In it, a down-at-the-heel gumshoe, Lemmy Cúramach (‘Caution’ in Irish) (Michael O’Sullivan), returns to Ireland from somewhere (unnamed) outside of the country. Ireland, or Eireville as it is re-titled,² is a totalitarian state run by the patriot Patrick von Pearseman whose brain is wired to the computer Dev ’69. The country is so wedded to an ideology of the past that everyone speaks in the past tense and all digits (displayed as room numbers, license plates etc.) are restricted to 1,9 and 6 (after 1916). The score in the All-Eireville final is fixed at 1-9 to 1-6. Cúramach is aided in his quest to locate his old friend, Dick Power (Páraic Breathnach), by the one-dimensional Natasha von Tuairisc (Siobhán O’Kelly) in the Anna Karina role.

Finlan’s film, while a very close pastiche of *Alphaville*, is influenced by Orwell’s *1984* and by his having attended film school in Moscow during communism, which supplied the experience of living in a totalitarian state. As he has said:

I’ve always been drawn to dystopian totalitarian visions. They provide a sexy environment both dramatically and visually. I guess I often feel we do live in a totalitarian world, which masquerades as democracy. Constantly bombarded by advertising both visually and aurally, our countryside polluted by crass logos and imagery.³

A number of set-pieces, notably Cúramach’s discovery of his friend, Dick, in a sanatorium and his own interrogation by Dev ’69, draw directly on the paranoia vein of SF while visually referencing low-budget Hollywood cinema of the 1950s, the source of Godard’s own film. The interiors have a gleaming Soviet-era look, enhanced by the prevalence of mock Cyrillic script, an echo again of the original in which certain characters communicate in Russian.

Finlan has been anxious to make it clear that his primary intention was to make audiences laugh, and the film has enjoyed considerable success on the festival circuit, winning the Cork Film Festival award for Best Short in 2002. Underneath the “only joking” veneer, *Eireville* connects with a number of discourses circulating within contemporary Irish society. Like so many practitioners, Finlan uses science fiction as a way of articulating a critique of the dominant social order. However, his science-fiction cinema is a pastiche of an homage – that is, a reworking of a film, *Alphaville*, that is itself a Europeanisation of American B movies. In this manner, he can locate his work at the intersection between Europe and America, a position that Ireland also, arguably, occupies, giving rise to the common axis of Berlin/Boston.

In common with a number of recent films, *Eireville* takes as its starting point the perceived failure of the ideals of 1916 and Republicanism. Thus it echoes *The Eliminator* and also the short film, *Matrix Adjusted Normal* (Conor O’Mahony, 1992), about institutional brainwashing and state control. While for many commentators the evolution of Irish culture since 1916 has meant the betrayal of the socialist principles articulated particularly by James Connolly, in Finlan’s film there is more than a suggestion that the ideals themselves were flawed (although the new Irish State of the post-Independence era could not be described as a totalitarian one, and indeed was closer in concept to an Arcadian ideal of cultural primitivism than the bureaucratic totalitarianism of the Utopian imagination).

Finlan’s appropriation of popular generic cinema reflects an existing indigenous artistic practice of countering cultural nationalism (namely, the historic project of rendering Ireland a pure Celtic country so beloved of the ideologues of 1916 and forever associated with the de Valera regime), with the pleasures of consuming the forbidden fruits of the mass media. The idea that you could escape from the dreary Ireland of the post-Independence era through the consumption of comic books, radio serials illicitly caught on the forbidden airwaves of the BBC, and attendance at your local cinema, runs through a number of feature films of the recent past. For instance, in *The Butcher Boy* (Neil Jordan, 1997), a film that could almost qualify as science fiction and certainly contains SF moments, the central character, Francie Brady (Eamonn Owens), lives in a fantasy world populated by heroes from *The Lone Ranger* and the British comic books he so ardently consumes. These provide

him with a much-needed diversion from his own deprived, Church-ridden environment. Similarly, in *The Boy From Mercury* (Martin Duffy, 1996), the young boy flees from a household obsessed with death and a bullying schoolyard to the cinema to watch Flash Gordon serials.

We may guess that, in the case of the last two films, their makers, Neil Jordan and Martin Duffy, were drawing on their own recollections of growing up in Ireland in the 1950s. Turning to Finlan and his contemporaries in the Irish short filmmaking environment, it seems that, alongside such cultural memories, their appropriation of science fiction and fantasy is expanding on a theme already apparent in *The Butcher Boy* and *The Boy From Mercury*: that Ireland is not a “real” space. Visually, this is apparent in *Eireville* by virtue of the absence of familiar landmarks – the film takes place in an unrecognizable urban location (in fact it was filmed in Galway). Not only is Ireland rendered strange in an indexical sense, it is also not the Ireland familiar to viewers of Irish film, offering as it does none of the conventional cinematic signifiers of Irishness.

Mimesis is achieved, instead, through aural signifiers: the ironic accompaniment of Irish music and, specifically and most strikingly through the use of the Irish language. Although there was an English text, Finlan always intended his script to be shot in Irish. The sense of shock achieved through the rendering of an SF narrative in a language associated with an Ireland of the past, and one that is often considered moribund, is accentuated by the device of having the actors deliver their lines in somewhat pedantic “school Irish” or “learned Irish,” utilizing Connaught and Munster dialects. The central character is played by a native Irish speaker, Michael O’Sullivan, who had spent time in America; so, for the purposes of the film and in deference to Godard’s original, he throws in occasional anachronistic Americanisms and his Irish is overlaid with a trace of an American accent. Like a number of similar projects that were not initially intended as Irish-language shorts, *Eireville* is not set in the West of Ireland—the traditional Irish-speaking area—but in an urban space; this was also a deliberate wish of the director: to move away from the conventional indices of Irish language speaking. Indeed it parodies “old” Irish culture, notably in the scene where Cúramach must play the bodhran to prove that he belongs in Eireville, and the film’s constant references to having “craic”, a dig at the ubiquitous exhortation aimed at tourists that they should participate on all possible occasions in “craic agus ceol”. Cúramach is a time-traveller but it is not clear whether he is in fact travelling to an Ireland of the past or one that exists in parallel time. Although cluttered with historical referents and shot in black and white, *Eireville* equally suggests a contemporary Ireland, therefore proposing and simultaneously denying historical linearity.

Eireville is one of a number of recent films that foregrounds and problematises the use of the Irish language, where medium and message become one.⁴ These include *Lipservice* (Paul Mercier, 1998), *Padraig Agus Nadia* (Padraig And Nadia, Kester Dyer, 2002) and *Yu Ming is Ainm Dom* (Yu Ming is My Name, Daniel O’Hara, 2003). All these works de-naturalise the speaking of Irish, inviting the viewer to

question the role of the national language within contemporary culture. In *Eireville*, this is an explicitly rendered part of the larger failed Utopian project, here associated with draconian methods of forced learning.

Coolockland is a futuristic film noir set in a nightclub in Dublin where actors perform a medley of characters ranging from Elvis Presley to James Joyce, Brendan Behan and Jesus Christ. Shot on reversal stock, the film has a garish, supersaturated look that defies any recognition factor (it takes place on the “Upper East Side of the Northside shopping centre”). The storyline is a pastiche, like *Eirevillés*, of the seeker/detective genre although the plotline is even less structured and the denouement is nominal. A series of killings sparks off an investigation that reveals a property scam, a form of corruption extremely familiar to contemporary Irish viewers. *Coolockland* is, however, better understood as a series of running gags, many of them visual, and a number deliberately offensive. Thus, one of the characters is Bobby Sands, whose stage performance consists of repeatedly refusing a plate of food. The film sends up exile culture, literary culture (Joyce is accused by Behan of plagiarising the Greek classics) and religion: the great shibboleths, in other words, of traditional Ireland. It also indiscriminately references cinema history, with a visual nod to the interiors of *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), and a closing line, “Forget about it, chief, it’s Coolockland,” that echoes the famous ending of *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974).

In its debunking of Irish cultural icons, *Coolockland* recalls the absurdist humour of Beckett and Flann O’Brien; where it is distinctive is in its search for a visual, cinematic language to create this effect. Again, in common with *Eireville*, and also short films such as Anthony Byrne’s *Meeting Ché Guevara & The Man from Maybury Hill* (2003) that imagines an encounter between a young traveller woman and the famous revolutionary during his Shannon stopover, the Ireland seen here has little in common with previous screen representations. Instead, it borrows knowingly from Hollywood cinema and then renders even this representational source strange.

Certainly, both films discussed here could be accused of a pastiching process, that is, in Fredric Jameson’s classical formulation, “to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (18). Arguably this does not, in either case, lead to the kind of vacuity and denial of historicity Jameson anticipated. Rather, it allows the directors in question to acknowledge the dominance of other forms of cinematic expression whilst inflecting them with a local idiolect. It may be futile to expect a coherent political message to emerge from either film (the *Irish Times* critic labelled *Eireville* “a smart, if ultimately superficial pastiche” [Hegarty 16]), yet both freely adapt global formulae to express local concerns – in Finlan’s film, a disquiet with the working through of Irish history, a sense of alienation from contemporary Ireland; and in the case of *Coolockland*, the validation of a cinematic idiom over a literary one, a referencing of official corruption, and a general feeling of unease. This use of narrative and visual codes offers particular pleasures, not all

of them similar, to audiences familiar with the conventions on which they draw and who may enjoy seeing them adapted to local circumstances.⁵ Joyce's response to Behan's accusations in *Coolockland* is that he is engaging in "appropriation," a practice with which the makers of this film and *Eireville* are also associated.

In discussing narratives of history, Hayden White counters the notion that it is the "story" rather than the method of telling it that has truth value:

This notion of narrative discourse fails, however, to take into account the enormous numbers of kinds of narratives that every culture disposes for those of its members who might wish to draw upon them for the encodation and transmission of messages. Moreover, every narrative discourse consists, not of one single code monolithically utilized, but of a complex set of codes the interweaving of which by the author-for the production of a story infinitely rich in suggestion and variety of affect, not to mention attitude towards and subliminal evaluation of its subject matter-attests to his [sic] talents as an artist, as master rather than servant of the codes available for his use ... At the same time ... the artistic text, as against the scientific, directs attention as much to the virtuosity involved in its production as to the "information" conveyed in the various codes employed in its composition.
(41-42)

The recent spate of Irish short films, particularly those that draw on and domesticate familiar codes from SF, Fantasy and European cinema, speak to an audience exactly in this suggestive manner while making much of their virtuosity. Thus, they announce the coming of age of the short film as a specific dramatic form while placing at the disposal of their audiences multiple narratives which they are, in turn, free to decode according to their own inclinations.



Coolockland

Notes:

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¹ The gender imbalance in Irish filmmaking is too big an issue to be debated here; that one of the feature films mentioned above was the work of a woman filmmaker, Geraldine Creed, seems to buck the trend. However, *Chaos* was critically greeted by such a low level of enthusiasm that it has, to date, not received a theatrical run and seems unlikely to do so. *Chaos* is one of the few films mentioned here to attempt to graft a straightforward SF formula onto the Irish narrative landscape, indeed literally onto the Irish landscape. This incongruity is a contributing factor to its aesthetic weaknesses; given these factors it seems unfair to dwell on the film or to extrapolate any significant generalisations from it.

² Finlan's preferred reading of the film's location is that "Eireville is not set in Ireland per se. It is a notional state, representing a way of thinking. It is a way of thinking unique to Ireland, but Eireville is not Ireland in any physical sense. It is a manifestation of a psyche" (email correspondence with author, 10 November 2003).

³ This and other background information are taken from email correspondence with the author, 12 June 2003.

⁴ For an extended analysis of this phenomenon, see: Anthony Cullen. *The Irish Language as a Theme: Confrontational Short Films in a "Near Death" Language*, unpublished MA Thesis, University College Dublin, 2003.

⁵ It is questionable whether either *Eireville* or *Coolockland* "work" for a non-local audience. Certainly, my experience of screening *Eireville* at a recent conference suggested that its references are lost on viewers unfamiliar either with Godard's original or, particularly, its transfer to an Irish narrative.

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Hollywood East?

A CAUTIONARY TALE OF IRISH FILM DISTRIBUTION IN NORTH AMERICA

“Despite considerable media hype

about gigantic box-office grosses for Hollywood films, the profit margin for theatrical releases at US cinemas is virtually nonexistent. The huge P & A budgets often serve as nothing more than advance promotion for a film’s planned home video/DVD/cable/international release.” (Max Alvarez in *Cinecittà* 2000: 36)

“Why did Paramount say yes? Because nobody knows anything. And why did all the other studios say no? Because nobody knows anything. And why did Universal, the mightiest studio of all, pass on *Star Wars*, a decision that just may cost them, when all the sequels and spin-offs and toy money and book money and video-game money are totalled, over a *billion* dollars? Because nobody, *nobody*—not now, not ever—knows the least goddamn thing about what is or isn’t going to work at the box-office.” (William Goldman in Goldman 1983: 41)

“It may sound cheesy, but when I cry, I buy.” (Tom Quinn, VP Acquisitions, Samuel Goldwyn Films, VIFF Trade Forum, September 2003)

In this essay, I attempt to open up a new area of research in Irish film studies. Here I provide a number of arguments, reasons and reflections upon why the distribution of narrative films is so challenging in North America and why only certain kinds of Irish and Irish-related material do achieve a modest degree of attention. It is, as my subtitle declares, a cautionary tale, one that takes into account the nature of the North American market – the most important film market, providing 50% of world gross – and the nature of the films available to be distributed. Caution is also required in assessing an academic researcher’s sources when quoting dollar figures. For example, Barry Litman and Hoekyun Ahn suggest that on average a \$50 million box-office gross will generate 200,000 sales of videocassettes. They estimate that ancillary markets account for only 20% of a movie’s income. However, although this ratio seems ridiculously low in the age of merchandising and a slew of other ancillary rights and income streams, they tellingly admit reliable figures are hard to come by due to “the proprietary nature of these data” (Litman 1998: 193). Yet, despite these uncertainties, it is my contention that contrary to screenwriter William Goldman’s and Tom Quinn’s colourful remarks above, we actually do know a fair amount about what “works” and what doesn’t in Irish film distribution from a variety of angles. I inevitably approach my subject from a Canadian perspective, but this does have the advantage of an analogous experience in discussing the regional, national and international contexts of film practice for English-language cinema seeking American success.

Hollywood North is the site of many US movies, TV movies of the week and TV series; it’s estimated that in the Vancouver region alone, such activity amounts to \$1.2 Billion (Canadian) per year, and some \$3.3 Billion in ancillary industries and services. This unprecedented American influx has manifested itself in the last twenty years. Indeed, Neil Jordan mentions in his foreword to the *High Spirits* published screenplay that he was, at the time, the only director in Hollywood who did not have a project in British Columbia (Jordan 1989: xi). Ironically, he was to remedy this perceived deficit the following year when *We’re No Angels* was shot in B.C.¹

Why, one might ask, is the westernmost province of Canada the repository of so much Hollywood money? The low Canadian dollar – in 2002 the Canadian dollar averaged between 62 and 66 cents American – is the strongest reason. But also Vancouver and its outlying areas have great scenery, lots of variety in buildings, excellent infrastructure, a modern economy, an English-speaking majority, many experienced crews, tax incentives, and is – for editing purposes – only a couple of hours by air from Los Angeles with which it shares the same time zone. Primarily, however, Vancouver—and Toronto and Winnipeg for that matter – can “pass” as a US city. Initially, the American arrival was seen by many Canadian filmmakers as a cultural invasion: a commercial, crafts and technical success story, but one which did little for Canadian writers and directors interested in Canadian stories. That’s a familiar lament around the world whenever and wherever Hollywood dominance intrudes in the non-American psyche.

But gradually, what was clearly a difficulty began to be rethought. Federal and provincial agencies alongside private and public broadcasters provided monies to the young directors and producers emerging from Vancouver’s university and private film schools to be the beneficiaries of crews and technicians eager to work on alternative, small scale or non-blockbuster material. Also, the cultural mindset of young filmmakers began to change from the cultural nationalism of the 1970s to a greater appreciation that English-Canadian film is just part of a North American audio-visual industry which takes no position, except that of assessing profit, in the selection of material for distribution. In other words, a compromise was reached. Some directors, like Lynne Stopkewich in a film such as *Kissed* (1997), a film about necrophilia made for \$1 million, found



The Crying Game

their work the subject of a bidding war between major American distributors. A budding auteur, such as Bruce Sweeney, whose latest and third feature, *The Last Wedding* (2001), will no doubt have at least a television and video life in Europe, is emboldened enough to demand that potential distributors invest in his next feature as part of any distribution deal. It is with such small steps that an indigenous film industry is built, and, more importantly, maintained.²

Now, it may be that Canada has the best and worst of both worlds – it sleeps next to the elephant and must adapt accordingly whenever the animal decides to change position on the bed. One might argue that this is the relationship between the UK and Ireland, and many have written that the Irish cinema today is essentially a British television industry – what is the recently feted *Bloody Sunday* (Paul Greengrass, 2002) but a British production? However, it seems to me that it is possible to see the UK and Ireland as one entity, as a potential Hollywood East, not so much a location for Hollywood offshore productions – which, of course, is very apparent in Irish cinema history – but in the possible partnerships that can occur between the needs of the Hollywood studios for the American marketplace and indigenous British and Irish material. The conjoining of the UK and Ireland is a reality for the reporting of box-office results in such trade journals as *Variety*, and it is a reality for Irish production budgets. Looking at the larger picture, there's a further argument that British film production has only really succeeded commercially when a British company

has made a decent distribution and production financing deal with an American major or mini-major. Working Title's deal with Universal has at least allowed a more serious entry into the North American market for its films.

In the film world, then, little space for purism exists. Bob Quinn's film work and writings argue, in a sense, for that return to small-scale production, with an agenda focused on screening works in Ireland.³ It's an admirable position, a moral position one might say, but one not shared by the majority of young filmmakers who want their stories and efforts to be recognized and enjoyed internationally. To them, an Ireland first policy is unsustainable. So, if one is prepared to see the UK and Ireland as a potential Hollywood East screening back to and alongside the magic factory of Hollywood, what Irish-themed productions obtain distribution in North America, and can one see patterns?

On the William Goldman "Nobody knows anything" school of criticism, the case of *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992) is trotted out. How is it that Miramax was able to purchase a film – that didn't return its European and Japanese investment – for between \$1 million and \$1.5 million and gross \$63 million in the domestic North American market? (Giles 1997: 46) Presumably, if the deal had been made for \$3 million Palace Pictures wouldn't have gone bankrupt, its Scala cinema might not have closed, and the investors might have been pacified. Or, if an ongoing relationship with Miramax – a three or five film deal – had been leveraged, perhaps the bizarre lopsided receipts for the UK and the US might have been swallowed. But this is the beauty of

hindsight, and credit must go to Miramax's heralded marketing creativity of which much has been written on this film. *The Crying Game* is, however, the exception, the dream ticket, hiding a more prosaic reality.

Naturally, my title, "Hollywood East" is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, for, after all, isn't the East "Asia" or, in its most rarefied artistic form for Western audiences, *Madame Butterfly*, set in Nagasaki, a Treaty Port where colonizer, colonized and partly colonized met and did business? It's not so far-fetched to be conscious that Ireland and Irish film are a peculiar East to North Americans. And when that East is imported and attempts are made at marketing and advertising it, it should be no surprise that certain aspects – both emergent and residual – of this culturally colonized East should be deemed more interesting than others. I argue here, and I think without much debate, judging by those films previously circulated, that there are key tropes that appear to American distributors to be sellable. These are: (1) Irish whimsy with quirky humour, including offbeat genre films; (2) "Troubles" films with passion and violence; (3) the achievement of rising above (or at least fighting against) poverty or injustice; and (4), what I'd like to call, "Diasporic meanderings." A possibly controversial claim here is that Irish cinema in North American eyes is a cinema of the study of failure, and the task of the North American distributor is how to market failure experiences as watchable noble successes. The distributor's world, we should remember, is one where an inch of advertising space in the *New York Times* costs \$1,000, and yet also a world where the "buzz" or word-of-mouth so central to extending a cinematic release can be stymied very easily and quickly by cell phone and internet usage.

Irish whimsy is the cinematic equivalent of the stage Irish. Humour is very much part of the Irish temperament and of the North American perception of the Irish. *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (Robert Stevenson, 1959), *Quackser Fortune has a Cousin in the Bronx* (Warris Hussein, 1970), *The Commitments* (Alan Parker, 1991), *The Snapper* (Stephen Frears, 1993), *Hear My Song* (Peter Chelsom, 1992), *Waking Ned Devine* (Kirk Jones, 1998), even *High Spirits* and *Widows' Peak* (John Irvin, 1994) all fit into this category. Behind these films is a celebration of subversive intelligence. It's as if the Irish subaltern speaks, inside humour, a false front similar to a Trojan horse. There's also a dark streak to this humour, often revealed in the offbeat crime melodrama, as evidenced in John Boorman's *The General* (1998) and Paddy Breathnach's *I Went Down* (1997) that have found a small space in US distribution.

Under the rubric of "troubles" films, we should perhaps distinguish between those to do with the 1916-1923 period and those concerning Northern Ireland 1968-present. The conflicted feelings about Ireland's move from the colonial to the post-colonial strikes a different note to the Americans (though perhaps not to many Canadians), who are willing to accept the necessity of violence to create a self-governing region, since it was the genesis of their own nation. Unsurprisingly, those few films in the 1990s, such as Deborah

Warner's *The Last September* (1999), that gave emphasis to the Protestant Irish community did very modest box-office in US and Canadian theatrical distribution (\$469,974), despite, in this instance, attempts to be carried along by the coattails of the English heritage film's popularity. By contrast, Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* (1996) delivered a number of American style paybacks, the most powerful that "righteous violence" achieves results. It earned \$11.03 million in North America.

The conflict in Northern Ireland benefits and suffers from media saturation over the last 35 years, and it has allowed numerous filmmakers to indulge in what Tom Nairn has outlined as the anti-imperialist myth.⁴ In simple terms, screenwriters have invariably closed off the topic of Northern Ireland as a festering dump of unresolved British imperialist policies, the consequences of which force fictional characters to lock in combat not so much as Protestant or Catholic, Loyalist or Republican, but as either the IRA or the British army and its representatives. *The Crying Game*, *In the Name of the Father* (Jim Sheridan, 1993), and *Some Mother's Son* (Terry George, 1996) all make the majority Protestant community in Northern Ireland practically invisible. Perceptions about the Irish-American community must play some part in this scripting tendency.⁵ Mainstream Hollywood productions, such as *Patriot Games* (Philip Noyce, 1992), *Blown Away* (Stephen Hopkins, 1994), and *The Devil's Own* (Alan Pakula, 1997), often went one stage further by focusing on dissident IRA members, thereby accentuating the basic thriller genre at the expense of local political details.

A more universal theme that occasionally strikes a chord with American audiences is the overcoming of disability, injustice and poverty. This does, in part, explain the high popularity of *My Left Foot* (Jim Sheridan, 1989) and the respectful reception accorded to *Angela's Ashes* (Alan Parker, 1999). Recent figures cited by Jack Valenti, head of the powerful MPAA, reveal that the American movie audience comprises 15% Hispanics and 11% Blacks. At the very least, then, you have 26% of the ticket-buying public who do not have to dig deep in family history to appreciate hard times. Perhaps more resonant with the 68% white population who frequent the movies is the concept of diaspora, as both the US and Canada are countries comprised of immigrants. One had only to listen to the surnames of the police and fire services personnel who died in the World Trade Centre attacks to appreciate the Irish-American contribution to the city of New York. Of course, in cinematic terms, Irish ethnicity has a long history in US film, most notably Hollywood depictions of Irish men between the 1920s and 1950s as priests, policemen and mobsters, while Irish women invariably were depicted as long-suffering and sacrificing mothers (see McIlroy 1999). In the latter stages of the 20th century, the plot device of the return-to-one's-roots seemed to be a commercially usable fiction. *Angela's Ashes* and *This is My Father* (Paul Quinn, 1998) delve into that well of the ruptured family history, and yet also climb nobly out of the experience once immersed. In the frenzied atmosphere of political correctness and the identity politics of the 1990s, such films allowed white Americans to value themselves and be valued.

