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NEIL JORDAN: A DISCUSSION OF
DOMINANT THEMES IN A SELECTION OF
HIS WORK.

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Neil Jordan's name has become synonymous with Irish film making. His international success has been unmatched by most of his Irish contemporaries. It seems extraordinary therefore, that Jordan emerged on the film scene in 1982, with the successful Angel, from virtually nowhere. Jordan was foremost a writer. His collection of short stories entitled, Night In Tunisia (1976), was awarded the Guardian fiction prize in 1979. He had an early career as a playwright, and also made a documentary on John Boorman's film, Excalibur, in 1981. However, Jordan had no long history of a struggling film career, and this, coupled with the fact that he, a writer, received the first Irish film making grant, led to much resentment of him by contemporaries and by the Irish film scene of the early eighties.

Nevertheless I feel that it is Jordan's literary background that accounts for some of his most accomplished and interesting cinema, although it must also be admitted that some of the more unsuccessful and problematic aspects of Jordan's films find their roots in his rich literary imagination.

Jordan is very much concerned with portraying the fantastical, the imaginative and the dreamlike. His novels and his stories are written in elaborate and beautifully descriptive language, and are rich in unorthodox imagery. I feel that Jordan tries to express the same poeticism in his cinema, visually as well as in the narrative. While the results of this attempt may not be as resolved in the films as they are in the writings, they are never dull.

Jordan merits discussion as an Irish film maker who is relating, themes which apply to Ireland, to more universal ones. Three of the films, Angel, The Miracle and The Crying Game are set in Ireland, but each deals with more encompassing, unspecifically Irish themes. The writings too, relate to universal human experiences. Frequently Jordan seems to refer to his own Irish background. The seaside resorts he inhabited as a child, and the popular music of the time, play a major part in the Night in Tunisia stories and in the film The Miracle. Perhaps, too, Jordan's preoccupation with discussions of adolescent sexual awakening and homosexuality refer to the strict, repressive climate of Catholic Ireland in those years.

I have decided not to examine the works in chronological order. It seems more sensible, and more interesting to look at the work in terms of identifying and relating predominant themes. There is a fluidity of concerns which refer back and forth between the films and the writings. I have separated these concerns into four chapters each discussing a dominant theme or aspect of the works.

The works I have chosen to discuss are the novella, The Dream of a Beast (1983), the short story Night in Tunisia (1976) and the films, Angel (1982), The Company of Wolves (1984), Mona Lisa (1986), The Miracle (1990) and The Crying game (1992).

The themes are, transformation, the clash between reality and unreality, violence in relation to Northern Ireland and Sexuality.

CHAPTER 1: TRANSFORMATION

The first theme I wish to identify, is one which I will call transformation.

Jordan's characters often seem to change or adapt themselves to a situation or environment. On the other hand they may transform to escape a situation. A character may adapt naturally, perhaps growing away from something, and finding appeasement with themselves. In contrast they may undergo an unnatural, and sometimes forced transformation which may be detrimental to them.

This theme of transformation may be found, in some guise, throughout Jordan's work. It may take the form of a psychological transformation, set in a modern environment, such as that of George in Mona Lisa. He emerges from prison and is forced to adapt to a changed world. On the other hand, the work may discuss a physical and fantastical metamorphosis, such as that of the huntsman who changes to a wolf in The Company of Wolves. Usually Jordan's transformations involve elements of both the realistic and the imaginary.

Through this theme, Jordan wishes to explore the effects of intense human experiences on his characters, and also to explore the roots of certain kinds of human behaviour. Frequently Jordan's protagonists are confronted with extreme harsh realities. Characters may face traumas such as violence or death. Some characters cope and survive, some escape and some are destroyed.

Literal fairy tale-like transformations befall the narrator in The Dream of a Beast, and Rosaleen in The Company of Wolves.

Jordan's novella, The Dream of a Beast, tells the tale of a man who is beginning to feel alienated from the world around him. He feels restricted by his domestic environment, which, since he lives with his wife and daughter, seems to him overbearingly female. The narrator's relationship with his wife worsens as the story progresses. He seems to only have contact with his daughter at bedtime and we sense that she confuses him with the mythical creatures that inhabit her dreams. He feels divorced from the humdrum reality of the city around him. He longs to break away from his responsibilities. He finds comfort and freedom in the time he has alone. He also has a sexual encounter with a business acquaintance. He feels excitement and liberation with this woman.

Paralleled to these emotional changes, the protagonist undergoes a strange transformation into some kind of fantastical beast. As the beast, he seems to act more freely and impulsively. The tensions between the narrator and his wife Marianne worsen. Marianne becomes frustrated, unable to understand his change. Frustrated, she eventually entraps him in their bedroom. The beast escapes and pursues a new life in a somewhat dream-like world. He hides out near a boiler house and befriends a young boy who works there. The story ends when the narrator encounters his wife once more, and they seem to accept each other as they walk side by side through the dream world.

The novella draws on many fairy tale motifs. The narrator's transformation is almost a reversal of the Beauty and the Beast fable, where beauty meets beast and finds he has a kind heart underneath his beastly exterior. The enchantment is then broken and the beast transforms into a handsome prince. Jordan's 'beauty' is Marianne. She is married to a man who is changing away from his identity as husband and father, into a person she feels alienated from.

For the narrator, the beast seems to represent feelings and urges that marriage and domesticity have forced him to suppress. He experiences feelings of entrapment, of desire for another woman, and of desire to shake off his everyday roles at home and at work. The physical manifestations of his transformation, are stereotypically macho features; bulging biceps, a hairy face and hairy limbs.

His home environment is described as stereotypical feminine. Elaborate passages in the novel describe Marianne dressing and undressing. Scattered around their bedroom lie female garments which he finds disturbing. He often dreams of being trapped by women wearing items such as stiletto heels and flowing gowns.

Marianne is delicate and frail, compared to the narrators beast-like form, "her fingers were long and bony, but soft with the softness of her white neck." (Neil Jordan, 1983, p.10). She seems bruised and hurt by the change in him but she is also wary and defensive. They find difficulty in communicating. often he seems to try to explain to Marianne, something of his experiences, but the words never seem to reach his lips.

Jordan uses small gestures and confrontations between the couple to illustrate very effectively the tension which separates them: "I touched her neck where the hair curled round it. She withdrew slightly and shivered." (Neil Jordan, 1983, p.6). The breakdown within the narrator's home seems to mirror a larger breakdown in the society of the city where he lives. It seems a very bleak grim city, perhaps a transformed Dublin, where armed soldiers patrol. The people he encounters on the streets seem to repeat the same conversations, and all seem to dwell on the past.

The protagonist at first seems to be a fairly weak and retiring person. He appears to constantly mould himself into a shape that will please others. Many references in the novella suggest that he has compromised his own nature, personality, or desires, to fit in with conventional domestic life: "I have always been considerate of others. My urge to spare their feelings will drive me to outlandish lengths." (Neil Jordan, 1983, P.23).

Passages describing the adventures of the beast contrast starkly with the humdrum activities of the man. It is as if the narrator becomes another person. During his encounter with his lover at the zoo, she unwraps the bandages he has used to cover up his strange appearance. The scene is exotic and surreal as they make love: "she gave a small cry as of a bird released and all the green parrots flew into the air at once, ...we lay there brute and beauty." (Neil Jordan 1983, p.41). Even after