Any joint economic/aesthetic claims about Irish films and their distribution must require dollar figures to support them, although in the film world of creative accounting, proprietary information and advertising hype, this approach is beset with fundamental research difficulties, as I have previously suggested. To ask, in a logical positivist manner, what is verifiable in the film business, is to open a veritable Pandora's Box. Nevertheless, releases in North America are verifiable as are box-office grosses culled from the Internet Movie database (imdb.com), *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*. What is not verifiable without a forensic accounting and privileged access are the production budget actuals and the specific amounts that filter back from the theatre owner to the distributor to the originating production company. For example, Will Silke (2002:23) estimates that 35% to 40% of US box-office would be returned to an "indie" distributor, with at most 50% of that returning to the producer (so \$1 million box-office translates into approximately \$150,000-\$200,000 to the originating company). Every deal is different, however, and signed before the film is released, thereby incorporating a high degree of risk investment. To take a contemporary example, BBC News Online (22 January 2002) reported that Paramount Classics bought Paul Greengrass's *Bloody Sunday* for US \$1 million for October 2002 release in North America, yet Rod Stoneman, then CEO of the Irish Film Board, one of the funders of the film, told me at an April 2002 conference in Dublin that the actual figure was \$750,000. The use of the \$1 million figure was, in his view, part of the self-serving hype around the film at the Sundance Film Festival.

Box-office grosses are an indicator to executives and critics alike of how well the film will do in video and DVD rental and sell-through, cable, satellite, network TV, hotels, airplanes, merchandising, etc. These ancillary markets together can surpass by two-to-three times the theatrical box-office gross over a number of years, although the spiralling marketing and promotion costs that this investment entails restricts the number of films distribution companies can actively support. Jack Valenti reported in 2002 that the average costs of prints and advertising for a major studio film had risen by more than 10% from \$27.31 million in the year 2000 to \$31.01 million in 2001. In other words, often at least 33% of a film's budget is required for marketing purposes, a figure that appears to be rising. Whereas a large bookstore can display 10-20,000 new titles every year, the initial theatrical window for films in North America in the 1990s always accommodated fewer than 500 major releases. The competition to achieve one of those spots, particularly outside the in-house studio productions, is therefore fierce.

Thirteen US distribution companies control more than 96% of the market and a corresponding percentage of the screens available. Consider the following table:

Top Film Distributors in the United States (1999)

Distributor	Gross BOS	%	Films	New Films
Buena Vista	1,246,319,866	17.06	30	22
Warner Bros	1,042,415,691	14.27	26	21
Universal	933,161,805	12.77	24	19
Paramount	846,698,995	11.59	19	15
20 th Cent Fox	793,843,472	10.87	22	16
Sony	633,965,905	8.68	34	27
Dreamworks	323,944,044	4.43	9	6
Miramax	319,450,834	4.37	38	31
MGM/UA	310,101,166	4.24	14	13
New Line	309,249,791	4.23	24	18
Artisan Ent.	193,636,924	2.65	17	13
Lions Gate	50,769,325	0.69	18	14
Fox Searchlight	37,379,780	0.51	10	8
SUB-TOTAL	7,040,937,538		285	223
OTHER	265,085,175	3.64	306	243
TOTAL	7,306,022,773		591	466

Source: abridged from *Cinecittà* (2000: 33).
 "%" represents percentage of market share

The spectacular figure one realises from this table is that 243 (52%) of the 466 new films that opened in 1999 were not released by the 13 major distributors and recouped together less than 3.64% of Gross Box-office. Of the 591 films on US and Canadian screens in 1999 (this figure includes 125 films initially released in 1998 that carried over), 121 or 27% were officially European (*Cinecittà* 2000: 48). At first glance, this figure appears impressive, until you realise that 30 were co-productions with the US, 13 were international co-productions without the US, and the remaining 78 were European productions or co-productions. Of the \$791 million European films secured at the US and Canadian box-office (12% of overall Gross), 80% of that amount came from the 30 co-productions with the US and only 17% from European only productions.

Naturally, the key distributors' ability to spend at least a third of the production budget on advertising is an enormous part of their success. And it's the main reason why the independent distributors can only hope for moderate coverage and reward. Thus, to talk about distributable Irish film focusing on theme, character, setting and style or genre is only part of the equation. To some extent, the rich studio distributed film versus the poor independently distributed film is a constant, but the variable is that an Irish film can be a studio distributable film.

Consider the various kinds of feature film finance/distribution scenarios laid out in the table at the top of the next page, reproduced from John W. Cones' *The Feature Film Distribution Deal* (1997: 30).

Studios may, as the table suggests, initiate a project in-house or buy the idea brought to it by an independent production company whereupon they may keep the attached producer and director or select their own. In both cases, they assume all costs. The third option—the negative pickup—is more complex, whereby an independent producer and director can come to the studio for partial production and distribution funds and services; in return, their film may have to meet certain aesthetic requirements

	Inhouse Production Distribution	Production Financing Distribution	Negative Pickup Arrangement	Acquisition Deal	Rent-a-Distributor
Source of Production Funds	Studio/Distributor	Studio / Distributor	Lender	Third Party	Third Party
Source of P&A funds	Distributor	Distributor	Distributor	Distributor	Non-distributor
Time of Agreement	Prior to Production	Prior to Production	Before Film Completed	After Film Completed	After Film Completed

(casting, changed ending, etc.), depending on the extent of the completion of the film. Distributors will want to see a rough assembly to decide upon the wisdom of a negative pickup arrangement. Having the studio onside for distribution will often trigger funds from other lenders/investors to complete the film. A fourth option – the acquisition deal – is also common. It's the hope of young filmmakers as they premiere their work at festivals that a distributor will buy their film with generous terms. The fifth option – rent-a-distributor – is a final chance for those films not picked up by or at festivals, although this strategy is only for the true believer with deep pockets. Knowing that European films cover, at best, only 12% of the Gross Box-office, a US distributor who is approached with a project will ask the obvious questions:

- Is the Director bankable, or at least clearly competent?
- Is there a star attached?
- If no stars, what other compelling hook is there?
- Is the property pre-sold? Based on a successful book or life story?
- Will it be PG13 or R (the two commonly successful adult movie ratings)?
- If humorous, will it be a good spring/summer release?
- If serious, will it be a good Fall/Winter release?

And these are only some of the questions needing powerfully persuasive answers. In the Irish context, only John Boorman seems confident and established enough to raise \$8 million to make *The General* without securing any distribution deal for Europe and the US until after the film is completed. A more accurate picture is probably to look back to his first film made in Ireland – *Zardoz* (1974) starring Sean Connery, which was made under the negative pickup arrangement. Looking at the profile of Jim Sheridan's four major films distributed in the US, it's significant that the above questions can be almost totally addressed, and that he progressed to a production/financing arrangement with Universal.

Film	Box-office (imdb.com)	Distributor
<i>My Left Foot</i> (1989)	\$14,750,000	Miramax
	<i>Bankable director?—not specifically, but theatre success</i> <i>Star actor?—not then, but well-known (Daniel Day Lewis)</i> PG13/R?—yes <i>True life story?—yes</i> <i>Fall/Winter release?—yes (November 1989)</i> <i>[Oscar winners Daniel Day Lewis and Brenda Fricker]</i>	
<i>The Field</i> (1990)	\$1,414,000	Avenue Pictures
	<i>Bankable director?—yes</i> <i>Star actors?—yes (Richard Harris and Tom Berenger)</i> PG13/R?—yes <i>True Life story?—no, but a pre-sold property (play)</i> <i>Fall/Winter release?—yes (December 1990)</i> <i>[Oscar nominated Richard Harris]</i>	
<i>In the Name of the Father</i>	\$25,010,000	Universal Pictures
	<i>Bankable director?—yes</i> <i>Star actors?—yes (Daniel Day Lewis & Emma Thompson)</i> PG13/R?—yes <i>True Life story?—yes</i> <i>Fall/Winter release?—yes (December 1993)</i> <i>[seven Oscar nominations]</i>	
<i>The Boxer</i> (1997)	\$5,799,000	MCA/Universal Pictures
	<i>Bankable director?—yes</i> <i>Star actors?—yes (Daniel Day Lewis and Emily Watson)</i> PG13/R?—yes <i>True Life story?—no</i> <i>Fall/Winter release?—yes (December 1997)</i>	

What leaps out of this selective overview of the work of three different distributors is the relative failure of *The Field* despite Richard Harris's Oscar nomination. The film was handled through the small but respected Avenue Pictures Productions; its releasing pattern and results were unimpressive to audiences and theatre owners alike. It's a film about extreme failure and hard to market; in short, it is a depressing story, lacking the clear achievements of the other three films. Naturally, the Sheridan oeuvre can become tied up too easily with auteurist assumptions, about one man's obsessions with working class Irish males. One receives only a slightly different perspective, if one profiles the work

of two distribution companies, and their Irish film product.

In the following table, we can scan the results of Sony Pictures Classics and Fox Searchlight Pictures, two subsidiary companies with a mandate to acquire and market low to medium budget films, including “art cinema” and “foreign.” It seemed to many observers that they were created to outmanoeuvre Miramax and to tap into the “Indie” market that was best illustrated by Fox Searchlight Pictures’ taking on of Sundance Film Festival hit, Ed Burns’ Irish-American *The Brothers McMullen* (1995).

Distributed by Sony Pictures Classics:

Film	US Gross BO\$ (imdb.com)
<i>This is My Father</i> (Paul Quinn, 1998) (opened in May 1998)	\$1,000,000
<i>The General</i> (John Boorman, 1998) (opened December 1998)	\$1,200,000
<i>A Man of No Importance</i> (Suri Krishnamma, 1994) (opened December 1994)	\$934,000
<i>Dancing at Lughnasa</i> (Pat O’Connor, 1998) (opened November 1998)	\$2,285,000

Distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures

Film	US Gross BO\$ (imdb.com)
<i>The Brothers McMullen</i> (Ed Burns, 1995) (opened August 1995)	\$10,246,000
<i>The Van</i> (Stephen Frears 1996) (opened May 1997)	\$621,093
<i>Waking Ned Devine</i> (Kirk Jones, 1998) (opened November 1998)	\$24,700,000

It’s not too clear what one can make of these figures, except a few broad statements that films with humour will have a better chance of succeeding in the American marketplace beyond the benchmark of \$1,000,000 gross. The relative failure of *The Van* may have been the result of its television drama look and its general absence of traditional rural landscapes, something *Waking Ned Devine* supplied in abundance. On the other hand, *The Van*’s May release might have been the critical problem, slotted between the more knowable Easter Holiday period and the summer blockbuster. The serious Irish films of Sony Pictures Classics were mostly released in the fall/winter period, yet even this subsidiary company of a major studio was unable to break out of the level of revenue recouped by the independent distributor Avenue Pictures Productions in promoting Sheridan’s *The Field*. At the Vancouver International Film Festival Trade Forum in September 2003, Tony Safford, Senior Vice-President of Acquisitions and Co-productions

at 20th Century Fox, considered their acquisitions of films worldwide as simple—anything fresh, original, provocative, challenging. Interestingly, he also referred to Irish subject matter as desirable when “exotic” and “quaint.”

Clearly, the industrial model of the US distribution market with its economies of scale and block booking practices favouring the major studios makes it difficult for independent distributors to succeed dramatically. Additionally, since there are so many English-language films for the distributors to choose from (the common problem is too many movies not enough screens), Irish films will never have easy access. Yet, while it may be true that a first time director and his/her film may make no profit, it is an investment in experience for director and producer, and it is a calling card. Critically, the film receives international exposure and sales. To have achieved American distribution, one of those 466 slots in 1999, for example, is no mean achievement.

Even Artisan Entertainment, one of the 13 major distributors, must struggle for audiences for its films. Of the 153 titles it distributes listed on imdb.com, only one is Irish—Paddy Breathnach’s *I Went Down*, which garnered a respectable \$405,000 in its three-week run. Compare this result with Artisan’s distribution of name director Ken Loach’s *My Name is Joe* (1998) which recouped only \$346,695 over a slow four month release (January-April 1999). Elsewhere, the tale only gets worse—Peter Sheridan’s *Borstal Boy* (2000) managed \$87,074 (Strand Releasing); Michael Lindsay-Hogg’s *Frankie Starlight* (1995) reined in just \$78,168 (Fine Line); Liam McGrath’s *Southpaw: The Francis Barrett Story* (1999) earned a meagre \$26,822 (The Shooting Gallery). One of the major difficulties in selling film rights to an American distributor is that it will generally reserve the right whether it will release theatrically or immediately “dump” to video. John MacKenzie’s *When the Sky Falls* (2000) bought by Trimark (now part of Lions Gate) went straight to video. Miramax – perhaps still recovering from Gerard Stembridge’s *About Adam* (2000), which only secured \$151,559 after a three week run – waited until 2003 to release, and then only on video, Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (2000) starring Kevin Spacey.

A film is marketable when there is, as Justin Wyatt remarks, “the match between a star and a project, a pre-sold premise (such as a remake or adaptation of a best-selling novel) and a concept which taps into a national trend or sentiment” (Wyatt 1994: 15). To this statement, one can add emphasis on merchandizing, including the music soundtrack possibilities, and any other synergies to suit the vertically integrated and increasingly laterally integrated conglomerates that are highly interested in every North American major release for future global ancillary profit. If Irish filmmakers and producers wish to “crack” the North American market, they have to understand the constraints I have mentioned in this essay, hire good entertainment lawyers, sales agents and publicists armed with a compelling trailer, seek out quality “indie” distributors after trying the majors and mini-majors for co-production, and examine the themes of their film to judge whether it taps into, or originally reworks, what I have termed here “Hollywood East.”

Notes:

¹ For a mainly economic and industrial analysis of B.C. film and Hollywood, though one sensitive to the cultural issues, see Mike Gasher (2002). British Columbia has a population of around 4 million, similar to that of The Irish Republic.

² Cynics or realists, depending on one's point of view, would remark on Lynne Stopkevich's second feature, *Suspicious River* (2002); primarily financed by an American company, its tale of a receptionist at a hotel on a nondescript highway giving sexual favours for money from the guests is hardly culturally "Canadian" despite the two leads' Canadian citizenship. The money that is transacted is visibly American.

³ Bob Quinn has been eerily consistent over the years. See my interview with him in McIlroy (1989: 142-146); his passion for Irish images for Ireland is also implicit throughout his recent book *Maverick* (2001), reviewed in this issue of CJIS/RCÉI.

⁴ I elaborate on this point in chapters one and two in McIlroy (2001).

⁵ Film critic Alexander Walker argues this very point about these films when he was interviewed on the UTV programme, *How the Movies See Us* (broadcast December 1998).

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Waking Ned Devine

Brian McILROY

A Film Apparatchik Speaks

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROD STONEMAN

Rod Stoneman is now the director of

the new Huston School of Film and Digital Media at the University of Galway. Previously, he served as CEO of the Irish Film Board from 1993-2003, and was a commissioning editor of independent film and video at Channel 4 from 1983-1993. He has also made independent programmes for television, including *Ireland: The Silent Voices*. Brian McIlroy sat down with him in Vancouver during the Vancouver International Film Festival on 2 October 2003. Later, Rod Stoneman spoke at a symposium on “Cultural Survival in the Age of Hollywood” organized by the Institute of European Studies at UBC.

BM: You have a credit as an actor in Peter Greenaway’s *The Falls* (1980), a film I must confess I remember watching and then falling asleep during it.

RS: You could be forgiven for that, as it’s four and-a-half hours long. The terrible truth is that Peter Greenaway was touring the South West of England where we’d organized an independent film tour in 1980. Greenaway had worked as an editor at the Ministry of Information; he’d done some marvelous eye-catching shorts outside his day job, and he was just beginning the Tulse Luper enterprise, and he spied a black and white photograph of me wearing nothing more than a gas mask, and he said he’d like to include that in a film he was making. Luckily, like you, very few people have stayed awake through the entire duration of *The Falls* to discover my very minor role in it!

BM: Is there a narrative arc to your career?

RS: I did English Literature at Kent at Canterbury, got interested in film and did a two year postgraduate diploma at the Slade Film School, and from there did a bit of teaching, organizing the Independent Film Tour in the South-West of England in the late 1970s and ended up working in the Arnolfini art gallery in Bristol where I ran the cinema. It was good experience and grounding to see how people actually go to the cinema, buy tickets, what magazine they buy; it was all very illuminating for me. I was asked to be on various film funding panels at South-West Arts and the British Film Institute.

The panels were a premonition of the later more serious engagement with funding in the last twenty years at Channel Four’s Independent Film and Video Department and at the Irish Film Board. Panel members actually have a comfortable role in relation to looking at a lot of projects and coming to a consensual decision. The real frontline is the apparatchiks.

An important memory for me is when I put in a proposal with a friend to the BFI Production Board for a creative documentary entitled *Trailers*, analysing film trailers to understand how films reach their audiences, how they work generically, how they summarize a film narrative, how they are changed in different countries, and so on. I remember getting the “Thank you for your application, but good luck with it elsewhere” letter and the feelings of shock and incomprehensibility after that decision, so when I was on the receiving end of filmmakers’ fury and ferocity, I tried to remember how impossible it is when you care about something and of course you just cannot understand why it doesn’t get the money.

At the Film Board we tried to provide a decision making process with integrity and transparency where that feedback was always available, and even if we hadn’t done that, it is now legally necessary because the Freedom of Information Act is shining a torch into the dark corners of bureaucracy. We always made readers’ reports available to applicants.

The Film Board was very proactive, not just a passive receptacle of applications; I think ten years later it’s clear that experienced directors and producers are now in place. And especially with the difficulties of raising finance in Ireland – which means that you have to put together packages with money from other places – Irish producers today are quite adept and sinewy. Overall, I think the effect of the mechanism of tax incentives – initially Section 35 and latterly 481, perhaps too many producers have become financial producers – good at deal making and contracts, but not engaged enough with creative and editorial input. Producers are not directors of course, but complementary – they should be doing more than writing a cheque; they ought to be questioning and probing, working with the director on the images and sounds.

BM: Some Executive producers are very famous for their imprint on the films under their wing. Miramax comes to mind. How did you see your role as executive producer at the Film Board?

RS: You often find yourself supporting the predilections of the director; that's why you backed the film and it's difficult to rebuild that ship at sea. As the funder, we do discuss the script, the cast, the rough cut, but I've always tried to do that with a lightness of touch. It's a delicate and interactive relationship; it's not workable to stride in and demand changes; that would lead to its own resistance. But lightness of touch doesn't mean to stand back passively. You should question any aspect of the film: the narrative grammar, the front set-up, the ending. The contrast for me, for example, is when I went to see the rough cut of *The General* (1998), and John Boorman wasn't able to be there, but then he came out especially to Dublin airport for coffee just to hear what I thought about the cut. Here's a guy who's made more great films than I've had hot breakfasts. He was just interested, open and receptive. On the other hand, I'd sit down with a young filmmaker just out of Dun Laoghaire college, and there'll be "give me room, stay away from me" stance, a very defensive insecurity at play.

BM: And presumably you had a few difficult projects...

RS: There have been a few! For instance when Cathal Black's *Love and Rage* (2000) went over-budget by some £620,000 (Irish Punts); there could have been a hole beneath the waterline of the Irish film industry, so we got together with the completion guarantors and the other funders and refloated it, taking away everyone's fees within sight to finish it. That financial bloodbath was not the biggest disappointment for me. It was also a problem for me that, without warning or agreement, the director took the film to Germany for a last minute re-edit where all the consensual input that the financiers and the distributor had been making and an agreed version was thrown aside and an extra ten minutes was put back. For me that was a different and sad thing, a breach of trust, a betrayal even.

It isn't that one is going to pull the clause in the contract, and fire the director; in the end, it's about rational persuasion, and it's important to be clear that it is not, in the last instance, our film. In the circumstances of *Love and Rage*, I asked the director to take off my personal credit, though the Film Board's remained to reflect the considerable support the Board had given it. What did you think of the film?

BM: I thought it was muddled, and thereby reinforced just as much as it critiqued misogyny.

RS: That may be true as well. What's interesting is the way in which a meltdown behind the screen is manifested in the text. The production process does finally affect what we see. And this wasn't a happy film.

BM: It is an odd symmetry that the first Irish Film Board, Channel 4 and the explosion of video all occurred in 1981 or thereabouts.

RS: Certainly, in my formation, the eighties were a moment of incredible aspiration and energy. The thought was that personal cinema, cultural cinema, independent cinema, political cinema, could reach a wider audience. I don't think I had any illusion of eventual hegemony, but the work was very exciting, stimulating, and it seemed that a broader audience could be drawn to it.

Channel 4 represented an extraordinary opportunity for the whole range of independent cinema I was interested in to be taken to that wider audience. Indeed there was a positive and open response to most of the stuff we showed. I remember transmitting some really tough material like avant-garde film and getting good audiences. With mischievous motives I screened some subtitled interviews with Jacques Lacan at 2.30 in the morning and still there were 400,000 viewers! It's very difficult to have much optimism about utilizing television to its potential now.

BM: But there have been so many critical successes during your tenure at the Irish Film Board, have there not, with Paul Greengrass's *Bloody Sunday* (2002) a recent example?

RS: In broad terms, with the tenth anniversary and the hundred features and shorts, there were probably 10 to 15 really wonderfully achieved pieces. Films as individual as *The General*, Pat O'Connor's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Kirsten Sheridan's *Disco Pigs* (2001), Nichola Bruce's *I Could Read the Sky* (1999). I'd actually prefer not to attempt a complete list unless they seem like a canon. Then there's a huge band of films that are "quite good with flaws" or "quite flawed with a few good bits" depending on your mood! And then, frankly, there were five or six films, mercifully few really, that really didn't work. But we're in the business of risk, and that's not a bad patterning.

In Ireland, there has been a really positive reception to the range of Irish films overall. Those that went into theatres have been well received. Two examples of the moment – John Crowley's *Intermission* (2003) which is passing 2 million Euros at the Irish box office, only cost 2.5m to make. It's a very sharp, modern film that relates to Irish culture at this moment in time. It's aesthetically quite daring with a non-centered narrative that reminds one of Altman or P.T. Anderson; it's also one of the most successful Irish films ever, with a 40 print release. Alongside it, is Elizabeth Gill's *Goldfish Memory* (2003), with a six print release, very low budget film, a lively Dublin polysexual comedy. The conceit is that the goldfish swims around the bowl and by the time it returns it's forgotten what was there. A mélange of relationships, gay and straight, melting and reconfiguring. It'll do about \$100,000, a good return for a modest art house release. Also a powerful film like Kim Bartley and Donnacha O'Briain's *Chavez: The Revolution will not be Televised* (2003) illustrates the strengths of contemporary documentary work.

Another headline: from the market research we did in the early part of 2003, *The General* has been seen by almost half the population of Ireland! And that Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* (2003) has been seen by 25% of the people of Ireland, before it's been out on video and DVD or television. However it's also true that we've not really had an international success such as Jim Sheridan's *My Left Foot* (1989) and Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992).

BM: What about Pat O'Connor's *Circle of Friends* (1995)?

RS: You're right, *Circle of Friends* made \$23m in the US, but it is a rather unusual example; it was a huge movie steaming towards production, which frankly would have happened with or without the Film Board. In that moment at the reconstitution of the Board in 1993, it was strategically important for us to show we would do a wide range of films – from quality popular through art-house to small-scale personal films. Pat O'Connor wanted the Board involved and Savoy, the American production company, was benign; they thought we would bring the imprimatur of an Irish film and we wouldn't be too much bother. But that was the exception. Most of the films we financed were desperate for our contribution to the budget. A very high proportion of the films – up to two-thirds—we developed at the script stage and took through to production. It was the producers' job to find the co-production monies, although we would often help to connect them with other sources of finance.

BM: In Canada, Telefilm would be very concerned that the projects have a distribution deal in place or at least a broadcaster to distribute it. Was that true for you too?

RS: I don't know enough about the specific policies of Telefilm, but I would be concerned about a tendency to evade the pressure of editorial project selection and hide behind technical validation by the "market" through presales, etc. We were glad to have market participation but never depended upon it, especially with recent low budget features. We thought most of them will be out theatrically, and even if not, they would be seen on video and DVD, and eventually television. Sometimes for documentaries we would say a condition of our loan is that you must find a broadcaster transmitting to the Irish population, otherwise they might just pop up in the Cork Film Festival and that'd be it.

There are arguments that we should be more of an automatic fund, putting money into projects to which the market has already committed most of the budget but that's a derogation of our duty to be brave and lead from the front and make decisive editorial commitments. For example, we found it very difficult to get Pat Murphy's *Nora* (2000) into production, because everyone said "Oh no, not another biopic," but it was clear to me from an early stage that if *Nora* was to work it was the story of a psycho-sexual dynamic between a couple who could have been called Peter and Paula. That film was not a powerful film because we're reading footnotes on James Joyce. That film is compelling because he had a certain power from his gender and as a genius/artist; she had a certain power psychically, which counterbalanced it. And many people live similar complex imbalances in their relationships today and this made it work, beyond the story of the historical James and Nora, even though financiers were initially put off by seeing it as the writer biopic genre.



Circle of Friends



I Went Down

BM: Was there a fundamental difference between the first Irish Film Board and the second?

RS: The first Film Board did very good work but, because of the specific constraints of their times, they were never able to get a sufficient range of films going, to achieve a critical mass – in total I think they were involved in about 10-12 films in six years; luckily, the second incarnation of the Board has meant that 8-12 films have been made every year for the last ten years.

I brought the notion of radical pluralism from Channel 4 – that it was important to achieve a broad range with heterogeneity and diversity because that was the way different kinds of cinema could co-exist or even argue against one another. Although I wasn't as passionate about all the films, I can't think of a film that we made that I wasn't pleased we were doing, at least at the start – hindsight is always an advantage. Fortunately, there were even enough resources to return to subjects that had been touched on before. We were involved with two Martin Cahill films – *The General* and Thaddeus O'Sullivan's *Ordinary Decent Criminal* (1999), and at least three hunger strike films – Terry George's *Some Mother's Son* (1996), Les Blair's *H3* (2001), and Maeve Murphy's *Silent Grace* (2001).

BM: Certainly, I think Irish Cinema has created a profile for itself in the last decade. My students now think of Irish cinema as “Troubles” films, fighting against poverty films, such as Alan Parker's *Angela's Ashes* (1998) and caper movies, such as Kirk Jones's *Waking Ned Devine* (1999).

RS: *Waking Ned Devine* is a profoundly ambiguous film in Irish terms. It was made on the Isle of Man and up to a month before it was shot it was set in Cornwall; then they

decided to reset it in Ireland and recast it Irish. Of course, it's dreadful paddy-whackery. I'm glad your students think of caper movies and “Troubles” films because when we started, the situation was that the limited image of Irish cinema was pretty much defined as historical rural movies of the 1950s, and it was often raining in Roscommon! That's not to say you can't continue to do good work in that genre, as with Kevin Liddy's *Country* (2000) for example. But after a little bit of effort, we were able to extend to sharper and more contemporary films like Gerard Stembridge's *About Adam* (2001) and *Goldfish Memory*. I remember my delight walking out of a screening in Cannes of Paddy Breathnach's *I Went Down* (1997), and a French critic I know said to me “I liked it very much, but it's not an Irish film.” I was pleased that his limited stereotype of an Irish film had been challenged. Apart from some funding from the BBC, the provenance, the personnel and the content of that film are totally Irish.

BM: Any topics or genres that escaped or are still to be worked on?

RS: I suppose we could talk about nuances in the mixture. We did some romantic comedies, but I wonder if there were really any shockingly funny satirical films. We needed to find that Swiftian scalpel, that “savage indignation” to look at contemporary Ireland and the Celtic Tiger. There were a few stabs at imaginative comedy like Frank Stapleton's *The Fifth Province* (1997) or Kieron J Walsh's *When Brendan Met Trudy* (2001). But not many films that have a sense how they could open up the dynamic of such a fast changing society in moral or political terms. I also wonder if we found enough films with strong personal visions – really pushing the boundaries artistically and formally.

Origins and Orientations

AN INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN ROCKETT, ON IRISH FILM STUDIES

Kevin Rockett has been a central figure

in the emergence and growth of scholarship on the history and cultural significance of Irish film. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Irish cinema and film culture, and he co-authored the seminal *Cinema and Ireland* (1987). In 2001, he was the recipient of the Irish Film Institute Award for Contribution to Irish Film and his most recent publication is *The Los Angelisation of Ireland: Film Censorship, Culture and Society* (2004). He is currently Professor of Film Studies at Trinity College, Dublin. In the course of this interview, Kevin Rockett discusses the background to his academic research into Irish cinema, censorship and Irish film culture, the indigenous independent Irish cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, contemporary film-making in Ireland and its institutional and cultural contexts, and the state of film education and research in Ireland. Des O'Rawe conducted this interview in November 2003.

DOR: What are the origins of academic research into Irish cinema and Irish film culture? How were you directly involved in this process, particularly in relation to the publication of *Cinema and Ireland*?

KR: In the 1970s there was very little serious interest in Irish film history. There was certainly an attempt to collect films and memorabilia but this was almost entirely due to the endeavors of Liam O'Leary¹. Around this time, I was studying architecture at the Architecture Association in London which had its own video studio and film collection. My interest in film was nurtured in this environment and soon I was attending the British Film Institute (BFI) summer schools and the *Screen* conferences that were then being held as part of the Edinburgh Film Festival. These events, and the intellectual concerns of *Screen* in the 1970s, exposed me to a broad range of theoretical frameworks ranging from modernist aesthetics to various semiotic and psychoanalytical discourses, an exposure to critical approaches to the cinema that were completely unknown in Ireland at that time.

Upon my return to Dublin in 1976 I became involved in the Project Arts Centre, which had just established the "Project Cinema Club" and we began programming film seasons with a particular theme or critical context in mind (for example, "Feminism and Cinema," "Brechtian Cinema," and "New German Cinema"). In the summer of 1978, I programmed

a ten week season devoted to "Film and Ireland" and this is where, I suppose, modern Irish film scholarship originates. This program was designed to draw attention to a wide range of cultural and critical issues and it included films that were not particularly well known. The final film in that particular season, *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1978) was a key avant-garde film of the period and its inclusion in the program not only indicated my own particular preferences, but it also seemed to offer an exciting new direction for Irish cinema. The "Film and Ireland" program was a great success and there was soon a demand for similar seasons, both in Ireland and elsewhere.

By the 1980s, the new Irish Film Institute (IFI) was able to provide an effective institutional framework to support these developments. The IFI was also responsive to the need for systematic research on the history of Irish cinema, and its first Film Education Officer, Martin McLoone,² adapted the BFI's summer schools into an Irish context, organizing residential and non-residential courses, some in association with RTÉ. In reality, this was the first presentation in Ireland of any serious critical and historical interrogation of Ireland's relationship to cinema and television. Indeed, McLoone's and John MacMahon's³ edited anthology of essays, *Television and Irish Society* (1984), was a direct product of these activities. More importantly in this context, however, was John Hill's⁴ work on British cinema's representation of Irish history and politics. Through the IFI summer schools, John Hill and myself came into contact with Luke Gibbons,⁵ whose background in the relationship between philosophy, literature and the visual arts added another strand to the study of Ireland's relationship to the cinema. Our presentations on different aspects of Irish film ultimately led to the publication of *Cinema and Ireland* in 1987.

DOR: How important were developments in Irish film-making at this time, and the policies of the Irish Film Board, to the critical concerns and reception of *Cinema and Ireland*?

KR: We were never interested in constructing a history of Irish film or exploring the representations of the Irish in British and American cinemas in and for itself. We were trying to encourage an approach to historical and theoretical issues that engaged meaningfully with the independent Irish cinema movement that had emerged in the 1970s and



The Irish Film Centre

1980s. This movement had its origins in Bob Quinn's *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire* (1975), and in other 16mm features such as Quinn's *Poitin* (1978), Kieran Hickey's *Exposure* (1978), and Thaddeus O'Sullivan's *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (1978). *Cinema and Ireland* supported that direction and sought to interact with the intense debates that were taking place in the statutory Irish Film Board (IFB), which was set up in 1981. Within the IFB there was considerable competition between members from the independent sector and those members who favoured a more commercial approach to Irish film production. Ironically, the culmination of the first IFB and its demise occurred in the same year as *Cinema and Ireland* was first published.⁶

DOR: While political and institutional issues were clearly very important, what kind of rapport existed between indigenous Irish film production and Irish film culture in general? Did the debates within the IFB and the stance taken in *Cinema and Ireland* reverberate beyond the Irish film-making community?

KR: We were certainly trying to develop Irish film culture and we believed (and still do believe) that this required both a meaningful relationship between practice and criticism, and the development of institutions that effectively underpin that relationship. If you look back to the early 1980s, with the exception of the Arts Council-supported 'art'cinema, the Irish Film Theatre (1977-83), the only institution that was dealing with film was the National Film Institute of Ireland (NFI), a sectarian body established in the 1940s under the aegis of Archbishop McQuaid.⁷ By the 1970s, this organization was largely defunct, although there were some modernizing elements within it and they invited a number of people – including Luke Gibbons and myself – to become involved at board level in the reorganization of the Institute. We quickly transformed it by removing the sectarian elements in its constitution and in 1982 we renamed it the Irish Film Institute (IFI). We wanted to create a pluralist organization that would be truly representative of all strands of Irish film and Irish culture, an institution that would also become a home for Irish film. It was during my time as chair of the IFI (1984-1991), that we initiated the project to create an Irish Film Centre (IFC). In 1992, the IFC opened in Dublin and soon became internationally recognized as the archival base for Irish films, and the most important social and cultural centre for film in Ireland. The continued success

of the IFI, especially in relation to its educational and archiving policies, as well as film screening programs, is a testament to the development of Irish film culture.

DOR: The establishment of the IFI was a major achievement that certainly anticipated the broader shifts and transformations in Irish culture in the 1980s. However, is it not the case that the development of Irish cinema has also been inhibited by a deeper phenomenon, namely a culturally ingrained suspicion of the image? Is your recent work on the history of film censorship in Ireland relevant to this question?

KR: George Morrison⁸ once commented that the paucity of visual culture in Ireland was due to its lack of engagement with the Renaissance. I do not necessarily agree with this thesis but I would suggest that some basic issues have to be addressed. Many of these issues can be traced to the historical peculiarities of Irish Catholicism and we need to recognize the fact that the attempt to contain the power of the image within a broader Irish cultural context had been in existence long before the invention of cinema. A suspicious attitude towards images was not in itself remarkable, particularly in relation to the dominant images of Ireland and Irishness that were constructed and disseminated by the colonial powers. However, in the commentaries of Irish film censors from the 1920s onwards, as they are cutting certain films that, besides containing transgressive themes such as extra martial affairs and divorce, you find that they are also preoccupied with images of female semi-nudity, and narrative moments where women were drinking or smoking, than with anything that overtly offended the national self-image. This tendency is important in terms of understanding the ways in which the censors tried to deal with cinematic images and their anxieties about the connotational powers of the image.

At certain points, for example, the censor realized that, unless he banned the film altogether, it would be impossible to contain the surplus desire that film images host, irrespective of the ostensible contents of these images. This predicament illustrates a general problem in the relationship between the cinema and censorship, and any study of film censorship must acknowledge that visual representations, and cinema in particular, inevitably resist the strategies of containment deployed by the practice of censorship. In Ireland, the censor would either ban the film or cut it in such a way as to 'protect' those classes who attended the cinema from its supposedly corrupting influence. Indeed, this fear of the image – and of what the image *secretely* – is rooted in a concern that once you allow free access to an image you are detaching people from the world of 'the word,' which supposedly anchors meaning in a transparent and quantifiable reality. In the case of the cinema, you are dealing with a discourse that is infinitely malleable and essentially subjective, a discourse that cannot be converted into concrete units of meaning. The cinematic image possesses a surplus of signification and this means that even an image of a landscape will carry a meaning and cultural resonance which is beyond the

comprehension and control of a given censor, at any given time.

This phenomenon also sheds light on the reasons why official attitudes towards the Abbey Theatre were much more positive than they were towards the cinema. Indeed, when you consider the frequency with which novels and plays were adapted for the screen in Ireland prior to the 1970s, you certainly get a sense of why the state was much less anxious about the effects of a play than they were about the effects of a film. Indeed, the original remit of Ardmore Studios, which was opened in 1958, was to adapt Abbey plays for cinema and television. The fact that Ernest Blythe⁹ wholeheartedly endorsed this project is itself indicative of the “literary” prejudices of the establishment at this time. This tendency prevailed in Ireland from the 1910s onwards and it was only in the 1970s, with the arrival of new processes of urbanization, modernization, and internationalization that a proper visual re-imagining of Irish culture became possible. The filmmakers who emerged at this time were committed to a notion of an independent, creative director or scriptwriter who was making their own film, from within their own head, as opposed to merely facilitating the cinematic adaptation of someone else’s novel or play. A number of these people, such as Pat Murphy, Thaddeus O’Sullivan and Joe Comerford came from backgrounds in art colleges in Dublin and London, while others like Bob Quinn and Cathal Black came from backgrounds that had little or no connection with Ireland’s cinema of literary adaptation. Indeed, the key people who made the most innovative films in the 1970s and 1980s, had not come from a literary or formal academic background. They believed in a different form of engagement with visual culture and it is this fundamental breach with tradition that makes that cinema the most radical of all, particularly with regard to the innovative and controversial images of Ireland that it created.

DOR: Neil Jordan is clearly relevant to any discussion of the relationship between literary and visual cultures in Ireland. Would you agree that one of Jordan’s achievements, as an Irish film-maker, has been his successful “translation” of literary influences and inclinations into a distinctive cinematic idiom?

KR: Yes, one of the reasons why Neil Jordan is Ireland’s premier international director is his creative and critical ability to merge the worlds of the image and the written word. He himself has commented that, by the time he had written *The Past* (1980) – a novel that is comprised primarily of descriptions as opposed to dialogue – he felt that he had exhausted the possibilities of the novel form and that, since he was just writing in pictures, so to speak, he might as well just go off and make films. One of the remarkable characteristics of Jordan’s prose, both before and after *The Past*, is its visual quality; and this sensitivity to the image is central to Jordan’s cinema, a cinema that is not driven primarily by dialogue or plots. This is as evident in *Angel* as it is in later films such as *The Butcher Boy* (1998) (which is

adapted from Patrick McCabe’s very “visual” novel) and *The Good Thief* (2003), which, in its reworking of Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Bob Le Flambeur* (1956), works with and through images, and images of images, in a more postmodern way.¹⁰ In this respect, Jordan shares something fundamental with the Irish independent cinema movement of the 1970s and 1980s, and, like directors such as Cathal Black, Bob Quinn and Pat Murphy, Jordan’s primary reference point is within a modern, or modernist, European cinema context.

DOR: In this sense, then, Jordan’s approach to film-making – his cinematic sensibility – is wholly different to that of someone like Jim Sheridan.

KR: Generally speaking, Sheridan is not committed to visual language and visual culture to anything like the same extent as Jordan. From *My Left Foot* (1989) onwards, Sheridan’s primary concern has been the production of well-plotted three-act dramas within a Hollywood-style mould. As I have already said, Jordan can be situated within a trajectory that includes those radical independent film-makers of the 1970s and 1980s, whereas Sheridan (who was lionized by Haughey¹¹ and others after the commercial success of *My Left Foot*) takes his creative bearings from theatre, particularly Irish realist theatre. Indeed, Sheridan and Noel Pearson (who produced *My Left Foot*) have conscientiously promoted the development of an Irish cinema that is stylistically compatible with commercial, narrative cinema. While Jordan has managed to make a diverse range of films that have often been commercially successful, he has remained loyal to a distinctly European modernist tradition. He has always remained alert to the reality that the form in which you express something is as important as what you express. Sheridan, like Pat O’Connor, has never had any real interest in an aesthetic practice capable of breaking the stranglehold of literary realism and theatrical naturalism that features so prominently in the landscape of the Irish cultural experience. Indeed, I had first hand experience of this as a member of the Project Arts Centre board during 1976–80 where intense debate surrounded aesthetic practice with performance artist Nigel Rolfe and myself advocating a modernist approach to Irish culture, while Jim Sheridan, the chair of the board, and his brother, playwright and later film director, Peter, took a “naturalist” view of artistic practice, something which still dominates the artistic work of both of them.

The reconstitution of the IFB in 1993 and Michael D. Higgins’s¹² re-vamping of Section 35¹³ consolidated this direction. Indeed, by the late 1990s, the IFB was able to dispense up to €10,000,000 a year in production finance with the result that nearly one hundred feature films and television series, and three hundred shorts, were produced between 1993 and 2003.¹⁴ The guiding forces behind this enormous expansion in production tended to support a familiar and uncritical cinematic representation of Irish culture. The Ireland portrayed by the cinema of the “Celtic Tiger”¹⁵ is very different from the Ireland that would have been presented by that critical and indigenous cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. Of course, this is also the period when it becomes increasingly difficult to locate indigenous and

independent film-making throughout Europe, the period when many cultures are trying to hold on to the notion of a national cinema while at the same time “de-nationalizing” that cinema through the adoption of mainstream generic conventions. This phenomenon, which has been very apparent in relation to contemporary Irish cinema, tends to neutralize political issues by inhibiting the emergence of formal innovation. If Irish films are to be commercially successful, so this argument goes, then they need to be able to travel to any global location without their “nationality” being clearly recognized. This is in direct opposition to the spirit of experimentation and ‘critical regionalism’ that characterized the independent film productions of the late 1970s and 1980s, and that still pervades films such as Jordan’s *The Miracle* (1991) and *The Butcher Boy*. Indeed, Jordan’s ability to negotiate a space for indigenous concerns and challenging forms within this industrial and “globalized” context is another important factor that has contributed to his success as a contemporary Irish film-maker.

The folly of many Irish film producers, directors and their supporters in the 1990s was that they so thoroughly embraced filmmaking as a commercial activity they were left exposed to the vagaries of Irish governments’ industrial and taxation policies. The result of discarding a cultural argument for cinema has resulted in the downgrading or elimination of tax-based investments in films made in Ireland by the early 2000s, at the same time as the Film Board’s production fund was being cut. Since other countries, including Blairite Britain, followed the Irish example and introduced such schemes, Ireland’s loss in this regard could well prove to be England’s gain.

DOR: Interestingly, this period has also witnessed the expansion of film studies as a discipline within the Irish higher education sector. Does film studies in Ireland address the new issues and problems that exist in contemporary Irish culture?

KR: The transformation of the Irish film industry in the 1990s has coincided with the growth of film studies within the academy. My own move to Trinity College, Dublin (TCD) in 2000 was very much part of this process and these developments are important. At TCD, for example, our undergraduate and postgraduate programs have been designed to provide some critical artillery to graduates, who can offer society a more reflective and critically informed analysis of not just Irish cinema, but of the cinema in general.

One consequence of the commercial “mainstreaming” of Irish film production throughout the 1990s has been the detachment of film criticism and analysis from practitioners. Indeed, the critical film culture that was developed in the 1970s and 1980s has been largely discarded by a new generation of film-makers who, for various reasons, have wanted to distance themselves from the experimental forms and political radicalism of this period. This reluctance to create and explore situations and contexts that actively interrogate the contemporary Irish experience is reflected in the dominance of a cinema that continually reprocesses and re-presents images and characterizations from earlier

eras. Elsewhere, however, increased decentralization of production, new opportunities for independent film-making, and the embracing of new technologies has facilitated the emergence of critical and regional cultures in the wake of globalization. Irish film-makers should be well placed to explore this “space within the global,” a space that can accommodate genuinely alternative practices and positions. This process cannot happen without an awareness of the central importance of critical activity within the film culture, and the role of the academy is obviously crucial in this regard.

DOR: In terms of graduate research, TCD and the University of Ulster are currently collaborating on a number of research events and projects. Briefly, what is the background to these initiatives and what contribution are they making to film scholarship in Ireland?

KR: Coming out of the recognition in 2002 of the lack of a platform for postgraduate film studies in Ireland as a critical activity, John Hill and myself decided to establish the annual Irish Postgraduate Film Research Seminar, which had its first conference at TCD in April, 2003. At the Seminar, nineteen graduate students from Ireland, Scotland, France, Italy and the US gave papers and debated a wide range of issues with other graduate students and academics in the field.¹⁶ As a result of this initiative, the Republic of Ireland’s Higher Education Authority – under its North-South Program of Collaborative Research – provided support for the Seminar (until 2006) and has agreed to fund three Ph.D. studentships on Irish cinema. These initiatives are designed to develop a critical mass in Irish film studies at graduate level, and it is also hoped that they will underpin the undergraduate and postgraduate work that is currently being done at both TCD and the University of Ulster (UU). These projects are designed to nurture a new generation of graduate film students who will continue the critical research project that originated with the writing of *Cinema and Ireland in the 1980s* (1990).¹⁷ O’Leary (1910-1992): Irish actor, documentary film-maker and archivist. In 1936, he co-founded the Irish Film Society and his *Invitation to the Film* (1945) was the first book to be written on Irish cinema. O’Leary’s private collection is now held in the National Library of Ireland.

² McLoone, Martin: Senior lecturer in Media Studies at the University of Ulster. He is the author of *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema* (2000).

³ MacMahon, John: Producer and education editor at Radio Telefis Éireann (RTE).

⁴ Hill, John: Professor of Media Studies at the University of Ulster. A co-author of *Cinema and Ireland*, Hill has published widely on the cinemas of Britain, Ireland and America; media policy; and popular culture. His books include *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema: 1956-1963* (1986) and *British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes* (1999).

⁵ Gibbons, Luke: Professor of English and concurrent Professor in the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre at the University of Notre Dame. A co-author of *Cinema and Ireland* and a contributing editor to the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991),

Gibbons's other publications include *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996) and *The Quiet Man* (2003).

⁶ Irish Film Bord/Scannán na hEireann: Statutory organisation that aims to promote and facilitate the production and availability of Irish films to national and international audiences. The IFB provides grants, loans and investment opportunities to independent Irish film-makers and collaborates with other agencies and groups to consolidate the economic and vocational viability of the film industry in Ireland. The Board was established in 1981 under the Film Board Act (1980) but was controversially disbanded by central government in 1987. It was eventually reconstituted in 1993. See, Rockett's *Ten Years After: The Irish Film Board: 1993-2003* (2003).

⁷ McQuaid, John Charles (1895-1973): Member of the Holy Ghost order and former president of Blackrock College, Dublin. McQuaid became Archbishop of Dublin in 1940 and for the next three decades emerged as the principal custodian of traditional Catholic values and social teaching in Ireland. An opponent of the reforms instituted by the second Vatican Council, McQuaid's political interventions and hostility towards modernity and secularisation is well documented.

⁸ Morrison, George: Film-maker best known for his two Irish-language documentaries *Mise Éire* (1959) and *Saoirse?* (1961).

⁹ Ernest Blythe (1889-1975): Former IRB activist who became a Sinn Féin MP in 1918, and then a government minister after independence before being appointed managing director of the Abbey in 1941. Blythe was a deeply conservative man whose cultural vision never extended beyond parochial anti-modernism. It is a commonly held view that his twenty-five year tenure at the Abbey was a disaster and that his enthusiastic promotion of Irish-language theatre was naïve and counter-productive.

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of *The Good Thief*, see the Rocketts' *Neil Jordan: Exploring Boundaries* (2003), 239-253.

¹¹ Haughey, Charles: Leader of Fianna Fáil who was elected as Irish Taoiseach on four occasions (1979-81, 1982, 1987-89, 1989-92).

¹² Higgins, Micheal D.: Labour politician, poet and academic who served as Minister for Arts, Culture, Gaeltacht, and the Islands between 1993-1997.

¹³ Section 35: Now known as Section 481, this scheme provides tax incentives designed to encourage the growth of film production in Ireland by providing filmmakers with cost saving methods of making films and opportunities to capitalise on investments in film production and distribution. In November 2003, shortly after this interview took place, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology (DLIADT) re-branded its prestigious film production department as the National Film School. Its inaugural Advisory Board is comprised of eighteen members including: four film directors (Neil Jordan, Jim Sheridan, Aisling Walsh and John Boorman), a writer (Roddy Doyle), a composer (Bill Whelan), an Irish television executive (TV3 founder-chairman, James Morris), an academic (Kevin Rockett). Rockett has subsequently commented that this important initiative is "an indication that perhaps the divisions between practice and criticism, which was such a feature of 1990s Irish culture, may be breaking down." (Rockett, Kevin. "Re: CJIS Interview." E-mail to Des O'Rawe. 4 Dec. 2003).

¹⁴ For more detail and discussion see, Rockett's *Ten Years After* (2003).

¹⁵ Between 1987 and 1997, the Irish economy experienced an unprecedented period of high-level growth, surpassing all the other states of the European Union, the OECD, and even the Asian "tiger" economies – hence the term "Celtic Tiger."

¹⁶ The proceedings of the 2003 Postgraduate Research Seminar are forthcoming in 2004.

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The Butcher Boy

Dana HEARNE

Cine Gael Montréal

A DECADE OF THE BEST IN IRISH CINEMA

In the spring of 1992, Anthony Kirby,

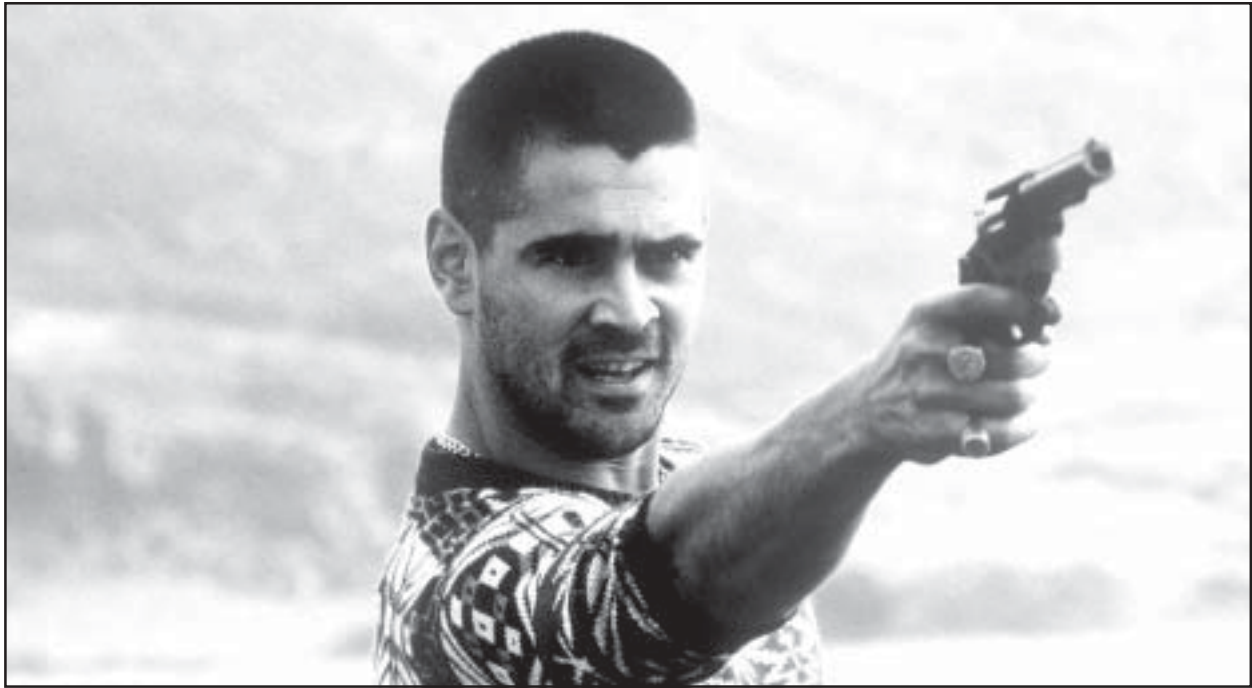
well-known film buff and member of Montreal's vibrant Irish community, made a presentation to The St. Patrick Society's cultural committee suggesting that it consider bringing Irish films to Montreal for the benefit of the community. Nothing happened right away, but Lynn Lonergan Doyle, a member of the cultural committee at the time, mulled it over, got a few interested people together and formed an executive committee. With the financial support of The St. Patrick's Society the first Cine Gael Montreal film season was set to roll one year later in January 1993. She had no clue then how complicated it would be to get a film season launched each year.

The first season's program was a harbinger of what was to become one of the annual highlights of the Irish community's rich calendar of events. That year we screened such classics as Alan Parker's *The Commitments*, Irvin Kershner's *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, Thaddeus O'Sullivan's

December Bride, and John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (preceded by a lecture presented by Professor James MacKillop entitled "Irish Cinema and *The Quiet Man*"), and Margo Harkin's *Hush-A-Bye-Baby*. This first season set the tone of future seasons in a number of ways. Irish cinema was wide open to us then, as anything we decided to show would be new to us. We could choose the best of the classics and we could keep our eye on the new releases. With the input of the more knowledgeable members of the committee, we all developed a considerable expertise in researching and tracking films. Now going into our eleventh year the choices have narrowed and we have to work harder on making our decisions. We developed a pattern then that we expanded in subsequent seasons. With a season that extended from late January to early May, we had a film evening every two weeks. We developed a tradition of having a guest speaker for every film. These speakers are drawn from the Irish



The Luck of Ginger Coffey



Intermission

community, from the universities and colleges (film studies and other disciplines), the media, the film directors themselves and high profile actors, and sometimes members of our own committee. We became interested in mixing genres to include not only full-length features but also documentaries, short films and animation.

From 1993 until 1998 we were lucky to have the support of the Conservatoire D'Art Cinematographique de Montreal that up to that time was housed at Concordia University. Its affiliation with Concordia ended that year and although we continued to show our films at Concordia's Cinema DeSeve, the loss of the Conservatoire's support made our task of researching and tracking films very much harder. The last year of this alliance was a *succes fou* for Cine Gael Montreal. That year we mounted a major festival of Irish film which we called "Le Cinema Irlandais: La Voix D'Une Nation/ Celebration of Irish Film: Voices of the Nation." It ran from March 26th to April 19th. In total we had 19 days of screenings and 55 films. The films were mostly highlights in Irish film-making North and South from the 1980s and the 1990s – features, documentaries, shorts and animation, including films directed by Neil Jordan, Jim Sheridan, John T. Davis, Paddy Breathnach, Margo Harkin, Trish McAdam, Tom Collins, John Huston, Joe Comerford, Brendan Byrne, Damien O'Donnell, Aine O'Connor, Pdraig O'Neill and Edith Pierperoff.

In the years following this bonanza of Irish film, we added two new features to our program: an evening of shorts; and one weekend devoted to highlighting a celebrated actor (Stephen Rea and Milo O'Shea to name two), director (John Ford, Neil Jordan, and Bob Quinn), a significant figure in the Irish film world (Rod Stoneman last season) or emphasizing a different focus, such as Irish women directors (Pat Murphy, Orla Walsh, Mary McGuckian, Margo Harkin).

Our next such weekend we hope to devote to Gay Irish Cinema. We also have opening and closing receptions and "special weekend" receptions either at Concordia or in one of the local Irish pubs, which always generously support our film season.

We have had some mad moments during these 11 years when films arrived just minutes before the screening because they somehow got stuck at customs or even worse, the wrong film got on to the reel in the projection booth or the right one never showed up. Perhaps the most hairy example of this type of mishap was during our Stephen Rea weekend. We were scheduled to show Neil Jordan's *Angel* on the Saturday night but as the projectionist was checking the film he informed us that we had a print of a French porn film of the same name. One of our committee members raced out to a video store and managed to get a somewhat scratched print of the right *Angel*, and the rest of the evening went without incident. We have found over the years that tracking the films is often the most difficult part of the committee's work. Sunniva O'Flynn at the Irish Film Centre always does whatever she can to help us out, but in most instances we have to track each film through its producer or distributor (if there is one). In many cases, the Irish Film Centre may only hold an archival copy, so we have to hope we can get one of the only other prints making the festival rounds.

For the up-coming season we are still scrambling, but we hope to be able to show some of the most recent Irish features, including John Crowley's *Intermission* with Colm Meaney and Colin Farrell, Elizabeth Gill's *Goldfish Memory*, John Deery's *Conspiracy of Silence* and open with John Irwin's *The Boys from County Clare*. It's a big job to run a film society but we're addicted to it and that helps, and we can count on screening to a capacity audience from the Montreal Irish community and the Montreal community at large.

Profiles of Irish-Canadians

BRIAN MOORE

The Statement (2003), the biggest and perhaps most

prestigious of Canada's feature film offerings of that year, was based on Brian Moore's 1995 novel of the same name; though produced and directed by acclaimed Canadian filmmaker Norman Jewison and scripted by Academy Award-winning screenwriter Ronald Harwood, it met with, at best, lukewarm reviews. The thriller style narrative details a French war criminal's fifty-year evasion of justice with the help of members of an ultra-right wing faction within the established Catholic Church. Moore's penultimate novel is typical of much of his work in that it provides a perceptive character study of a man confronting his values under duress, and an opportunity to rework one of his recurring themes: that of the complex relationship of Catholicism to modern society. The facile pulp fiction prose style, which served in the novel as a lure to engage readers with a thoughtful exploration of the irreconcilable nature of religious and political belief was, perhaps inevitably, taken at face value; dulled and simplified to fit the pattern dictated by a well-established Hollywood genre.

Yet despite the film's relative lack of success in translating the philosophical thrust of Moore's work to the screen, it does provide a neat point of departure for a summation of a career that encompassed successful work in both literature and cinema. For Moore, a much celebrated Irish-Canadian author, who inspired critical acclaim and garnered accolades in Ireland, England, Canada and the United States for his fiction, was also responsible for several original screenplays as well as adaptations of his own novels for films and television. Admirers of his writing included authors such as Graham Greene and Mordecai Richler, yet what might be described as a latent cinematic potential in his works, and his deft ability to create and sustain a certain mood with his prose, attracted an equal measure of interest from such film industry notables as the Hollywood directors John Huston and Alfred Hitchcock. It is to be hoped that this most recent film version of one of his novels will spark a renewed and deserved critical interest in his complete works.

Born in Belfast to Eileen McFadden and Dr. James Bernard Moore on August 25, 1921, shortly after the partition of Ireland that created the southern Free State, Brian Moore was the fourth child of a family that would eventually grow to nine. His parents and upbringing were solidly middle class, and his early years were relatively untroubled by the frequent eruptions of sectarian violence in Belfast, despite his membership in the Catholic minority and Dr. Moore's heightened awareness of the religious struggle. His father was a voracious reader, and the young Brian grew up in a home with the typical bourgeois proclivity for education, where books were easily accessible, and study encouraged. From an early

age, he showed an aptitude for English composition that was at first encouraged by his Elementary school English masters. Yet the strict Catholic instruction he received, with its emphasis on rote learning, and the oppressive atmosphere he encountered at grammar school, discouraging individual achievements and personal growth, would mark him profoundly, and have a deep creative influence upon his first novels.

His failure to achieve the necessary marks in mathematics for matriculation prevented his entrance to university and medical school, disappointing his father, and causing their relationship to suffer through his adolescence. It was perhaps this, coupled with his early ambivalence towards the Catholic ritual of Confession, that led to his open rejection of the Church in his teenage years, when Moore began to rebel unreservedly against the stultifying, provincial, class-bound Belfast atmosphere and his parents' religious and ideological affiliations. Some conservative Irish Catholics, Dr. Moore among them, initially supported Hitler's march across Europe as a protest against the British Empire. Yet Brian Moore, in his independent pursuit of intellectual stimulation, joined socialist youth groups, read modern authors such as James Joyce and W.H. Auden, and cultivated interests detached from the predominant Catholic ethos he had been subjected to both at school and at home. It was at this period of his life that he first began to entertain serious thoughts of becoming a professional writer, and that he first became determined to quit the generally inhospitable Belfast milieu in the hope that he could take advantage of a change of scene to effect an entry into the ranks of his chosen vocation.

In the summer of 1939, Moore joined the Air Raid Precautions Unit, and when the first air assaults of the Blitz struck Belfast in 1941, he performed heroic duties in recovering and preserving the bodies of the dead for identification. In 1943, he seized an opportunity to leave Belfast presented by his rough working knowledge of French, and accepted a job with the British Ministry of War Transport as a port officer in North Africa. His administrative career was a highly successful one, and he moved eastward to posts in Naples, on the Côte d'Azur, and in Paris, as the Allied front lines advanced. He was able to develop a more cosmopolitan outlook through his exposure to Mediterranean, and particularly French culture, and his interactions with the many Englishmen, Canadians, and Americans he encountered in the course of his duties. At the termination of his wartime service in 1945, he took a job with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Poland, and in 1947, submitted two articles about conditions in Warsaw to the Dublin *Sunday Independent*.

Depressed at the prospect of having to return to Belfast after his time with the UN organization, and with no qualifications and minimal hope of employment, he explored the possibility of emigrating to pursue a career in journalism in Canada inspired by the relative success of his freelance editorials on Poland, and his desire to revive the faltering relationship he had begun with a Canadian woman. Encouraged by the Canadian Embassy's report that journalists were in demand, he arrived in Canada in 1948, and, settling in Montreal in 1949, he took a job as a proofreader with one of the city's English language newspapers, *The Gazette*. His talent for reportage was soon recognized and he was promoted to the position of correspondent for the daily, incidentally gaining valuable experience in the art of unearthing crucial detail and rendering it succinctly in print over his three years on the job. Moore was married to a colleague in 1952, and became a Canadian citizen in November of 1953, shortly before the birth of his only child, Michael.

It was during his time as a professional journalist that he began to write crime thrillers under various pseudonyms for the Toronto publishing house Harlequin, drawing upon his wartime experiences and the stories of Montreal's underworld that he had covered for the paper as his chief inspirations. He quit *The Gazette* in 1952, to concentrate upon what he felt were more legitimate literary endeavors, but continued to pen thrillers for the American companies Fawcett and Dell as well as freelance stories and articles, even after his first great success with a serious novel. Retreating to a cabin in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec in the summer of 1953, he worked on the manuscript of what was to become his first significant work and he would complete it by the end of that year, despite a boating accident that left him with a serious brain injury. *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, published by André Deutsch in 1955, earned rave reviews, and won the Author's Club First Novel Award and the Quebec Literary Prize.

Judith Hearne, the story of an alcoholic Irishwoman's disillusionment with her faith and ultimate descent into madness, would be the first of a series of novels with uniquely Irish settings and themes, suggesting Moore took advantage of the objective distance that living in Canada provided him to mine his unhappy recollections of life in Belfast for creative material. His first fictions became as much the basis for an exploration of his attitudes towards Irish Catholicism, social class distinctions and family relationships, as stylistic experiments to develop his author's technique. His second novel, *The Feast of Lupercal*, published in 1957, would attempt to portray the unfulfilling close-mindedness he recalled as the salient feature of his own Catholic education. After a move to New York in 1959, he set to work on what would become *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, a semi-autobiographical novel about an Irish immigrant's experiences in Montreal, which was awarded the Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1960. He would again receive the award in 1975 for *The Great Victorian Collection*. He also enjoyed the distinction of being short listed for the Booker Prize three times in his career.

A regular output of novels from the mid 1950s until the late 1990s, included works as diverse as the television script pastiche of the October crisis of 1970 in *The Revolution Script* (1971), the exploration of the repercussions of an imaginary latter-day schism within the church in *Catholics* (1974), the

historical dramatization of the spiritual dilemma of missionaries in New France in *The Black Robe* (1985), and the investigation of the complicated relationship of the Catholic Church to Nazi war criminals in *The Statement* (1995). Yet in each of his novels there remains a characteristic economy of prose and something of the taut pacing of the early pulp fiction potboilers he churned out in the early 50s.

Yet it was his second novel, *The Feast of Lupercal*, which first attracted the attention of the famous director of suspense films, Alfred Hitchcock, for what he saw of his own experiences at a Jesuit Catholic school in its uncompromising representation of the effects of harsh Catholic instruction upon the schoolboy psyche. In 1965 he brought Moore to Universal Studios in Hollywood, to work with him on the Cold War spy film *Torn Curtain* after the celebrated Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov proved to be unavailable. However, the collaboration was not a happy one, and the quality of the finished film, about an American scientist feigning defection to the Soviet Union, was severely compromised by the novelist and the director's many disagreements about the direction the script should take. The finished film, though respectable entertainment, remains one of the director's lesser works. Nevertheless, the collaboration with Hitchcock provided the novelist with an opportunity to hone his screenwriting skills, and the time he spent in California moved him to settle permanently in Malibu with his second wife in the mid 1960s.

It was perhaps as a result of his association with Hitchcock that the French New Wave director and cinephile Claude Chabrol invited him to write the screenplay for his 1984 film *Le sang des autres*. Yet Moore had adapted his own novel *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* for an independent producer in Montreal in 1963, before his sojourn in Hollywood. He had reworked five of his novels, *Ginger Coffey*, *Catholics*, *The Black Robe*, *Cold Heaven*, and *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* for the movies before *The Statement* arrived in 2003. *Judith Hearne*, Moore's *chef-d'oeuvre*, took a particularly circuitous route to the screen. The rights to the novel were originally purchased by John Huston, who renewed his option on the book for several years. Actresses suggested for the role of Judith included Katherine Hepburn, and Deborah Kerr. Yet the book did not arrive on the screen until 1987 with Jack Clayton's successful, if bleak rendering, starring Maggie Smith and Bob Hoskins.

At the time of his death at the age of 78 in 1999, he left a legacy of 27 novels and nine screenplays. He remains an influential author and a unique voice in the history of Canadian literature.

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Profils de Canadiens irlandais

BRIAN MOORE

The Statement (2003), qui est la sortie

canadienne la plus importante et peut-être la plus prestigieuse cette année, est basé sur le roman de Brian Moore du même nom publié en 1995. Bien qu'il ait été produit et réalisé par le célèbre cinéaste canadien Norman Jewison et écrit par le scénariste Ronald Harwood, vainqueur d'un Academy Award, ce film n'a obtenu qu'un accueil tiède. L'emprunt du style narratif au film noir met en scène un criminel de guerre français qui pendant une cinquantaine d'années a échappé à la justice grâce à l'aide des membres d'une faction d'extrême-droite au sein de l'Église catholique. L'avant-dernier roman de Moore est assez exemplaire de l'ensemble de son œuvre en ce qu'il traite de l'évolution des perceptions à travers l'étude d'un personnage masculin confrontant ses propres valeurs sous la contrainte. C'est aussi l'opportunité pour Moore de reprendre un de ses thèmes récurrents, à savoir la relation complexe entre catholicisme et société moderne.

Toutefois, malgré le manque de succès tout relatif du film pour rendre la ligne philosophique du travail de Moore sur la toile, celui-ci apporte un bon point de départ pour résumer la carrière réussie d'un homme tant dans le domaine de la littérature que du cinéma. En effet, Moore, auteur canadien-irlandais célèbre, qui inspira une critique louangeuse et qui recueillit les honneurs en Irlande, en Angleterre, au Canada et aux États-Unis pour sa fiction, rédigea aussi plusieurs scénarios ainsi que des adaptations de ses propres romans pour le grand comme pour le petit écran. On pourrait citer parmi ses admirateurs des noms d'auteurs tels que Graham Greene et Mordecai Richler, mais le potentiel cinématographique latent de ses travaux ainsi que son savoir-faire pour créer et soutenir dans sa prose une atmosphère particulière, attira un intérêt équivalent parmi les notables de l'industrie du cinéma tels que les réalisateurs John Huston et Alfred Hitchcock.

Né à Belfast de Eileen McFadden et du docteur James Bernard Moore le 25 août 1921, peu de temps après la scission de l'Irlande qui vit naître l'état libre de l'Irlande du Sud, Brian Moore était le quatrième enfant d'une famille de neuf enfants. Il fut élevé dans un milieu bourgeois et la tranquillité de ses premières années ne fut pas troublée par les flambées de violence sectaire fréquentes à Belfast, malgré son appartenance à la communauté catholique et la conscience aiguë de son père des tensions religieuses. Son père était un lecteur avide, et le jeune Brian grandit dans un environnement éducatif typiquement bourgeois où les livres étaient facilement accessibles et les études encouragées. Dès son plus jeune âge, il montra des qualités en composition anglaise qui furent tout de suite soutenues par ses maîtres à l'école primaire anglaise. Toutefois l'instruction catholique stricte dont il fut l'objet, de par son emphase sur l'apprentissage par cœur et l'atmosphère

oppressive du lycée décourageant les accomplissements et l'enrichissement personnels, le marqua profondément et influença ses premiers romans.

Ses notes insuffisantes en mathématiques l'empêchèrent d'entrer à l'université et à l'école de médecine, ce qui fut une grosse déception pour son père et ce qui entraîna par la suite une période troublée dans leur relation pendant toute la période de son adolescence. La combinaison de sa position ambivalente par rapport au rituel catholique de la confession et de la relation difficile qu'il entretenait avec son père fut probablement à l'origine de son rejet de l'Église en cette période troublée de son adolescence. Moore commença à se rebeller ouvertement contre l'atmosphère provinciale abrutissante et sclérosée de Belfast d'une part et les affiliations religieuses et idéologiques de ses parents d'autre part. Quelques conservateurs catholiques irlandais, dont le docteur Moore faisait partie, supportèrent au départ la marche d'Hitler sur l'Europe en signe de protestation contre l'empire britannique. Cependant, Brian Moore, dans sa poursuite indépendante de stimulation intellectuelle, se joignit à des groupes des jeunes socialistes. Ce fut à cette période de sa vie qu'il commença à penser sérieusement à devenir écrivain et qu'il forgea sa volonté déterminée de quitter l'environnement inhospitalier de Belfast dans l'espoir de tirer avantage de ce changement pour effectuer son entrée dans les milieux de la vocation qu'il avait choisie.

Durant l'été de 1939, Moore s'engagea dans les Air Raid Precautions Unit, et quand les premiers assauts aériens de la guerre éclair frappèrent Belfast en 1941, il se distingua sur le champ de bataille dans la récupération et la préservation des corps pour leur identification. En 1943, il utilisa ses connaissances approximatives en français pour quitter Belfast et accepta un poste d'officier portuaire dans les services du Ministère du Transport de Guerre britannique en Afrique du Nord. Sa carrière administrative fut brillante et il fut appelé à se déplacer sur des postes à Naples, sur la Côte d'Azur et à Paris à mesure que la ligne de front alliée avançait. Il développa une perspective cosmopolitaine à travers ses contacts avec la culture méditerranéenne (et plus particulièrement la culture française) et à travers ses interactions avec des Anglais, des Canadiens et des Américains qu'il rencontra dans le cadre de son travail. A la fin de son service de guerre en 1945, il accepta un emploi dans l'Administration des Nations Unies pour le Soutien et la Réhabilitation en Pologne et en 1947, il soumit deux articles sur les conditions de vie à Varsovie au journal de Dublin le *Sunday Independent*.

Déprimé à l'idée d'avoir à retourner à Belfast après son contrat avec l'Organisation des Nations Unies, sans qualifications ni espoir de trouver du travail, encouragé par ses succès relatifs dans la rédaction en tant qu'indépendant

d'éditoriaux en Pologne, et motivé aussi par le désir de raviver une liaison balbutiante avec une femme canadienne, il se pencha sur la possibilité d'émigrer au Canada pour poursuivre une carrière dans le journalisme. Il arriva au Canada en 1948 et s'installa à Montréal où il obtint un travail de correcteur dans *The Gazette*, en 1949. On lui reconnut bien vite des talents pour le reportage et il fut promu correspondant pour le quotidien, profitant incidemment de cette expérience pour travailler l'art de la révélation du détail crucial transcrit succinctement sur la page dans les trois ans que dura son expérience. Moore épousa une de ses collègues en 1952 et devint citoyen canadien en 1953, peu de temps après la naissance de son fils Michael.

Ce fut pendant cette période de sa vie de journaliste professionnel qu'il commença à écrire sous divers pseudonymes des romans noirs pour la maison d'édition Harlequin de Toronto. Ses principales sources d'inspiration furent ses expériences durant la guerre et les histoires du monde souterrain de Montréal dont il avait fait la couverture pour le journal. Il quitta la *Gazette* en 1952 et se concentra sur ce qu'il estima être des projets littéraires plus légitimes même s'il continua à écrire des romans noirs pour les compagnies américaines, ainsi que des histoires et des articles en tant qu'indépendant même après son premier grand succès avec un roman important. Retiré dans un chalet des montagnes Laurentiennes pendant l'été 1953, il travailla sur le manuscrit d'un roman qui devait être son premier travail important qu'il termina à la fin de cette même année, malgré un accident de bateau qui lui causa des dommages cérébraux sérieux. *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, publié par André Deutsch en 1955, emporta des commentaires louangeurs et lui valut l'Author's Club First Novel Award et le Prix littéraire du Québec.

Judith Hearne est l'histoire des désillusions religieuses d'une femme irlandaise alcoolique et de sa chute progressive dans la folie. Ce roman fut le premier d'une série de romans composés à partir de thèmes et de cadres exclusivement irlandais suggérant le fait que Moore utilisa la distance objective que lui apporta son implantation au Canada pour creuser dans les souvenirs malheureux de sa vie à Belfast à la recherche de matériel pour ses créations. Ses premières fictions furent autant les bases d'une exploration de ses positions par rapport au catholicisme irlandais, aux distinctions de classes sociales et aux rapports familiaux que des expérimentations stylistiques pour développer ses techniques d'écrivain. Il tenta à travers son deuxième roman, *The Feast of Luperca*, publié en 1957 de décrire les privations d'une étroitesse d'esprit qui caractérisait les souvenirs de son éducation catholique. Après un passage à New York en 1959, il se mit au travail sur un projet qui allait devenir *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, un roman semi-autobiographique qui traite des expériences d'un immigrant irlandais à Montréal qui reçut le Prix de Fiction du Gouverneur Général en 1960. Il devait recevoir ce même prix en 1975 pour *The Great Victorian Collection*. Il eut aussi l'honneur d'apparaître sur les listes du Booker à trois reprises pendant toute sa carrière.

La production régulière de romans de la moitié des années 50 à la fin des années 1990 comprend des travaux aussi divers qu'un scénario télévisé pastiche de la Crise d'Octobre de 1970, *The Revolution Script* (1971), l'exploration des répercussions d'un schisme imaginaire de l'Église à son époque dans *Catholics* (1974), la dramatisation historique du dilemme spirituel des missionnaires de la Nouvelle France dans *The Black Robe* (1985)

et de l'investigation des rapports compliqués entre l'Église catholique et les criminels de guerre nazis dans *The Statement* (1995).

Ce fut son deuxième roman *The Feast of Luperca* qui attira la première fois l'attention du réalisateur de film de suspense Alfred Hitchcock, dans ce qu'il vit, selon ses propres expériences d'élève d'une institution éducative jésuite catholique, comme la représentation intransigeante des effets d'une instruction catholique dure sur la psyché des jeunes élèves. En 1965, il invita Moore dans les Studios Universal de Hollywood pour travailler avec lui sur un film d'espionnage de la guerre froide intitulé *Torn Curtain* après avoir appris que le romancier russe Vladimir Nabokov n'était pas disponible. La collaboration ne s'est pas bien passée et la qualité finale du film qui traite de la défection simulée d'un scientifique américain pour l'Union Soviétique, fut sérieusement compromise par les désaccords constants entre le romancier et le réalisateur sur les directions que le scripte devait prendre. Le produit fini, bien que de qualité honorable, reste l'un des travaux mineurs du réalisateur. Toutefois, la collaboration de l'écrivain avec Hitchcock permit à celui-ci d'aiguiser ses capacités d'écriture de scénarios et le temps qu'il passa en Californie l'incita à s'installer de façon permanente à Malibu avec sa deuxième femme dans au milieu des années 60.

Son association avec Hitchcock fut peut-être aussi la cause de l'invitation de Claude Chabrol, réalisateur Nouvelle Vague français, à l'écriture du scénario de son nouveau film *Le sang des autres* en 1984. Il faut signaler cependant que Moore avait déjà adapté son propre roman *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* pour un producteur indépendant de Montréal en 1963 avant son séjour à Hollywood. Au moment de la sortie du film *The Statement* en 2003, Moore avait ainsi retravaillé cinq de ses romans – *Ginger Coffey*, *Catholics*, *The Black Robe*, *Cold Heaven* et *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* – pour leur adaptation à l'écran. *Judith Hearne*, le chef d'oeuvre de Moore, vint à l'écran d'une façon particulièrement alambiquée. Les droits du roman avait d'abord été achetés par John Huston qui renouvela ses droits sur le livre pendant plusieurs années. Les actrices mentionnées pour le rôle de Judith comptaient parmi elles les noms de Catherine Hepburn et Deborah Kerr. Ce n'est toutefois qu'en 1987 que le livre fut porté à l'écran avec la version populaire bien qu'exagérément sombre de Jack Clayton avec Maggie Smith et Bob Hoskins.

À sa mort, à l'âge de 78 ans, en 1999, il laissa derrière lui une œuvre de 27 romans et de 9 scénarios. Il reste un auteur influent et une voix unique dans l'histoire de la littérature canadienne.

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Splendour Falls

A CHAPTER FROM A NOVEL IN PROGRESS

Sean lingered under the shade

of an oak tree, sipping light champagne and making light conversation with a blond professor from a private college in, as far as he could remember, Virginia, who hoped to set up an Irish Studies programme there as soon as the funding would become available, like almost everyone Sean had met since coming to the United States a week ago. At the moment, this professor, whose name was John Murray, taught English literature but had introduced Yeats, Joyce and Synge, who were proving to be extremely popular, as one would expect. “And not just with students of Irish extraction, which in our college would actually account for a small proportion of the overall student body.” Sean was alert to the inference, that his college was an old exclusive institution, which saw itself as a third cousin to Harvard, and no relation at all to Boston College. But he took no offence since he knew how snobbish the Americans were about their universities, poor innocents, and, as unofficial ambassador of Irish culture, language, unique human character and last but by no means least, romantic landscape, to the western world, he received veiled or direct insults to Ireland and the Irish in exactly equal proportion to the glowing accolades which it was his business to accept gracefully on behalf of his country and people. (Sometimes he fell into thought patterns more appropriate to a president than what he was, a retired college lecturer. But of course he was more than that, much more). The stereotyped views of his country were peddled in the groves of the most illustrious academies as well as the clubs and dancing classes, the meeting houses of organisations whose ideals were at best outdated and at worst life-threatening and whose members had more in common with the Mafia than with anyone you’d ever meet in Dublin, at least in Sean’s sedate, ironic and exclusive circles. Over here he had to adapt to a view of himself and his country that was very different from that he cherished at home. He did not know in which stereotype he found more irritation: the reputation for spirituality, warmth, poetic imagination, mysticism, creativity, loyalty, or the tempering complementary image of drunkenness and belligerence, not to mention stupidity, laziness, backwardness, and endemic poverty. He had to accept that if the Irish were in some way imaginatively superior they were in equal measure inferior in rationality. Good at poetry, bad at maths. Name an Irish scientist? Sean could, or at least he knew which reference book to consult in order to find one (wasn’t there that chap they called the Library after in Cork?) but like most people he couldn’t be bothered. They had written some good poems and a novel and apparently told a great quantity of long stories in Irish

which nobody could understand. But they hadn’t discovered gravity, or the theory of relativity, or even television or the computer or the car or the bus. Or the bicycle. No doubt somebody from England had brought over the first wheel in the back of a boat because on the evidence of recorded history it seemed unlikely that a native Irish person could ever have come up with such a scientific idea. So what. Sean’s area was culture in the humanities sense, and he was at ease in its leafy groves. But his personal expectation, as somebody who sometimes behaved as if he were president of the country and who always felt like one of its better representatives, who believed himself to typify what was most Irish, was that Ireland was about to take a great leap forward into rationality, science and what was always assumed to follow such pragmatic ventures, money, and he was happy about that in a fuzzy vague way. True, there were no factories and no industries and the only natural resources his country had were grass and a certain verbal felicity, but signs were, in the bulging maternity wards, the expanding schools (expanded with pre-fabs) that everything was going to change, and soon. It was rumoured that secondary school would soon be free for all, and it was even possible that university education would be open to the poor, as it was already in England, in the not distant future. Sean guessed this would come to pass although he had as a former professor grave reservations about the wisdom of enfranchising vast numbers of young people from Ballyfermot and Finglas. How would they fit in? Standards would inevitably decline once they began to overrun the campuses. Still an undoubted advantage of the free education would be that all the lucky enlightened educated young poor people would sensibly study science, electronics, engineering, and related subjects, and prove that the stereotype by which he had earned his reputation and living would be proved a regrettable product of historical circumstance rather than of elemental soul. The effects of the change, he guessed, would be felt in the 1990s, or later. These things took their time. He would not be there to see it, a small mercy in itself.

“If I can help you in any way,” he said to Professor Murray, “please let me know.” He handed him his card, which included his name, address and telephone number, although some advised against putting that in such a public place as a personal calling card. Many of his friends would not even put their telephone number in the telephone directory, in case it fell into the wrong hands. Their arrogance shocked Sean. Although he was, he knew, in all modesty, the most well-known academic in the entire country, he

seldom received calls from strangers, and had never had a death threat, or anything like it, to his relief but to his occasional shame. Obviously he was not as important as he believed. The situation was not hopeless. His enemies he knew for a fact to be legion but the problem with them was that they were mostly his former colleagues in UCD and were by definition too bourgeois or too timid to resort even to the threat of violence. Others, however, lived in a more sudden more dramatic world (Queens, maybe?) where a myriad nasty types would invade their telephone lines at the first opportunity, where gunmen lurked in the veronica and hydrangea, awaiting their chance. So it seemed. Sean's bold brave calling card, telephone number brazenly displayed, was embossed with a harp. Although Sean was not in fact a public servant or an elected representative of the nation he felt entitled to make use of its emblem; he had earned that right by virtue of his lifelong devotion to the services of the country. Anyway his harp was not precisely the same as that sent out on the brown envelopes of, say, the Revenue Commissioners. It was a modernistic design, just a few sharp clear lines, transparently honest, aesthetically simple, uniting the best qualities of the old and the new Ireland.

Professor Murray, with whom he was conversing under the oak tree, a live oak with strange fuzzy things like witches bags hanging from its branches, was a young man, small for an American and with a look of a thin Elvis Presley, big lips, sultry, even sulky, eyes and a bit of a pout. He wore one of the white linen suits which were much in favour at today's event, and a moss green tie, also much in favour. Every man seemed to have ransacked his wardrobe and pulled out a tie in some shade of green. They were not all as crisp and shiny as Professor Murray's, although all the suits looked as if they had been bought specially for the occasion – Americans were devils for clean clothes, they obviously got up very early in the morning to see to their grooming. But some of the ties had seen better days. There were skinny tweed ones which had clearly been purchased in tacky gift shops in Killarney or Nassau Street visited perforce when their owners were at the mercy of a bus driver on some all Ireland tour; there were polyester emeralds with the creases of countless Saint Patrick's Day parades etched into their dusty weave; there were ties which had probably been bought for school concerts in convent schools in the last century. All dragged out in his honour. He found it touching that Americans believed he would like the colour green. How could they know of the cynicism with which Irish people viewed every material symbol, from the shamrock to the harp to the flag itself? Americans flew the stars and stripes from log cabins and suburban villas, for Independence Day or the cat's birthday, mixing patriotism and pleasure in a way that was unthinkable to the Irish, who hoisted the flag as a warning of intent to kill and wore green only in jest.

Professor Murray's wife, Kathy, a common name among the wives, was beautiful; petite, with long red hair as smooth as a plank of mahogany. Her dress was green, from top to toe. The Murrays had gone to town, every stitch they had on looked new. The dress had a high neckline, very modest, and a very short hemline. The women dotted around the sweeping lawn under the trees wore either very short skirts

or skirts that swept the smooth grass. It was an era of uncertainty, in fashion, apparently, and women seemed to have a choice this summer. He did not know which he liked best. Both had their charm, at least here, where all the women had slim brown legs and were in general glossier, smoother, plump in the right places, than women at home, as if they had been bred by experts who selected the most appealing traits and gradually eliminated all the aberrant ones. Big white teeth, smooth tight pored skin, plump breasts and bottoms, thin legs abounded. There was a great deal of very fair hair in evidence. A lot of the women looked like the progeny of Spaniards who had been crossed with Swedes, although this could hardly have been the case here, where most of the surnames began with O or Mac. The men, curiously, were a much more varied lot. Glossy skinned, their assorted faces and figures would not have looked out of place — well, in Greystones or Ballsbridge.

"I see someone over there I should say hello to!" Kathy said, in her leisurely delightful drawl which caressed the eardrums like a lullaby. "Will you excuse me, Professor O Maney?" She smiled and held out her hand. "It's been a real honour and a pleasure to talk to you and I hope we meet again."

"Yes, I hope so too." He shook her hand with tight sincerity. She smiled again and tripped off over the lawn, in strappy sandals with very high heels.

Her place was taken by another husband and wife team. People were queuing up, most discreetly; they were hovering around his live oak, engaged in apparently lively but low-volume conversation with other people, all the time alert for a gap in the phalanx that surrounded the great man, Sean himself, waiting for their chance to shake his hand and tell him how honoured they were to talk to him, and to express the hope that they would meet when they came to Ireland during the summer, to do research in the National Library or to bring groups of students on trips to Kerry or the Aran Islands taking in a play at the Abbey (which would obligingly run "The Plough and the Stars" for the bus tours, as usual). They were all warm and friendly, relaxed and complimentary. They had wonderful manners and knew how to pay a compliment in a way which made it sound totally sincere, from the heart. When he had received a few hundred of these compliments he began to wonder about the depth of their sincerity but that hardly mattered. It was not just flattering to be treated so well, it was heart warming.

He was a guest of this large university in Florida, which had just this morning conferred on him an honorary doctorate, in recognition of his great contribution to the field of Irish Studies. It was the third such honour he had received so far, the two principal institutions at home having leaped to confer their highest tokens of recognition on him the moment he retired, a few years ago. He had not expected to be selected by a foreign university, however, even an American one, since his main field was the Irish language, which Americans favoured less than Irish mediated through English, naturally enough preferring to understand a modicum of what they were giving their awards to.

Sean had specialised in Gaelic. His contribution to the study of the language and the culture it enshrined was, not

to put a foot in it, ten times larger than that made by any other individual scholar in the history of the world. He had compiled the three definitive dictionaries, Irish-English, English-Irish, and Etymology of the Irish Language. He had edited no less than fifty Old Irish poems and stories, and published them in the imprint which was a department of the research institute he had in fact founded himself, an institute devoted purely to research of Irish in Irish, unpolluted by students or by translation. He had written hundreds of articles on obscure and interesting problems of Old Irish, Middle Irish and Modern Irish grammar, syntax and vocabulary. His greatest achievement had been the discovery of an invisible pronoun, not the well-known Infix Pronoun, also of course totally invisible, which had been noted by an astute German grammarian in the late nineteenth century, but another even more elusive one. The person and number of this particle were infinitely flexible, so that it could do duty almost anywhere in a sentence, lurking under cover of any word, noun or verb or adverb or even other pronoun, having the potential to change utterly the meaning of all the other words in the sentence or even the entire text, and gloriously, miraculously, invisible to almost everyone, before Sean had pointed it out. He called it simply the Flexible Invisible Participle (having decided as time went on that it wasn't necessarily a pronoun; sometimes it was a noun and sometimes a verb, sometimes a conjunction and sometimes even an adjective) but it had become popularly known, among those qualified to understand such matters, as the Sinn Feiner.

In addition to working sixteen hours a day on projects such as the above, Sean had found time to become a commentator on almost every aspect of Irish life in his spare moments. He was a constant contributor to discussions on radio and television, where he held forth in his friendly rather than declamatory style on the nature of the Irish, the future of Irish literature in Irish and in English, the complexity of the Irish identity, the necessity for compulsory Irish, the need for an Irish language radio station and television channel, the Common Market, James Joyce, WB Yeats, Irish myths and legends, bovine tuberculosis, island life, the fate of the Atlantic salmon, the need for more science in schools, and other topics of urgent national interest. It was thanks to his generous contribution to the on-going debate about Ireland and the Irish in the public media that the indigenous universities had conferred on him their highest honours.

But in addition to all this, even, Sean had found time to accomplish one more task: he had written, mainly during his summer holidays which he spent in a cottage in the west of Ireland Gaeltacht – a holiday which was unofficially compulsory for anyone in his position; Sean had occasionally sneaked off to Italy or France, which he loved, for a week in the summer, but he kept these excursions a secret from his colleagues, who would have regarded a trip abroad as a betrayal of the cause and of the Irish tourist industry, which it was their duty to promote and support – the book which he valued least but which accounted for his international fame: *The Encyclopaedia of Gaelic Civilisation from the Dawn to the Present Day: Folklore, Language, Myth, Literature, Spirituality, Monks, Fairies, Spiral Megalithic Things, The Book of Kells, Aran*

Sweaters Past and Present. Agus ar Uile. It was a mammoth work – once he had started, it had been surprisingly hard to know where to stop. But he finally drew the line a year ago, and now the book was out. And in spite of coming in four volumes and costing a great deal of money, it had become an international best seller, in the sense that every single library in the western world with a budget of any dimension ordered a copy, and it also became an indispensable present for rich people at home and in the diaspora, the favourite Christmas gift of the year for those who had Irish blood and who had made it, who were much more numerous than Professor John Murray, for example, imagined. Mooney's Encyclopaedia had made Sean's name in the States, and it was thanks to its fame that he was now standing under a live oak tree in Florida, accepting greetings, compliments and invitations to dinners and lunches at delightful locations all over the sunshine state.

The ceremony this morning had been seemly, neither too long nor too short. The necessary speeches had been made but those who made them were professionals and did not try the patience of the audience. Not too much anyway, although they were so well-bred it was impossible to tell whether they were genuinely entertained, mildly weary, or bored to death. The room had been air-conditioned and Sean had found the entire event extremely enjoyable. The cocktails this afternoon had also been pleasant, to begin with. The wide lawn, tables shaded by gay umbrellas, yellow and white, the ancient shade trees, had captivated him. He loved fine weather; his long holidays in the rain were a nightmare, as far as weather was concerned, although it explained the encyclopaedia, and much of his other work, which had been accomplished in summers during which it was impossible to stick his nose out the door without it getting washed away. He loved America and the Americans, who were so kind, generous, innocent and well-dressed (apart from the green stuff, but that was temporary). He loved getting honorary doctorates and trusted he would get many more now that the encyclopaedia had begun to make an impact where it mattered – he was going to a Canadian island after this but the great institutions, the ones that really counted, had not yet sent him the wished for letter. "We are pleased to inform you." It would come, in time, he felt sure, now that the ball was rolling in the right direction. In the meantime, there was the sun and the champagne, the delicious seafood, the fresh orange juice for breakfast.

But he was growing tired. He had stood on this lawn for three hours, and chatted to at least a hundred people, all of them strangers. Where was Dean, his host? Professor Dean Smith, of the English department, offering Yeats and Joyce and Synge to an enthusiastic studentship, who had looked after him from the moment he arrived at Jacksonville airport till this minute, with exemplary efficiency, warmth and consideration for his every need. "An hour or two," he said. "And then we'll go to dinner at a very nice place in Saint Augustine, you'll love that, it's the oldest city in the United States and more to the point the restaurants are good."

That was three hours ago. Since then he had had four glasses of champagne, had not sat down even once. His

legs were beginning to feel sore. He was seventy three years of age, after all, even if he could pass for a well-preserved sixty three. He was tall, slender if you didn't notice a bit of a belly, a wine belly rather than a beer belly, although fortunately it would pass for either (he knew he should stick to Guinness, for reasons of commercial patriotism, but his tippie par preference was a good sauvignon blanc). He was blessed with a good bone structure of the strong variety and in profile looked like a Roman emperor of the healthy military type, Julius Caesar rather than Nero. He had a plentiful supply of snow white hair which sprang back in an unusually smooth thick mane from his high forehead, like the hair of a highly bred delicate goat. His only flaw was his false arm and hand, but very few people ever noticed that - even before he had the perfect prosthesis, he had become such an expert at disguising his missing hand that the vast majority even of his friends were unaware of it. It was surprising how unobservant people could be.

He took the liberty of scanning the lawn. Among the clusters of white suited men and brightly clad women who dotted the turf the familiar figure, roly-poly, creased, avuncular, was nowhere to be seen. His eyes wandered to the porch of the house, a white colonnaded affair. The university, the school rather as they called it, was based on an old plantation, complete with slave huts where prize winning students were housed as a reward for their brains and industry. Was that Dean, up their sitting on a swing, sipping a long drink, his crumpled white sack of a body wedged between two female figures, one dressed in orange and the other in green? His idea of a joke?

Excusing himself from Kathy (his sixth Kathy today, they were more plentiful than Marys at home) and Bart, from New York, he strolled in the direction of the house. As he crossed the lawn he received hundreds of warm smiles and words of greeting, but nobody in this company would be rude enough to impede his progress, and the clusters parted before him like the Red Sea, or a multi coloured sea with a green tie, as he slowly made his way to the steps. Half way across the lawn, he stopped for a moment and took off his glasses to rub them on his sleeve, although really they did not need it. This was one of his compulsive habits, a mannerism of which he was more or less unaware; he was so unconscious of his action that he did not even realise he had stopped; had he known what he was doing, he wouldn't have, since stopping was of course dangerous, an invitation to talk. And sure enough as he performed his task, rubbing the clean glass, he felt a hand tapping his shoulder. He slapped on his smile and turned, ready to accept the tribute of flattery which was his due. Or maybe he was in luck and it was Dean, come to rescue him and carry him off to the ancient city and relaxing dinner?

It wasn't.

On the lawn stood an elderly lady, her white hair as snowy and plentiful as his own, tied in a bun on the back of her head. She had large eyes, the colour bright for an old lady - green, as it happened, but that was not her fault. She supported herself very lightly on a steel walking stick, but she was tall and slender in spite of her stoop. She was dressed in a simple dress of some dark material finished with a white

lace collar, most unlike what anyone else was wearing here. It was not necessarily an old dress but it smacked of another era, as did everything about this woman. It was surprising that he had not noticed her before.

"Hello Jack," she said. "Don't you recognize me?"

He knew the face but her name eluded him. Perhaps she had been a student of his?

"Well, of course I know you," he lied, as he invariably did in these situations. Sometimes if he stalled for long enough the identity would be revealed, hauled up from his subconscious or offered to him by its owner.

"I'm Emily" she helped him out quickly, and stood there, smiling politely but challengingly.

His stomach felt as if it had been punctured. Emily. Of course he had known, he must have been cheating himself. His composure was too practised to desert him for more than a second or two, however, and after the first brief spasm of panic, he extended his good hand and smiled with all his age old neutral warm bonhomie:

"Emily! How delightful to meet you, after all this time! How well you're looking!"

But what was this? He had fallen into an idiom which was not his own. Irish people, Gaelic scholars, do not say "How delightful to meet you!" They do not say "How" anything, but always, always, the flat less effusive more low key "It is." "I am." Or even leave it all out. "Pleased to meet you." That is what Sean O Maonaigh usually said. Actually it was what Americans said too. Good to meet you or, if they were very posh and tainted with pomposity, "honoured to make your acquaintance." Nobody said "How good," "How charming" "How delightful," or any of that Oscar Wilde stuff. But there it was, out of his mouth before he knew it, proof of his linguistic insecurity after all these decades of ploughing the Irish linguistic furrow.

Emily had always had this effect on his language, always, ever since he had first encountered her, a very very long time ago.

"How are you?" she asked, simply.

Book Reviews

NEW FILM BOOKS, NEWFOUNDLAND, AND OTHER NEW IDEAS....

Lance Pettitt, *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000 [Distributed in Canada by University of British Columbia Press]. Paperback, 320 pages. ISBN: 071905270X. £14.99; .

Reviewed by Brian McILROY

Back in the 1980s when Derrida, Foucault and Lacan were all the rage, one noticed a tendency among British and American academics to see their primary role as gatekeepers, interpreters, and synthesizers, servicing a more general audience in their writing than their more adventurous French counterparts. One thinks of Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, a first port of call for many senior undergraduate and graduate students seeking a primer on then current critical approaches. In the area of Irish media studies, we now have the English based critic Lance Pettitt's *Screening Ireland*, an excellent introduction to an emerging and increasingly contentious field.

The academic study of Irish and Irish-related cinema and television has really only been apparent in the last fifteen years or so, and perhaps only ten academics regularly publish in this area. Lance Pettitt and the current writer are therefore both fortunate and unfortunate in the choice of their specialty: fortunate because our articles and books can have more general impact than "yet another book on James Joyce or W.B. Yeats or Samuel Beckett"; unfortunate because, frankly, being a relatively small research area (though growing) it lacks, in my view, a healthy enough diversity of opinion and positions in order to advance the field.

Pettitt's book in part sets out to synthesize work on Irish cinema and television that has already been featured in articles and books by Ruth Barton, Jennifer Cornell, John Hill, Luke Gibbons, Brian McIlroy, Martin McLoone, Barbara O'Connor, Kevin Rockett, Robert Savage and Helena Sheehan. There is much to commend in his approach: it allows these various writers to be placed on a fairly even footing for the general reader to begin to understand the field of study (and Pettitt's scholarly apparatus and bibliography are very reliable and solid). Pettitt's research is prodigious and his footnotes and general style of writing reveal a sensitive and fair-minded writer. As an introductory work, and because it gives equal space to the consideration of television, it surpasses the general works published in the 1980s. Indeed, I have found it very useful as a text for my graduate course in Irish cinema, alongside James MacKillop's edited collection *Contemporary Irish Cinema* (1999) and my own *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland* (1998; rev.ed 2001). Pettitt encourages the notion that his book be used as a classroom text by providing study questions at the top of each chapter.

Pettitt's text is divided into two parts: six chapters on cinema and culture, five chapters on television, with the book rounded out with one concluding chapter that effectively returns to cinema. Pettitt provides a brief history of both media in Ireland and isolates representative films and television programmes for discussion. His approach is one influenced by cultural studies, tying together as best as possible text and context. Having attempted this framework myself at one time, I can vouch for the difficulty of achieving a good balance between fiction and documentary, film and television. Pettitt's own effort is excellent in this regard.

My major problem with Pettitt's work is its predictability. His introductory chapter, for example, exposes him (despite some concessionary moves) as someone who is very much in thrall to the recent counter-revisionist position in cultural and historical matters. He devotes quite a few paragraphs to argue that John Wilson Foster's use of Albert Memmi to describe the Ulster Protestants is too partial and misleading. One might also say that Pettitt's blind acceptance that what Memmi says about colonialists (the Ulster Protestants in this example) – that they are passive and without agency – is highly questionable. The current lively debates within Unionism show in many respects that Memmi's model is inadequate, not to mention Frantz Fanon's. In a footnote, Pettitt refers to the "seminal" work of post-colonial theory applied to Irish cultural endeavour – David Cairns and Shaun Richards's *Writing Ireland* (1988), a work that almost completely ignored the experience and complexity of the Ulster Protestant community. That this work here be deemed seminal speaks volumes.

I should point out to readers that Pettitt does cite my work often in disagreement, and this I welcome. What is disappointing is that he finds no areas of disagreement with the main Irish-based critics John Hill, Luke Gibbons, Martin McLoone and Kevin Rockett. This is odd because these writers, if read closely, actually do not agree with one another on many issues. Pettitt's English base (a more distanced perspective) should have allowed him to challenge at least some of their positions. Also, as happens often in general works, the necessity to skim over issues and texts can be too quick. Pettitt ingeniously brings together David Lean's *Ryan's Daughter* and Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* to discuss 1970s big budget representations, but then proceeds to devote seven paragraphs to the former and only one to the latter. One wonders what the editor at Manchester was thinking. Pettitt's use of John Corner's work on documentary theory is rather laboured and unnecessary for his purposes.

But there is so much to enjoy in this work that one should not leave an overly critical impression. Pettitt's chapters on Irish popular television and situation comedy

are very insightful, and fun to read. His perspective on Troubles television drama, though very different from my own, is informed and cogent. Pettitt's main thesis is that "film is now the preeminent medium through which Ireland both examines itself and projects its image to the wider world." If one includes television, advertising and websites to Pettitt's observation, one can only agree, no doubt much to the chagrin of die-hard literary types. In a sense, Lance Pettitt's work marks a watershed – its inclusiveness is excellent, its reach commendable, and it nicely sets the scene for more controversial readings of Irish visual culture to be written.

– University of British Columbia

Brian McIlroy, *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland*. Richmond, British Columbia: Stevenson Press, 2001. Paperback, 224 pages. ISBN: 0968799604. \$39.95.

Compte-rendu de Damien DETCHEBERRY

Six ans après une première édition remarquée au Royaume-Uni, *Shooting to Kill: Filmmaking and the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland* est désormais disponible, dans une version révisée par son auteur, au public nord-américain. On peut apprécier que Brian McIlroy, professeur d'études cinématographiques à l'University of British Columbia et spécialiste de la question irlandaise, propose une lecture à la fois détaillée et néanmoins accessible aux néophytes d'une situation aussi complexe que la guerre civile qui a ébranlé l'Irlande du Nord ces trente dernières années. Forcément politique, inévitablement sujet à controverses (sur lesquelles l'auteur revient en préambule de cette nouvelle édition), *Shooting to Kill* interrogeait déjà en 1998 les multiples approches de cinéastes internationaux à l'un des aspects les plus passionnants, du moins le plus médiatisé, de l'histoire contemporaine d'Irlande du Nord, que les britanniques ont désigné par l'euphémisme « The Troubles ».

L'ambition de l'auteur est clairement de rendre compte, à travers une étude à la fois sociale, culturelle et politique des films ayant traité de la guerre civile Nord Irlandaise, de la perception de la situation par les cinéastes contemporains, d'où une attention particulière portée à la compréhension des thèmes mis en jeu dans les films. Les deux premiers chapitres insistent sur le contexte culturel et critique, puis historique et politique de la situation en Irlande du Nord. A partir de ce recadrage, l'auteur oriente sa réflexion autour d'une série de réflexions sur l'ensemble de la production audiovisuelle irlandaise et britannique, mais aussi d'outre Atlantique. Un chapitre sur le cinéma hollywoodien, qui n'était pas présent dans l'édition de 1998, tente notamment de décrypter les rares films américains consacrés à la situation irlandaise dans les années 90 - pour l'essentiel, *Jeux de Guerre*, de Philip Noyce (*Patriot Games*, 1993), *Blown Away* de Stephen Hopkins (1994) et *Ennemis Rapprochés* de Alan J. Pakula (*The Devil's Own*, 1996) - les mettant en lien avec la politique américaine de médiation en Irlande du Nord sous la présidence de Bill Clinton. A la lecture de ce court chapitre – le plus court de l'ouvrage – qui insiste sur les compromis et

les simplifications hasardeuses opérées sur les scénarii pour n'aboutir qu'à une vision stéréotypée des « troubles » d'Irlande du Nord, on mesure à la fois le mépris et les regrets de l'auteur pour la production hollywoodienne qui se contente d'explorer la violence des méthodes utilisées par l'IRA plutôt que de soulever un véritable débat sur le rôle et les objectifs des groupes terroristes irlandais. A ce titre, et malgré l'originalité certaine qu'il y a à observer ces films sous l'angle de la politique de Clinton - l'auteur qualifiant *The Devil's Own* de purement « clintonien » - il est dommage que, dans le contexte international actuel, Brian McIlroy ne s'étende pas plus longuement sur la nature même des compromis scénaristiques des films cités et à travers cela sur la friosité de Hollywood à aborder de front le thème du terrorisme et de ses enjeux.

Sur les cinémas irlandais et britannique, *Shooting to Kill* est bien plus riche ; à commencer par une brillante analyse du film malheureusement méconnu de Carol Reed, *Huit Heures de Sursis* (*Odd Man Out*, 1946), présenté comme le premier film britannique majeur à s'intéresser à la situation en Irlande du Nord. Plus qu'une relecture contemporaine de l'œuvre de Reed, Brian McIlroy la réévalue en soulignant l'audace des partis pris du cinéaste et de son scénariste (F.L.Green, adaptateur de son propre roman), trop souvent négligée par les critiques de l'époque, obnubilés, à tort, par le maniérisme de la mise en scène. Un regard incisif est également porté aussi bien sur les cinéastes phares du cinéma irlandais contemporain – tels que Neil Jordan et Jim Sheridan – que sur les cinéastes « sociaux réalistes » britanniques depuis les années 70. Si l'on peut regretter l'absence d'analyse approfondie sur certains films pourtant très discutés comme *Michael Collins* de Neil Jordan (1996) - qui mériterait plus que quelques allusions dans l'ouvrage - force est de constater la perspicacité des analyses concernant les œuvres citées et examinées. De même, il n'est pas toujours facile d'y voir clair dans l'abondante production de documentaires et d'œuvres vidéos consacrée à l'Irlande du Nord dans les années 80 et 90. Un des grands mérites de Brian McIlroy est de s'y être plongé sans prétendre à l'exhaustivité, mais en privilégiant les exemples appuyant une réflexion plus générale sur la représentation des communautés dans la production audiovisuelle de l'époque. L'ajout fondamental par rapport à l'édition de 1998 est en effet un nouveau chapitre consacré à la représentation - ou à l'absence de représentation - de la communauté protestante unioniste dans la production globale irlandaise et britannique. Pour McIlroy, cette exclusion, consciente ou inconsciente de la part des cinéastes concernés par les « Troubles », est à mettre sur le compte de la puissance romantique du mythe anti-impérialiste qui vise à exclure les minorités équivoques au profit d'une vision dichotomique des tensions entre communautés. L'intérêt majeur du livre est là : cette conception réductrice dénoncée par McIlroy qui régit trop souvent les œuvres cinématographiques et télévisuelles traitées ici dépasse la question de l'Irlande du Nord et ouvre, pour le lecteur, des perspectives de réflexion sur l'ensemble de la production audiovisuelle internationale, qui devrait se concentrer plus que jamais à l'étude des troubles sociaux contemporains.

– Paris / Montréal

Léirmheas le Pádraig Ó Siadhail

Is éard atá sa leabhar gairid seo imeachtaí comhdhála a d’eagraigh Institiúid Scannánaíochta na hÉireann i mBaile Átha Cliath i Samhain 1998. An téama mór a bhí faoi chaibidil ag muintir na comhdhála forbairt agus fás náisiúnachas na hÉireann i gcaitheamh an 20ú haois. An cur chuige a bhí acu de réir mar a thug siad aghaidh ar an ábhar tromchúiseach sin sraith páipéar ar thréimhsí ar leith de chuid an chéid mar aon le míreanna as cláracha faisnéise ó na tréimhsí céanna. Na páipéir amháin atá sa leabhar seo, ar ndóigh, ar a shon go luaitear ag tús gach páipéir na foinsí teilifíse nó scannánaíochta atá comhoiriúnach dóibh.

Liosta le háireamh na cainteoirí a bhí i láthair ag an chomhdháil agus a bhfuil aistí leo sa leabhar seo. Ba é an Taoiseach Bertie Ahern a bhain an ceann den díospóireacht (tá súil agam nár chaill an Institiúid a fóirdheontas ó shin as siocair nár litriodh ainm an Taoisigh i gceart ar chlúdach an leabhráin is ar an chlár istigh!). Ina dhiaidh, dhúigh na cainteoirí eile, ar pholaiteoirí nó staraíthe a bhformhór glan, ar na tréimhsí éagsúla: Gerry Kelly de chuid Shinn Féin ar na 1910í is ar na 1920í; Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh ó Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh, ar na 1930í is ar na 1940í; Paul Bew ó Ollscoil na Ríona ar na 1950í; Margaret MacCurtain ó Choláiste Ollscoile Átha Cliath ar na 1960í; Mary Holland, iriseoir, ar na 1970í is na 1980í; agus an Dilseoir, David Ervine, ar na 1990í. Labhair Robert Savage ó Boston College ar an chonspóid a d’eascair ó chinneadh an mhórchomhlachta teilifíse Mheiriceánaigh, CBS, an clár faisnéise faoi Éirinn, *Ireland: The Tear and the Smile*, a dhéanamh sa bhliain 1959; thagair Tony Tracey ón Institiúid féin do *Mise Éire* mar shaothar ealaíne atá iltaobhach; agus chíor Luke Gibbons ó Ollscoil Chathair Átha Cliath an teannas idir an fhírís is an ficsean i scannánaíocht na hÉireann. Is éard atá in aiste spéisiúil Joe Lee, ó Choláiste na hOllscoile Chorcaí, a chuireann clabhsúr ar an leabhrán píosa tráchtairachta a scríobh sé tar éis dó freastal ar an chomhdháil.

Is sainchomhartha de chuid na haoise seo caite é go bhfuil teacht againn ar ábhar ar scannáin faoi na heachtraí is mó i stair na hÉireann san 20ú haois – ó Éirí Amach na Cásca go sléacht na hÓmaí. Bíodh sin mar atá – agus gearrchuntas air seo is ea na ceisteanna uilig a chuireann Bertie Ahern ina aitheasc – ní hionann sin is a rá go bhfuil glacadh le haon insint ar na heachtraí sin is ar a mbaineann leo. Cad a fheiceann tú os do chomhair tú nuair a amharcann tú ar Mhícheál Ó Coileáin ar cheann de na nuachtspóil sheanaimseartha sin ó thús 1922: laoch, fealltóir nó sceimhlitheoir?

Smaoineamh breá ba ea é cur leis an fhocal labhartha agus leis an pháipéar scríofa trí theacht i dtír ar íomhána na teilifíse is na scannánaíochta. Ach is gá a rá – faoi mar a deir cainteoirí éagsúla – nach raibh an cur chuige sin saor ó locht. Gan trácht ar an bhéim ar náisiúnachas na hÉireann – is é an tOllamh Lee a luann gur deacair plé a dhéanamh ar náisiúnachas na hÉireann gan tagairt do náisiúnachas na Breataine Móire nó gan comparáid a dhéanamh idir stair na

hÉireann is stair de chuid tíortha eile — is ar éigean is féidir linn breathnú ar an scannánaíocht mar mheán oibiachtúil a chuireann an scéal iomlán ar ár súile dúinn. Is minic a bhíonn lucht déanta cláracha faoi bhrú ag cúrsaí ama — ar an nuacht go háirithe, sa dóigh gur trí thimpiste nach mór a thaifeadtar an-chuid de na radhairc ar leith atá i ndiaidh dul i gcion ar an lucht féachana — nó faoi bhrú ag rialtais a úsáideann a gcuid cumhachta chun cinsireacht a dhéanamh ar ábhar nach maith leo nó chun teachtaireachtaí bolscaireachta dá gcuid féin a chraobhscaoileadh.

Is díol spéise é gur ag na seanghníomhaithe míleata/na polaiteoirí úra proifisiúnta atá na cainteanna is laige sa leabhrán seo. Duine é Gerry Kelly a bhfuil cur amach aige ar a leagan féin de stair na hÉireann sna 1910í-1920í, ach is é próiseas síochána ár linne is mó atá ag déanamh scime dó ina pháipéar. Is é an feall é nach ndearnadh dianegarhóireacht ar chaint Ervine chun a chuid argóintí a bheachtú dúinn. Ba iad na scríbhneoirí oilte — na staraíthe go háirithe — a bhí in ann a n-intinn a chruinniú ar an ábhar agus a gcuid tuairimí a bhreacadh síos go snasta snoite. Ar ndóigh, ní lia staraí ná barúil ar fhréamhacha is ar fhoras an náisiúnachais Éireannaigh: ó Ghearóid Ó Tuathaigh a chreideann gur mithid obair de Valera a chur sa chomhthéacs ceart stairiúil go Paul Bew a chíorann an dóigh a ndeachaigh cláracha a bhí báuil leis an náisiúnachas i bhfeidhm ar dhreamanna ar leith, agus Rialtas Stormont orthu. Mar gheall ar leagan amach na comhdhála, tá na páipéir uilig an-ghairid — róghairid, uaireanta — agus gan ach corrnóta ag gabháil leo nó leabharliosta féin.

Leabhar beag breá é seo, mar sin, a bhfuil lón maith léitheoireachta ann ar léiriú glinn é ar na conspóidí polaitiúla is intleachtúla a bhaineas le ceist ghabhlánach náisiúnachas na hÉireann le glúin anuas. Leabhar beag tábhachtach é fosta a chuireann i gcumhne dúinn gurb é an scáileán teilifíse nó pictiúrlainne an meán is cumhachtaí dá bhfuil ann chun scéal a insint, bíodh an scéal sin ina fhírinne ghlan nó ina dheargbhreag nó áit éigin eatarthu. Mar, i ndeireadh na dála, má tá dhá insint ar scéal, agus dhá insint déag ar amhrán, níl teorainn le líon na n-insintí ar radhairc as stair náisiúnachas na hÉireann.

– *Saint Mary’s University, Halifax*

Martin McLoone, *Irish Film: The Emergence of a Contemporary Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 2000. Paperback, 234 pages. ISBN: 0 85170 793 9. \$39.25.

Reviewed by Jennie CARLSTEN

In this book, as the title suggests, Martin McLoone traces the halting development of an indigenous Irish film culture. This is not a history of the Irish film industry, however, but a broader consideration of the social and economic constraints on Irish cinema. McLoone also outlines and clarifies the cultural debates surrounding Irish cinema and definitions of Irishness. Finally, he provides analysis of a number of films, identifying common narrative concerns and suggesting new ways of looking at canonical Irish, British, and American representations. McLoone

organises his ambitious project around the premise that Irish cinema is in a “place between.” Throughout, he emphasises the ways in which notions of Irishness and Irish cinema negotiate opposition: essentialism versus hybridity, tradition versus modernity, protectionism versus internationalism.

McLoone’s work is predicated in part on that of Luke Gibbons, John Hill and Kevin Rockett, and he acknowledges their *Cinema and Ireland* (1987) as an essential text. McLoone’s mission here is less a critique than an expansion and synthesis of that work. He brings the reader up to date through his discussion of the years since *Cinema and Ireland*, contributes his own readings of specific films, and places the ideas of Gibbons *et al* within the larger critical discourse.

The first three chapters are concerned with the underlying myths, stereotypes and tropes of Irish cinema. McLoone begins with a discussion of the cultural nationalism of the early 1900s, which defined “Irishness” in a romantic, militaristic and insular manner. McLoone faults this cultural nationalism for creating a climate in which cinematic experimentation and investment was discouraged, opening the door to misrepresentation from abroad as well as disquiet from within. He thus turns to the representations of Ireland found in British and American cinema, representations which came to define Irish cinema to itself and to the world. For his discussion of the two dominant trends – violence and romanticism – McLoone draws heavily on the work done by Gibbons and Hill. However, his additions are important and compelling. In particular, McLoone updates Hill’s argument, that British cinema pathologizes Irish violence and avoids its political dimension or the question of British responsibility, to include films of the last decade. An upsurge in Irish and American filmmaking, corresponding to the Northern Ireland peace process, has provided a fresh body of films for McLoone’s consideration (curiously, there is little discussion here of British coproduction). Despite McLoone’s apparent optimism about the peace process itself, he offers a less positive overview of the films the process has engendered, finding them largely apolitical and disappointingly conventional in form and content.

In the second portion of the book, Chapters 4 and 5, McLoone discusses the changing economic and social conditions of Ireland from the Lemass era to the present day. The corresponding ups and downs of the Irish film industry are described and located within the cultural debates around revisionism and within the theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism and critical regionalism (the separate circumstances of the Northern Irish film industry are only briefly discussed here). McLoone’s thesis evolves in these chapters, as he explains how economic growth and changing international relationships shaped not only the industry, but also the themes and aesthetics of Irish cinema. Central to this thesis is an identified tension between tradition and modernity, intensified by competing notions of Irish identity, and ambivalence about both Ireland’s accepted past and its possible futures. McLoone also points out that the recession of the 1980s resulted in policies that privileged commercial (and international) concerns over those of national culture. He carefully articulates the dilemmas of defining a “national

cinema,” a discussion that may be of particular interest to scholars of Canadian cinema.

The remaining chapters look closely at the films of the 1970s, 80s and 90s (McLoone does not take more than a passing look at documentary or the role of television, but does include a chapter on short films and their potential as alternative cinema). McLoone devotes one chapter to the “oppositional” cinema of the 1970s and early 80s, looking at filmmakers Bob Quinn, Joe Comerford, Cathal Black, and Pat Murphy. Placing the films in the context of contemporary religious and social controversies, McLoone explores at length their opposition to conservative Catholicism, the nationalist tradition, and Irish patriarchy.

Turning next to films of the 1990s, McLoone bemoans a tendency toward reactionary, aesthetically conventional cinema. Yet he also recuperates these films through a metaphorical reading of their common themes: incomplete or traumatized families, abused children, and oedipal narratives. McLoone’s analysis of such films as David Keating’s *Last of the High Kings*, Johnny Gogan’s *Last Bus Home*, and Alan Parker’s *Angela’s Ashes* outline the concerns he perceives in contemporary Ireland. The book concludes with a chapter devoted to Neil Jordan’s *The Butcher Boy*, a film which McLoone believes articulates the unsettled nature of Irish cinema.

Irish Film engages self-consciously with the revisionist debate; McLoone revisits the ideas of his predecessors and reconsiders them in relation to revisionist arguments. To place McLoone within the counter-revisionist camp, as his alliance with Gibbons, Hill and Rockett would seem to suggest, would be to miss his point that contemporary Irish cinema invites, indeed requires, a reconciliation of these two opposing tendencies. By taking this approach, the academic discourse itself becomes yet another site of tension and negotiation.

– University of British Columbia

Patrick F. Sheehan, *The Informer: Ireland into Film 4*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2002. Paperback, 91 pages. ISBN: 1 85918 288 7. € 15

Luke Gibbons, *The Quiet Man*. Ireland into Film 6. Cork: Cork University Press, 2002. Paperback, 121 pages. ISBN: 1 85918 287 9. € 15

Reviewed by Jerry WHITE

Cork University Press has initiated a series that at first blush seemed, shall we say, less than exciting: short books about Irish literary works that had been adapted into films. The study of adaptations has a long and mostly boring history in Film Studies, despite (or maybe because of...) some of the more theoretically engaged work that has emerged in the last few years. Called “Ireland into Film,” this series jointly edited by Keith Hopper (responsible for the critical text) and Gráinne Humphreys (responsible for the still photos) would, I once feared, repeatedly fall into the all-too-predictable trap of wondering whether the book was better than the movie.

This has not happened. What we have seen instead are a large number of engagingly written, rigorous and occasionally counter-intuitive discussions of well-known and not-so-well-known Irish films, written by a variety of academics both within and outside of Ireland. The two books under discussion here, Patrick F. Sheeran's analysis of *The Informer* and Luke Gibbons' of *The Quiet Man*, have examples of some of the series' best tendencies: a balance between the familiar and the surprising, careful attention to Irish cultural history, and sensitivity to the *cinematic* aspects of the work under discussion.

I was about to say that another point of contact between these two books is that they both deal with films by the renowned John Ford, but that's not quite right. Although Gibbons's book on *The Quiet Man* is clearly about Ford (that's one of Ford's most famous films, after all), Sheeran's work on *The Informer* is a bit trickier. About half of the book is indeed devoted to Ford's semi-famous adaptation of Liam O'Flaherty 1925 novel *The Informer*, which he completed in 1935. But a substantial part of the book contains a discussion of Arthur Robinson's nearly-impossible-to-see adaptation, completed in 1929.¹ That film is a real curiosity, not only because of the way that it used atmospheric lighting and stage effects to echo the dark, creepy feel of the novel, but also because it was made just as sound technology was being widely introduced to motion pictures. Using various drafts of the script that Robinson worked from, Sheeran reconstructs this unstable period in film history in admirable detail. And while he begins the discussion by asserting that this earlier film of *The Informer* "is a beautiful piece of work, as fine an example as one could wish to see of the late silent cinema" (46) he holds no illusions about the difficulties caused by the still-experimental technology of film sound, which had in 1929 been truly mastered by nobody. "The halfway-through dubbing is simply awful" he writes. "Moreover, not all the elements of the rich hybridity promised by an Irish novel, a German-American director, an international cast of actors and an English production company came to fruition" (49). There is also fascinating material here about Robinson's other films, including the 1923 film *Schatten* ("Warning Shadows," according to Sheeran). He locates Robinson squarely in the context of German Expressionist or Expressionist-influenced cinema; this is also where he sees Flaherty ("[h]owever alluring it may be to propose a Gaelic provenance for the rhetoric of *The Informer*, the evidence points elsewhere: O'Flaherty's letters, published statements and the novel itself confirm that he had his eye on the silent cinema, and probably on the German expressionist cinema at that" [25]). His understanding of that cinematic movement and its influences is impeccable. Indeed, he even places the seminal Hollywood director Ford in this context, in a section called "Ford in Weimar."

And the truth is that the reason for linking these two books in these pages was indeed their shared connection to John Ford; Sheeran has some very interesting material on the man who was supposedly born Seán Aloysius Feeney. He draws on the diary of Ford's trip to Ireland for insights into his sense of Ireland and his tendency to mix up fact,

fiction and myth, and there is plenty to please Ford-o-philes there. But he is also sceptical of *The Informer's* status as a real Ford film, writing that "*The Informer* has been described as a Ford film, in accordance with the tyrannical convention that ascribes films solely to directors. However, there is evidence to suggest that *The Informer* is more properly considered a writer's film" (63). We then get a sustained consideration of the script by Dudley Nichols, and Sheeran goes on to plunge us into the controversy around Nichols's refusal of the Oscar for the film's screenplay, taking issue with Ford partisans such as Tag Gallagher (who recorded Ford's claim that he had dictated the script) to side squarely with the case for Nichols as primary author of the film.

Luke Gibbons's consideration of *The Quiet Man* doesn't have anything quite so juicy in terms of argument about Ford's legacy, but there are some valuable new insights to be found. Gibbons makes links to other work by Maurice Walsh, who wrote both the novel the film is based on and its screenplay, hooking up particularly with the sense of a buried mystery that lies at the heart of some of the stories in *Green Rushes* (1935), and generally sees the film as more serious and melancholy than it is widely understood to be. Indeed, *The Quiet Man* has become a very strange object in Irish cinema, both overly-central to a cinematic canon and, for many, something of a whipping boy in terms of romantic portrayals of the Irish landscape and population. I confess to a provisional membership in the second camp there, and have usually thought of *The Quiet Man* as being a basically uninteresting film that I am practically contractually obligated to have an opinion of; left to my own devices, I would be more than happy to let it float right off my radar screen. I have never felt this way about other John Ford films (*The Searchers* has always seemed to me an authentic masterpiece) or even other John Ford Irish films (like, say, *The Informer*, which, whatever Sheeran may have to say about its disputed authorship, fits nicely into the Ford broken-hero pattern). Gibbons goes some way in convincing me to take *The Quiet Man* more seriously.

The overall argument here is that Ford moves in the direction of charming pastoral, but finds himself unable to settle on the themes that would make that form comforting or even fully coherent. He writes at one point that "*The Quiet Man*, as Lord Killanin claimed, may be an Irish western, but it is a western in reverse, a captivity narrative in which the victim is more than willing to be held captive by the natives and is prepared to fight for admission to the reservation" (65). Gibbons is laying the irony on a little thick here, but his point is clear. In a later discussion of the past that Sean Thronton cannot quite purge, he writes that "[t]he film can thus be seen as a gradual disenchantment of Sean's nostalgic vision while yet allowing him to come to terms with the nightmare of his past.... If there is redress for the injuries of his American experience, it comes through the community in the form of the voice of 'the other' – which, as befits a 'Quiet Man,' is more a listening than a talking cure" (89). His call to read this in the grain of a melancholy John Ford film is, overall, compelling. But there are moments where the argument breaks down a bit, such as when he writes that "just as Ford did not flinch from

incorporating the physical violence associated with death in the ring into the film, by the same token the shameful secret of domestic violence is also brought into the open in the idyllic world of Innisfree"; the wife-beating (and wife-dragging) just seems too light-heartedly evoked in this film to be read in that way. And during his discussion of flashbacks, Gibbons makes the odd claim that "[t]he first fully-fledged use of unmotivated flashbacks, cut adrift from visual mnemonic devices (fades, dissolves), voice-overs or narrative itself, is generally considered to be Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour...*" (59). I'd like to see some citations there, since this assessment ignores an entire history of avant-garde filmmaking; Maya Deren jumps to mind immediately, as does Jean Cocteau, to say nothing of eccentric European narrative filmmakers like Luis Buñuel. This is, though, a minor point.

Indeed, what recommends these books so strongly for me is their close attention to these films as films, not simply as reproductions of literary classics, at the same time that they pay very close attention to those source materials; this is a delicate balancing act. Other entries in the "Ireland into Film" series, such as Lance Pettitt's entry on *December Bride*, are to be commended on similar grounds. These books specifically, though, are at the same time a real step forward for studies of John Ford and for Irish cultural studies.

Note:

¹ The only recent public screening of the 1929 *The Informer* in North America that I know of occurred at the 1998 Telluride Film Festival, when John Boorman chose it as a guest director's selection. Clint Eastwood sat in the back row, smiling slightly and seeming genuinely interested but vaguely confused.

– University of Alberta

Ruth Barton, *Jim Sheridan: Framing the Nation*. Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2002. Paperback, 175 pages. ISBN: 1904148050. €16.50

Reviewed by Brian McLROY

This book is part of a new series under the general editorship of Eugene O'Brien, entitled "Contemporary Irish Writers and Filmmakers," and it issues from a new Dublin publisher. Other writers and filmmakers in this series to be so honoured include Neil Jordan, William Trevor, Brian Moore, Colm Toibin, Seamus Heaney, Brian Friel, John Banville, Roddy Doyle, and even the popular Maeve Binchy. The central premise of O'Brien's series is a solid one – since Ireland has undergone a "paradigm shift" in the past twenty years (a reference to the liberalising of social practices and the sudden affluence), we require new visitations on Irish artists, both new and (relatively) old, who have written throughout part or most of this period. Another interesting feature of the series is that most of the authors of these volumes are Irish or British based, so a Canadian can sense the winds of change within the academy there. Ruth Barton is a Post-Doctoral fellow at UCD's Centre for Film Studies and has made important contributions already to the field of Irish film studies, particularly in relation to gender issues.

Here we have her first book of criticism.

Jim Sheridan needs no apology to enter into the pantheon of writers mentioned above. He has co-written and directed four notable Irish feature films, scripted two others, and been producer on still others. Sheridan's ability to co-script with Terry George three films on the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland, and then go on to get them all made and released internationally is nothing short of an amazing achievement. And this does not take into account his theatre career in Dublin and New York. Barton's book is the first monograph on this filmmaker, and thus she has been presented with the opportunity (some might say the burden) to lay down a distinctive framework for situating this theatre and film artist.

Unfortunately, despite an informative interview with Sheridan that concludes the book, and solid social, textual and political criticism on each of his four directed films – *My Left Foot* (1989), *The Field* (1990), *In the Name of the Father* (1993) and *The Boxer* (1997) – plus one on the Sheridan scripted film directed by Mike Newell, *Into the West* (1992 – it has to be said that Barton takes few risks in her assessments and arguably commits a few important sins of omission.

There is an unease among film critics writing monographs, as we all know that films are collaborative enterprises with multiple influences on the final product. Barton even remarks, "To organize a book around a specific director's work is a risky proposition" (12), but then she proceeds to carry on with this theoretical approach, arguing that every Sheridan film, in Ireland at least, "is an event" (13). This places Sheridan and his work safely back into cultural studies territory where clearly Barton is more comfortable. Barton is thus a reluctant auteurist, an intellectual position that inevitably makes her discourse fall between two stools. If she were an unapologetic auteurist, we would have required much more archival work on Sheridan's writing and directing before he came into film in his late 30s. This aspect seems to occur to Barton rather late by her inclusion of *Into the West* as the final chapter in the book. I think a true auteurist would have placed this film first after having explored Sheridan's theatre work. Of the latter, precious little is found here, except the well-known story of his remove to New York in the early 1980s after controversy over a production at the Project Theatre in Dublin. A chapter alone was needed on Sheridan's writing and theatre direction in the 1970s.

Needless to say, a critic unconvinced by auteurism's utility would have spent more time than Barton does here on intersections with other "events" in Ireland, the UK and the USA, including other filmmakers and writers. Of course, for Barton to follow this trajectory, she would not have been able to accept the commission of this series volume with its auteurist assumptions. Another problem for Barton is that Sheridan's work, and the critic acknowledges this, is largely undistinguished in any cinematic or visual sense. Sheridan is primarily a wordsmith, a raconteur, a writer with a great sense of dialogue, and a director who is able to coach great performances from his actors, most notably Daniel Day Lewis. Thus, we find little analysis of visual style in the text. What we do get is an informed survey of the films and the

popular and political reaction to them, with the appropriate cultural context sketched in.

Barton is strong in her thesis that the family is central to Sheridan's artistic vision. He endeavours in all his films to integrate family concerns with political and social problems. By contrast, Neil Jordan's writing puts greater emphasis on the individual and political and social choices of the situation depicted. It is in the area of politics that we can say that Barton and Sheridan share assumptions, most obviously in their antipathy to things English (though without England's television stations who provided monies, Sheridan might not have had a film career). Ironically, Sheridan is more understanding of the American audience and their tastes than Barton, a nuance which suggests that the critic is still working through her attitude to Hollywood production and influence.

This book will serve as a good primer for undergraduate students, but we may have to wait ten years for Sheridan to have another four films under his belt before a more complete and less compromised auteurist study can be written. And I suspect that Barton's apparent commission to write the "Ireland" volume in the Routledge National Cinema series will allow her to create her own map of the field rather than orienteer around a rather outdated one.

– University of British Columbia

Bob Quinn, *Maverick: A Dissident View of Broadcasting Today*. Dingle: Brandon Books/Mount Eagle Publications, 2001. Cloth, 279 pages. ISBN: 0 86322 288 9. £15.99.

Reviewed by Jennie CARLSTEN

Filmmaker Bob Quinn has written a fiery account of his relationship with Radio Teilifis Éireann. *Maverick* covers the four years Quinn sat on the RTÉ Authority before his bitter resignation in 1999. More than just a memoir of those years, this is a look at an industry in crisis.

In Quinn's pessimistic view, the problems of RTÉ parallel the problems of the Irish nation itself; the self-destructive trajectory of the RTÉ reflecting the loss of Irish national identity and confidence. Quinn's "crusade" has been his campaign to ban child-targeted advertisements from public television, and his unsuccessful efforts in this regard are well-covered in his memoir. It is clear, though, that for Quinn this is only one front on which he wishes to mount a counter-attack on the mass commercialization of Irish society. Quinn's Ireland is a nation in desperate trouble, unable to cope with the modernity thrust upon it.

Despite the title of his work, Quinn is in fact an insider in some respects. He was with RTÉ at its formation in 1961 and worked for them until 1969, a time he characterizes as one of innocence and youthful energy, but also one that presages his later conflicts. Since first leaving RTÉ in 1969, Quinn has worked as an independent filmmaker, but one who has received a certain degree of support from RTÉ, support he acknowledges in *Maverick*. His four years on the Authority ultimately provide Quinn with a great deal of insight into the state of broadcasting in Ireland. Quinn

positions himself as a rebel (describing himself as the Lone Ranger and comparing his role on the Authority to that of McMurphy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) from the day he joins the board, so that his account of those years reads as a series of battles.

In particular, Quinn raises questions about RTÉ's policies on disclosure. His own attempts to access RTÉ's commercial logs and minutes are continually frustrated, and he describes his growing sense of marginalization within the body he is meant to represent. Quinn also has doubts about RTÉ's financial responsibility, questioning its accounting practices and overly centralized structure. The RTÉ he describes is primarily concerned not with public service, but with job creation and protectionism. Most troubling for Quinn is RTÉ's growing reliance on, and shameless cultivation of, advertising income. He points out that RTÉ's dependence on commercial income has doubled since 1990, effectively placing the broadcaster in the thrall of big business. At the heart of all of this is Quinn's idealist vision of the public broadcasting mission, a mission he sees undermined not only by the global market, but by the unwillingness of RTÉ to take a principled stand. Quinn argues that the Irish have embraced the worst of both worlds in RTÉ's compromise between public service and commercial enterprise.

Quinn does acknowledge the constraints and complexities faced by RTÉ. Faced with competition from cable and satellite television, RTÉ's impulse towards self-preservation is understandable. Quinn is frank about the political and economic forces that seek to undermine public broadcasting, but ultimately sees RTÉ as complicit in its own destruction. There are heroes in this narrative, most notably Minister Michael D. Higgins. However, Quinn is quick to point out how the individual concerns, obsessions and personalities of various insiders prevent real change to RTÉ policy.

The causes Quinn takes on go far beyond the rubric of RTÉ, of course. Quinn is challenging the very notion of Irishness through a regionalism which opposes the Dublin-centred nature of Ireland's media. He is a passionate advocate of Irish language broadcasting, and a longtime agitator for a Gaeltacht station. Quinn writes of his initial dissatisfaction with Teilifis na Gaeilge (now TG4), arguing that the technology has been inaccessible and the content irrelevant to those in the west's Irish-speaking communities, and that the project pandered to the Dublin audience. By the time he writes *Maverick*, though, Quinn has embraced TG4, claiming that it is the only channel which represents the "Irish people" – a phrase which might seem to exclude everyone outside the Gaeltacht. Quinn is concerned, too, with the "dumbing down" of the arts by a media that seems to underestimate the public it serves. Most of all, *Maverick* laments a loss of innocence (not only the innocence of children but, by extension, the innocence of the Irish nation) and the failure of society to protect that innocence.

In one of the most interesting chapters of *Maverick*, Quinn deals with accusations that he has sometimes failed to represent the interests of filmmakers. His own relative success with RTÉ notwithstanding, Quinn points out that

there has been little support for small, indigenous filmmaking. His own view that independent filmmaking has been taken over by businessmen rather than artists results in an ambivalent attitude towards RTE's financial support and government tax incentives, which Quinn sees as further discouragement of creative, independent, Irish filmmaking.

In the end, Quinn resigns from the Authority because he sees the board and executives engaging in covert censorship and political bias. For Quinn, RTE's appeal of the Coughlan ruling (in which RTE was found to have shown bias in its coverage of the divorce referendum), and the galling decision to pursue that appeal without the consent of the Authority, is the last straw. Ironically, his objections to the "paternalistic and politically correct control of the so-called 'responsible' people" (249) are mirrored by how others have criticized his own stance on the protection of the public interest.

Maverick is a compelling read; Quinn's passion is both the strength and the weakness of his writing. His observations are provocative and his causes noble, but it is easy to see why, as he freely admits, his tactics have been largely unsuccessful. Quinn's position is not entirely clear: at times, he seems to see himself as Everyman, fighting the good fight on behalf of a public that sincerely wants quality television and protections for the vulnerable. At other times, he seems to privilege his own position as an artist and advocate for a public that is reactionary and in need of guidance. The dilemmas Quinn illustrates do not lend themselves to easy solutions. *Maverick* doesn't offer these solutions, but goes a long way towards articulating the problems.

– University of British Columbia

Louisa Burns-Bisogno, *Censoring Irish Nationalism: The British, Irish and American Suppression of Republican Images in Film and Television, 1909-1995*. Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company Inc., 1997. Cloth, 213 pages. ISBN: 0786404051.

Reviewed by Brian McILROY

It's a measure of how far we have come in Irish-British-American relations that the phrase "Irish Nationalism" does not have the same threatening overtones it once did. Today, the phrase "Irish Republicanism" has replaced it, provoking – despite the "peace process" in Northern Ireland – continual fear and outcry in some quarters, linked as it is to the violent or physical-force tradition. Burns-Bisogno's title and subtitle alludes to that distinction indirectly. Historically, and this is a good chronological introductory study of the censorship of Irish images, the simple pursuit of an anti-colonial agenda could – and did – bring the full wrath of British state agencies onto a wide swathe of Irish-related cultural projects, some of which never, in the end, got made.

Burns-Bisogno's methodology is to focus on the concept and practice of censorship as an Althusserian ideological state apparatus, discussing both the periodic incursions of censors in all three countries on specific films and television programmes, as well as the nature of the

censorship environment that filmmakers operated under. As the author points out, self-censorship is always widespread and the most difficult to track, since at heart filmmakers want their work to be seen broadly and often compromise for the sake of expediency. They are not always willing to admit to that pressure.

Burns-Bisogno concentrates in her first two chapters, "Censoring the Green" and "Silent Film and Irish Rebellion" on BBFC censorship of mainly Irish made films, such as Fred O'Donovan's *Knocknagow* (1918), Walter MacNamara's *Ireland A Nation* (1914), and documentary news reels, such as *Sinn Féin Review* (1917/18). She also describes and discusses the American Kalem Company's exploits on location in Ireland between 1910 and 1914 under the auspices of director Sidney Olcott. These lively stories of run-ins with the authorities have been told before in previous books by, among others, Joseph Curran and Anthony Slide, and Burns-Bisogno scrupulously acknowledges her sources.

Chapter three, "The Free State and Censorship of Motion Pictures" and chapter four, "Irish-American Influence on Film" also draw from these works, but also, in the case of the latter chapter, from the PCA files in the Margaret Herrick Library in California. Here Burns-Bisogno begins to warm to her task, showing, for example, how censor Joseph Breen continually pestered John Ford throughout the making of the *The Informer* (1935). When the film script was passed in the US and brought to the BBFC, the latter demanded the word "Ireland" be frequently deleted. References to the Black and Tans also disappeared. Then the Irish Censor had to review it twice before it was released (to great success) in Ireland.

Burns-Bisogno's final three chapters, before a short conclusion, "Censorship Creates IRA Stereotypes," "IRA Stereotypes Continue After Censorship," and "Censoring the IRA on Television" comprise about half of the book and provide an excellent synthesizing account of contentious republican material and its fate. Her discussion of Ford's travails with *The Plough and the Stars* (1929) is particularly effective in showing how interference from Breen, Martin Quigley, the BBFC and Ford's own studio led him to disown the film after it was made. Burns-Bisogno is too ready, however, to assume in British films such as Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (1947) that republicanism is the target of criticism, when a quite different case may also be made.

Burns-Bisogno's review of the films of the 1980s and 1990s is cursory, mostly confined to plot summary and a few comments on the reception of films such as Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992) and Jim Sheridan's *In the Name of the Father* (1993), and she adds little that is new to our understanding of these films or the atmosphere in which they were created. Arguably, in the most recent period, the real turf war has been fought in the arena of television, the subject of the final chapter. The critic carefully explains the narrow nature of control on British and Irish television, and how each country's broadcasters worked under an array of restrictions with regard to Irish republicanism – Section 31 in Ireland and section 11 in the UK's Prevention of Terrorism Act (1976). Both sections limited or prevented the ability of Sinn Féin, the IRA's political wing, to put their

case on television, a situation which lasted until the mid 1990s.

It would have been useful for the author to explore the circumstances surrounding the highly risible period in the UK when Sinn Fein spokespeople, such as Gerry Adams, could be seen but not heard speaking in their own voice; to explore further the motivation behind Section 31 in Ireland beyond trying to stick the blame on Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien; to explore further the philosophical and practical problem of how a democracy and a majority should treat minority views that are allied to the use of violence; to explore further the difference in audience reception between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with specific films in mind. The book is also written with little recognition of Ireland's one million Unionists and the different rules that can apply to censorship between England and Northern Ireland.

As with all books, there are quibbles. Fans of Basil Dearden will be saddened to learn that he has been renamed here Basil Dreardin. Burns-Bisogno has an awkward tendency in the text proper to introduce some critics by their full name and others only by their surnames. Similarly, the index is a little haphazard: some critics make it in, some don't.

Nevertheless, Burns-Bisogno has been able to pour over the PCA files with regard to censorship of Irish-related films, and practically all previous critics in this research area have not been able to spend the time at this reference library in California to make convincing arguments on more than a few isolated films. This familiarity with primary sources helps to show the links between American and British censors, a link not fully understood and worthy of further investigation. Burns-Bisogno's solid work may well indeed spark such welcome research.

– University of British Columbia

Stephanie McKenzie and John Ennis, eds, *Backyards of Heaven: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from Ireland and Newfoundland & Labrador*. Waterford: WIT School of Humanities Publications and Corner Brook: Scop Productions, 2003. Paperback, 339 pages. ISBN for Canada 0-9730945-2-4 (\$22.00); ISBN for Ireland 0-9540281-1-2. € 15.

Reviewed by Danine FARQUHARSON

Very smooth with a rich, fruity, mild palate, delicate hints of peat and a lovely, long satisfying finish. This volume of poetry from Ireland and Newfoundland & Labrador exhibits the qualities of the finest blended Irish malt: smoke and sea air abound on the nose with support from clove, ginger peel and vanilla pod aromas. Intense and concentrated on the palate with masses of complexity and a long, spicy finish, this book has an elegant, elusively sweet character dusted with sea salt.

The bonds between Ireland and Newfoundland and Labrador are palpable and ethereal at the same time. Connections can sometimes be made more tangible by political agreements, trade missions and memoranda of

understanding. This anthology, while partially funded by the Ireland/Newfoundland Partnership Cultural Grants, asserts a relationship between the two islands but does so by returning us to the feeling of things, the metaphoric relationships as well as the material. Edited jointly by Stephanie McKenzie and John Ennis (who met at The March Hare in Corner Brook, Newfoundland – the largest poetry festival in Atlantic Canada), *The Backyards of Heaven* was launched in two cities in Newfoundland (Corner Brook and St. John's) and five in Ireland (Waterford, Cork, Galway, Dublin, and Belfast). The book embodies transatlantic relationships.

For example, west-coast Newfoundlander Al Pittman resides comfortably with Seamus Heaney. One could say that these two voices have had more than one lively conversation in some backyard. The vibrant words of St. John's resident Ramona Dearing – “Ass in snow pants / thick as the ice” – ring true next to Belfast-born Derek Mahon's urbane sonic images: “gravel-crunching, interminable departure.” The physical and sensual bodies the poetry of Ruth Lawrence from Fortune Bay – “Drunk, I sat on the grass / while your fiddle strings played / a tune that wrapped itself around / my staggering heart in a reef knot” – are related by metaphysical blood to Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill's silver-tongued Irish voice:

Is móinear féir mé ag cathráil
faoin ngréin
aibionn faoi thadhall do láimhe
Is osclaíonn

I sprawl like a grassy meadow
fragrant in the sun;
at the brush of your palm, all my herbs
and spices spill open

And bravo to the editors for including both English and Irish version of poetry so unilingual readers such as I can at least appreciate the wonder of the typespace if not the sound of the words.

There is a bittersweet taste to much of the work collected here – death and loss co-exist with life and love in a way that seems to be particularly poignant and true to Irish and Newfoundland & Labrador poets. There is a touch of melancholy in Michael Crummey's “Her Mark” where “every word I have spoken the wind has taken”. The wind may steal some of the words, but *Backyards of Heaven* offers the reader a symphony. There are snowstorms, ocean gales, frost encrusted eyelashes and freezing ponds. These elemental forces are intertwined with the sounds of place and time and family. As Ciaran Carson writes in “Eesti”

This red-letter day would not be written, had I not
wandered through the land of Eesti.
I asked my father how he thought it went. He said to
me in Irish, *Listen: Éist*

Backyards of Heaven presents a flavoursome concerto of voices to our ears, an awareness of touch and smell and taste and feel. Many of the poems have been previously published, but it is in the wondrously unique combination, companionship, and juxtaposition of poet, sound, and image that creates such a splendid blend for all the senses.

– St. Jerome’s University

Claire Connolly, ed., *Theorizing Ireland*. New York: Palgrave, 2003. Paperback, 215 pages. ISBN: 0-333-80397-3. USD\$ 24.95.

Reviewed by Danine FARQUHARSON

Theorizing Ireland is the latest volume in Palgrave/Macmillan’s “Readers in Cultural Criticism”: a first-rate publication series that began in 2000 with *Gender* (edited by Anna Tripp), *Reading Images* (edited by Julia Thomas) and *Posthumanism* (edited by Neil Badmington). As the titles of earlier volumes demonstrate, the focus up until now has been on broad theoretical ideas or practices; *Theorizing Ireland* is really quite unique. Its central subject is a place, an identity, and an idea. The “Readers” have gained a deservedly excellent reputation in cultural studies – a reputation due in no small part to the general editorship of that eminently trustworthy and sensible guide through minefields of contemporary cultural and literary theory – Catherine Belsey. *Theorizing Ireland* is as good as its predecessors and for anyone interested in contemporary studies of Irish culture, this volume is a must-have for the bookshelf. It will be useful for any course in Irish studies, cultural theory and/or postcolonial issues.

As a “reader” the contents are varied and not all the collected essays will satisfy all readers. However, Claire Connolly is to be commended for her editorial choices. Many of the essays in *Theorizing Ireland* are ones I often consult, thus I’m pleased to have them together in one collection. Pivotal works by internationally known critics are here: following the Introduction, Seamus Deane’s now classic “Heroic Styles: the Tradition of an Idea” (1985) starts off the collection and speaks to the currency of the writing. All component essays were previously published between 1985 and 2002. Terry Eagleton makes a predictable appearance (“Changing the Question” comes from his 1995 *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*), and Luke Gibbons and Shaun Richards are both welcome and expected inclusions. Wonderful surprises are also here: Joe Cleary’s “Misplaced Ideas?” is an exciting application of Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz’s ideas to Irish colonial questions. Although demanding for the general reader, Cleary is nonetheless worth the effort. Siobhán Kilfeather’s exploration of sexual politics in the nineteenth-century novel justifies the cost of the book alone, if only for her erudite rejection of fellow contributor Terry Eagleton’s account of Irish realism. For myself, a literary scholar who spends all her time in the twentieth century, a real treat in *Theorizing Ireland* is Richard Kirkland’s essay on the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Museum studies and critical readings of different exhibits have recently become “hot” cultural topics and Kirkland works critical magic in discussing the

museum’s layout and spacial design. He deftly integrates contemporary cultural flashpoints such as ideas of tradition, regionalism, and polemical debates generated by nationalist and unionist communities. Claire Connolly has ultimately made fascinating choices that reflect what she refers to in her introductory essay as the “multifarious stories” that make up Ireland’s cultural life.

Theorizing Ireland has added bonuses. At the end of the book there are summaries of the articles, a glossary and suggestions for further reading. The further readings are helpfully divided into those labeled “accessible” and those labelled, in that cult-stud attempt at familiarity, “more difficult, but worth it.” This working bibliography includes annotations to assist readers. The only disappointment – and it is a mild one – in the entire book is Connolly’s introductory essay. Connolly is well-known for her work on Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) and here she tackles difficult material, which does begin productively by outlining the anxieties and tensions involved in cultural studies (such as the move from “abstraction into the specifics of culture” (2). Connolly then poses several questions central to both this collection and Irish studies generally. Is Ireland postcolonial? How do we remember the past? And while she goes on to interrogate in a broad way the very subject matter of Irish studies, I’m not convinced she’s working new ground here. Connolly is best when assessing feminism and sexual politics as the interstice that most interestingly engages her framing questions (she’ll get no argument from me on that one). Her close reading of Sean Hillen’s photographic collages is astute and fascinating. However, once she moves back to more general topics, her argument becomes less interesting. The discussion of *The Quiet Man*, *Man of Aran* and Joyce’s “The Dead” are familiar and arguably worn-out territory. More to the point, this discussion does not propel her reading of Hillen in any interesting way. To Connolly’s immense credit, however, she acknowledges this very difficulty of reading specific texts in a cultural context. While her Introduction speaks to the heart of how difficult cultural criticism can be, the collection as a whole satisfies.

Whatever the minor shortcomings of the opening essay, Connolly’s edition is highly recommended. Reliable friends and exciting newcomers combine into the best of what “readers” can offer – depth, difference, disagreement and debate.

– St. Jerome’s University

Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, ed., *The Poetry of Derek Mahon*. Ulster Editions and Monographs 11. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2002. Cloth, 361 pages. ISBN: 0861404254. £35.

Saint-John Perse, *Birds*. Trans. Derek Mahon. Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2002. 33 pages. ISBN: 1852353384 (Cloth), 1852353376 (Paper). £13.95 (Cloth), £7.95 (Paper).

Reviewed by Brian BURTON

The Poetry of Derek Mahon, a collection of essays drawn from the proceedings of the University of Ulster's fourth Ulster Symposium, is a timely reminder that the amount of critical praise given to a particular writer is no indicator of his or her perceived importance. There is yet to be written a monograph on Mahon, and the only other sustained analysis of his work is found in another collection of essays, a special edition of *Irish University Review* issued nearly a decade ago. At a time when studies of Heaney are published on an almost annual basis, *The Poetry of Derek Mahon*, in the words of the editor's introduction, seeks "to redress a conspicuous critical deficit". The book's list of contributors reads like a Who's Who of Mahon's most perceptive critics and staunchest devotees (although Terence Brown is a notable absence). It must be said that Stan Smith has not always been a wholesale admirer of Mahon, as his Marxist dismissal of Mahon's detachment from politics and history in his 1982 book, *Inviolable Voice*, shows. Yet here we see a less fractious Smith praising Mahon for his ability "to see each tree in turn in all its particularity, without forgetting the wood". Smith discerns in Mahon's work a strain of Neo-Platonism which requires the non-materiality of light and darkness to view the highest level of reality. Light and dark are familiar tropes in Mahon's poetry, and for Smith this Neo-Platonic streak poses a threat to Mahon's quest for artistic authenticity. Mahon resolves this tension not by envisaging a transcendental "reality of reality," but by positing reality in the human consciousness and sheltering in his "heart of hearts / A light to transform the world" ("The Forger").

Existentialism – particularly its twin features of alienation and theological doubt – is at the heart of the essays by Gerald Dawe and Bruce Stewart. Dawe sees in Mahon's work "an existential clarity," derived from Camus and Beckett, that simultaneously foregrounds Mahon's Protestant dissent and his rebuttal of the "distorted critical dispensation" that some critics (notably Peter Porter) have levelled at Irish poetry in general. Stewart frames his discussion in terms that both exploit Mahon's existential predilections – whereby rootlessness conditions his sense of metaphysical unease – and negate them. In claiming that "existentialist is the wrong term for Derek Mahon," Stewart focuses on Mahon's scepticism as an indicator of his "secular mysticism": "The forms of faith are present but not the content." Such an oxymoronic practice reveals the elusiveness of Mahon's poetry, its frequent contradictions, and its (equally oxymoronic) sincere irony.

Jerzy Jarniewicz concentrates, on the other hand, on the secularity and antitheses that he discerns in "the characteristically Mahonian opposition between the world of humankind and the world of inanimate objects." In each

case, history is exposed as an exclusive process that deprives the mute phenomena of their rightful place in the world while privileging the strictly human. But Mahon's conception of history is not reliant on temporal linearity, which sees the past in the present. He wants to "transcend history," and in so doing include the voices of those phenomena "that have been marginalized by history and ignored by grand narratives." Such conceptions of displacement and historical myth-making also inhere in Neil Corcoran's consideration of Mahon's meditations on life in America. Mahon's often polarised views of "an ideal society" and "elsewhere" (a concept borrowed in part from Wallace Stevens) come together in "The Hudson Letter," where the idea of the promised land is inverted and satirised. Mahon metaphorically "becomes one of those derelicts, down-and-outs, beggars and tramps," and more literally "one of the outsiders and the alienated who figure frequently in his own earlier work." Mahon's affiliation with a local community that belongs only to an alien elsewhere provides the basis for Eamonn Hughes's essay. Here, Mahon's concern with his place in the world is founded on his "constant tendency towards the abstract and conceptual in his treatment of place" and his ability to give any place a "brief moment of stability."

Stability in Mahon's world has traditionally been viewed as a fleeting, transient state of affairs. But Frank Sewell, taking issue with the critic Peter McDonald's disparaging review of *The Yellow Book*, reveals Mahon to have been not a perennial exile but a poet whose sense of "Irishness" colours all he sees and writes: "it has been evident that the Irish writing tradition (both in English and translated from the Irish) has provided one essential and enabling source for Mahon in his efforts to find the metaphors, rhythms and words to express his own personal situation and concerns." Apocalypse is one such concern, and Patrick Crotty relates it to a shift in Mahon's poetic voice in *The Yellow Book*. Here we see Mahon flitting nervously between his more usual solitude and an acceptance of solidarity that embraces, rather than tries to overthrow, "the historical moment."

Artistic and personal authenticity, alienation, theological scepticism, mute phenomena, the attraction of elsewhere, Irishness, apocalypse and history: these are all familiar themes in Mahon criticism and their continued debate, while unsurprising, underlines their importance to our understanding of this most elusive poet. Nevertheless, as John Goodby shows, Mahon's poetry still accommodates new critical insights. Approaching the work from a postmodern, gender-oriented position, Goodby exposes Mahon's decision to include certain aspects of feminism in his later poetry as "almost" arbitrary in an attempt to avoid "over-insistence on a fixed self". Yet Mahon's poetry retains an "uncompromising maleness" that is "shaped by a secularised form of the specifically masculine and 'sacramental' silences which structure Unionist culture".

Hugh Haughton's essay on translation expands on earlier articles by Richard York and Terence Brown, while the pieces by Edna Longley, Michael Allen, and Richard York update or provide responses to essays published in the aforementioned *Irish University Review* special issue.

Individually, all of these essays are impressive achievements of Mahon scholarship, but collectively they provide the best single-volume critique of the man Michael Longley once describes as second only to Heaney in the hierarchy of contemporary Irish poetry. (Incidentally, a similar collection on Longley, published in the same year, is equally welcome). Although frequently presenting contrasting or contrary viewpoints (an inevitable outcome of disparate authorship), this collection represents a significant contribution to our understanding of this most elusive and evasive poet.

As for Derek Mahon himself, *Birds* is his most recent published work and it is something of an oddity. A close translation of Saint-John Perse's *Oiseaux*, it is a "méditation poétique" rather than a fully-fledged poem. Mahon tells us in his translator's note that "Perse disliked the term 'prose poem'," and the thirteen cantos of *Birds* represent the points of contact where poetic prose meets metaphysical speculation. The original text was designed to accompany a series of bird lithographs by Georges Braque, a painter best known as one of the founders of Cubism. Sadly, these lithographs are not reproduced here, and as a result some of the cantos lose clarity and coherence, especially when referring directly to Braque's paintings.

Birds provide the rich metaphor used to describe life's mysteries through often abstract language. Equated equally with words and the poet's flights of imagination, the birds exist both on the page and in the mind. Each has a twofold allegiance to the earth and the skies, moving and mediating freely between these two poles of ambiguous existence. Birds and words, "radiating invention and premonition," are the links between world and word, between creator and creation, between language and life.

Hugh Haughton's essay in *The Poetry of Derek Mahon* speaks of the poet's "need to take his bearings from elsewhere, as part of a larger cultural history," while describing Mahon's tendency to see translation as an opportunity for "cultural adaptation and transfer". This is as true of *Birds* as it is for Mahon's other translations. The comparison of Canto II between birds and ships, for instance, contains a suggestion of Mahon's family background in the shipyards of Belfast, while Canto III situates the theft by a Mongolian conqueror of a bird and its nest as an analogue for usurpation and (presumably British) empire-building. Cultural adaptation and transfer also find a parallel in the allusions to Hart Crane's *The Bridge*: the line "beneath the curve of their flight lies the curvature of the earth itself" recalls the "curveship" of Brooklyn Bridge. Spanning France, Ireland, Britain and America, birds and words inscribe themselves "in the great vagrant poem of the evolving earth".

By the end of the sequence birds lose their metaphorical status and, as natural objects, become ontological gauges of reality itself. While occupying the same "poetic space" as the artist, we are told that, "[t]hese are birds, pure and simple, nothing more, their truth the secret of life itself," and that, "these birds are far from 'literary'". They have, in other words, become transcendental arbiters of Platonic Form, revealing the reality of reality in their "true facticity." Although *Oiseaux* is not exactly a canonical work (Perse's

Anabase and *Amers* are more widely known), it shares Mahon's concerns with dispossession, language, the artist's vocation, and the mute phenomena through whose truth "we are changed for ever."

– University of Durham

Matthew Campbell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Paperback, 294 pages. ISBN: 0521012457. \$22 / £15.99.

Reviewed by Brian BURTON

Collections of essays on contemporary Irish poetry have appeared at regular intervals during the past decade or so, most notably those edited by Elmer Andrews (*Contemporary Irish Poetry*, 1992), Neil Corcoran (*The Chosen Ground*, 1992), and Michael Kenneally (*Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature*, 1995). But none has gone as far as Matthew Campbell's collection in trying to define and delineate what is understood by the troublesome word "contemporary." To attempt clarification, the Preface speaks of "a middle way" that stands between the deaths of Yeats and Joyce, and the insistence, emphasised by the Corcoran and Kenneally collections, that "contemporary" poets must be extant. Campbell wisely refuses to ignore the continuing influence of Clarke, Kavanagh and MacNeice, while the shadow of Yeats "may be taken as given". Each of the essays contained here provides, to some degree, a response to these influences, positing influence either as a process of absorption or as a means of self-distancing from dominant precursors. Guinn Batten's essay on Boland, McGuckian and Ní Chuilleanáin, for instance, seeks to retrieve the female subject from the "specially endowed (male) subject who can repossess the maternal body". Such statements reflect the extent to which confidence has grown particularly among female poets of the last half-century, but this confidence is not confined only to women.

The editor's own essay, which serves as an introduction to the entire book, celebrates recent poetic achievement in Ireland, documenting the growth of cultural revitalisation during the latter half of the twentieth century. Campbell shows that while the years 1949-1969 were characterised by religious and political divides that threatened to return Ireland "to a provincial backwater, unnoticed by the world," the subsequent three decades, although suffering even greater political turbulence, witnessed an "extraordinary increase in the volume and quality of Irish poetry." This increase may have been coincidental with Ireland's political situation but, as Fran Brearton astutely points out, it did not rise out of a "group" aesthetic other than in terms of giving "Northern poetry a distinctive focus." Brearton dismisses the idea of a 'Northern Renaissance' as too easy and too programmatic a concept derived from a journalistic tendency to associate the appearance of Heaney, Mahon and Longley with the onset of the Troubles. Robert Faggen echoes this analysis, emphasising the "great variety and quality" of Irish poetry. Faggen's thesis is carried forward into the new

millennium by David Wheatley's essay, which discusses five poets born between 1960 and 1968 who "form no school and adhere to no shared orthodoxies."

Of the fourteen essays in this collection, almost half deal with single poets (and there can be no prizes for guessing who these might be!), while the rest cover more general themes in Irish poetry of the last fifty years. And it is the latter group that provides the most interest for professional academics. Apart from those already mentioned, we find essays on the poetry of dissent, Irish modernists, and Gaelic poetry, all of which successfully contextualise contemporary Irish poetry. These remarks are not meant to disparage the collection in any way, most of the essays of which appear robust, well-informed, and, in some cases, invaluable scholarly aids.

– *University of Durham*

Pericles Lewis, *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Cloth, 241 pages. ISBN: 0521661110. USD\$ 59.95 / £35.

Reviewed by Brian BURTON

Pericles Lewis's first book is a rewarding study of modernist concerns with the politics, both ideological and literary, that lie behind conceptions of nation and race. Three of the five chapters deal with the place of Conrad, Proust and D'Annunzio in this schema, but it is Joyce who occupies what is perhaps the most revealing section of the book. Focusing his attention on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Lewis sees Joyce as both inheritor and parodist of a tradition that has Balzac at its forefront. *A Portrait* is shown to subvert Balzac's realism, which posits disillusionment as the only response to the division between social and ethical behaviour. According to Lewis, however, Joyce solves the problem of disillusionment through "the idea of the consciousness of the race, which the individual experiences as a pure interior realm but which is also the emanation of society." *A Portrait* projects individual consciousness onto the backdrop of collective imagination, which means that, through a combination of Marxist and existentialist thought, man is sociologically constrained yet also free to choose.

Joyce was highly disaffected with politics, which increased his sense of isolation and paved the way for his insistence on artistic freedom. He spoke of renewed cultural identity in Ireland, and Lewis uses Joyce's ideas to frame his discussion through the lens of Stephen Dedalus. Joyce's isolation might be seen as stereotypical of modernist individualism, but Stephen is exposed as being more concerned with a collective conception of 'race'. Lewis begins his study by quoting from the penultimate entry in Stephen's diary: "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." While God is equated with the uncreated soul of Ireland, Lewis also argues convincingly that 'race' displaces God in a "rather odd form of theology" that sees Stephen adopting the dual role of Christ-figure and priest of his own race.

Lewis traces an association between race, culture and ethics, whereby "the ethical self...is a product of the historical forces at work in human society." If the conscience of Stephen's race is uncreated, then so must be its culture, a situation that enhances the Joycean ideal of unrestricted art. By blurring the distinction between creator and creation, Joyce's novel situates Stephen and literature as forces of racial redemption and rebirth.

D'Annunzio, Conrad and Proust are all linked through Joyce to the continental tradition of shifting attention away from the omniscient author in favour of an inward-looking consciousness. The various manifestations of liberal nationalism that lie at the heart of these writers' works are revealed as modes of political engagement at odds with the separatist argument found in many critiques of modernism. Terms such as "national will" and "national character" are still laden with difficulties, not least because of their associations with right-wing ideology, but Lewis's thought-provoking study goes a long way towards disclosing how such radically different authors confronted the problem.

– *University of Durham*

Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People*. London: Routledge, 2001. 262 pages. ISBN: 0415069394 (paper), 0415069386 (cloth). £19.99 / £70.

Reviewed by Chris MORASH

In an influential article published in the early 1990s in *Theatre Research International*, Bruce McConachie argued that "it is more than a little ironic that many of us are engaged in writing the history of a kind of theatre – the theatre of the nation-state – that may soon be extinct".¹ This is, of course, precisely the kind of statement that triggers off interesting rows in pubs; on one hand, we have a decade of civil wars and wars of independence to remind us that the nation-state is far from extinct, while at the same time it would be naïve not to acknowledge that we are part of a globalised economy that determines what we eat, wear, read, and – to a certain extent – watch in the theatre.

It is in this context that Lionel Pilkington's *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* constitutes such an important intervention. If we are to understand the role of national cultures in the twenty-first century, we need to begin by recognising that while some art forms (cinema, recorded music, the printed word) are ideally suited to be traded as commodities in a globalised economic system, others are less easily commodified – and this is particularly true of the theatre. This is not to say that there were not attempts to integrate the theatre into a system of international exchange; indeed, in an earlier phase of global capitalism in the 19th century, the theatre world was dominated by touring circuits, and this mode of theatrical production continues to exist with big musicals, which trundle around the globe in multiple productions, moving from market to market. However, at its most basic the theatre is a local phenomenon – a performance is an event,

held in a particular place at a particular time in front of a localised audience – and this localisation makes the theatre peculiarly resistant to the forces of globalisation.

Stepping back and taking this wider view helps us to put in context the changes that have been taking place in the study of Irish theatre over the past five or six years. While certain areas of Irish theatre history have never been lacking in scholarship – the early Abbey, for instance, or Beckett – there has never been anything comparable to the detailed attention to which Irish theatre as a whole has been subjected since the late 1990s. In part, this is due to a maturation in Irish studies, which has allowed the study of Irish theatre (including performance histories, institutional histories, design, production, etc.) to emerge as a subject in its own right within the academy. At an institutional level, the development of theatre departments and programmes in many Irish universities, and gradual improvement in the state of Irish theatre archives – particularly at the Abbey and the Linenhall Library in Belfast – are creating more possibilities for research into Irish theatre.

Almost all of this recent work has taken the relationship of Irish theatre to the nation/nation-state as a starting point. For instance, Christopher Murray's *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to Nation* (1997), signals its emphasis in its subtitle, as does Nicholas Grene's *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (1999). Other recent books revise and complicate the relationship of Irish theatre to a nation or state, such as Alan J. Fletcher's *Drama, Performance, and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (2000), which pioneers the detailed historical study of theatre in Ireland before the existence of a modern nation-state. John P. Harrington's *The Irish Play on the New York Stage, 1874-1966* (1997) moves Irishness beyond the limits of the nation-state. However, neither of these books are focused as intently on the relationship between theatre and nation-state as is Lionel Pilkington's *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland*.

Pilkington's book is the product of a rare mixture of commitment, theoretical complexity, and painstaking historical scholarship. The great strength of this book lies in the author's relentless, searching scepticism. While acknowledging the accepted versions of events, Pilkington refuses to take them at face value, and so approaches his archival sources – in which the book is rich – with a fresh eye. So, for instance, the reader who begins reading the opening chapter, on the early Abbey, may expect to find the activities of Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge explained, as usual, in the context of post-Parnellite cultural nationalism, along with the Gaelic League, GAA, and everything else that gets swept up in the word "Revival". However, by shifting his focus from the broad sweep of political and cultural change to the micro-politics of Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century, Pilkington allows a completely different picture to emerge. Always remembering that the theatre is by definition local, Pilkington is able to read the manoeuvrings of the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre in terms of a policy of constructive unionism, which was being forced to re-define itself, moment by moment, in response to a shifting political scene. At a stroke, he thus forces us to question the orthodox view, substituting for it

an interpretative paradigm that is entirely convincing.

Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland is thus worth reading for its opening chapters alone, which cast an entirely new light on the first two decades of the Abbey. Similarly, the section on the Abbey's attempt to provoke a row with Dublin Castle over the staging of Shaw's *The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet* is probably the best account of that incident, while the chapters dealing with the theatre of the 1920s are rich in the kind of political detail that is needed to rescue O'Casey from his own insistent self-mythologisation.

Pilkington's approach pays further dividends as he moves into mid-century. While histories of Irish drama that take a reified printed script as their focus find themselves running thin on material in the Ireland of the 1930s, '40s and '50s, Pilkington's focus on the relationship of theatre and nation-state finds much that is both new and important in the decades immediately after independence, during which an Irish state was in the process of defining itself. Similarly, while many accounts of Irish drama can find little to write about in relation to Northern Ireland other than the ubiquitous "Troubles play," Pilkington once again finds much that forces us to reconsider our views by concentrating on the ways in which the Northern state created its own theatre culture, whether through theatre companies like the Ulster Literary Theatre or the Lyric Theatre, or through funding bodies such as the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Lionel Pilkington's *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland* is thus among the most important of the recent spate of books on Irish theatre. By concentrating on the theatre as an institution (as opposed to confining himself to plays either as dramatic texts or as autonomous aesthetic objects), he is able to make a sustained, convincing, and resolutely materialist case for the role of the theatre in construction of the nation-state (both North and South), without recourse to explanations that involve "Irish character", an Irish love of language, or any of the other unconvincing essentialist generalisations that are so often trotted out to explain what makes an Irish theatre Irish. This is a book which takes seriously both the real, material existence of the theatre, and of the nation-state in which it is staged. One thus closes its final pages wondering if in its materiality, the theatre will prove to be a bulwark against the virtual cultural economies of globalisation.

Note:

¹ Bruce McConachie, "Theatre History and the Nation-State", *Theatre Research International* 20:2, 142.

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Helen M. Burke, *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theatre, 1712-1784*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003. Paperback, 356pages. ISBN: 0268040168. USD\$ 35.00.

Reviewed by Raymond GILLESPIE

The history of Irish theatre before the twentieth century has, at last, become a rather fashionable subject. This is the fourth important book on the subject in the last few years following on Christopher Wheatley's *Beneath Ierne's Banners* (Notre Dame, 1999), Alan J. Fletcher's *Drama, Performance and Polity in pre-Cromwellian Ireland* (Cork and Toronto, 2000) and Christopher Morash's magisterial *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (Oxford, 1002). Why this upsurge of interest should have happened now is a difficult question to answer. At least some of the explanation may be found in the increasing sensitivity by both historians and literary critics to the importance of performance and the role of the audience, a sensitivity learnt, in part, from symbolic anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz. Field anthropologists are well aware of the importance of small but significant responses, such as the wink, in the process of telling the story and this sensitivity has now transferred itself to the study of the Irish stage. As Prof Burke puts it the book is "an attempt to uncover the embedded significance of behaviours and practices that have been dismissed as irrational, meaningless or folkloric in standard theatre histories." This she proceeds to do in eight well-focused and clearly written chapters which propound a view of Irish theatre, of the reactions of its audiences to what they saw, and indeed of Irish society generally, in the middle of the eighteenth century.

The approach to the problem of the nature of eighteenth-century Irish society as measured by audience reaction to stage performances is truly eclectic. In some cases the examination is, in some ways, a straightforward political interpretation, albeit from an unusual and interesting perspective. In the first chapter, for instance, Burke argues that from the "riot" at the performance of *Tamerlane* in November 1712 a sense of popular Protestant "patriotism," which was so clearly displayed later in the century, was present at an earlier date than is usually acknowledged. Other approaches to this problem include the question of dress as it appeared on stage, in chapter two, and music as it was performed in the third chapter. The remainder of the book uses the theatre as a way of exploring how audiences forged a world in reaction to what they saw on stage and how the stage in turn reflected what audiences felt as Irish political and social life was realigned in the eighteenth century. This, she argues, created a commonality of interest between different voices in Ireland. Thus, by the end of the book the "anticolonialist" voice of the Volunteers is revealed in the rituals that cluster around a number of performances on the Dublin stage in 1784. It was this which, Burke argues, forced the passage of the Theatre Act of 1786 which attempted to neuter the theatre in Ireland as a political tool and had a far reaching impact on the way in which the history of Irish theatre is written.

This is, to my mind, an excellent, and provocative book.

Its claim to use the disturbances surrounding the stage as a way of understanding the popular voice is an innovative and attractive idea. It is all the more so because although the book is informed by modern theoretical perspectives it shows an understanding of the historical context of the events which it describes. Its inclusion of music and dress in the discussion of political attitudes in the early eighteenth century is innovative, although clearly a matter of concern to contemporaries. The most significant achievement of this book is that it provides a way of looking at popular protest in eighteenth century Dublin (since the provincial stage is not touched on here) by considering audience reactions. Whether the mob was as politicised or as rational as this book suggests is another question which needs to be answered with more intensive interrogation of newspapers and other sources and the deployment of other perspectives as well. It is difficult, for instance, to disentangle the varying sorts of Protestants in the audiences and it is clear not all reacted in the same way to what Burke calls the "neocolonial" attempts of the London government to rule Ireland. I am not sure, for example, that the riot of 1712 "can also be regarded as a defining moment in the struggle to create a stage for *all* the people of Ireland" (51 italics in original). For this argument to work would require a level of politicisation which it is difficult to identify before Swift's use of the printing press in the 1720s spread such sentiments widely. Again the Protestant use of "Gaelic" symbols on stage may not have 'created an image of a society that was inclusive and intercultural' (p. 263) in the 1780s. Such symbols had been happily appropriated by Protestant Ireland long before they appeared on the stage. It is worth recalling that this was a Protestant Ireland that still read the works of James Ussher and was very clear that St Patrick was a Protestant. Again by the early eighteenth century the quintessential historical defence of Catholic Ireland, Geoffrey Keating's history of pre-Norman Ireland, was circulating in an English translation in which the word "Catholic" had been systematically replaced with the word "Protestant." Protestant Ireland, even in the late eighteenth century, had a habit of stealing other people's clothes to dress itself up rather than to empathise with the owner.

This is a genuinely original and exciting book from a number of perspectives. Its conclusions will undoubtedly be the subject of debate as, indeed, is the nature of eighteenth-century Irish society. The historical problem of whether eighteenth century Ireland was a colony run by England, an ancien regime society with its own deep sectarian divisions or a mixture between the two is a long way from being resolved. This book makes a distinguished contribution to that debate from an important perspective.

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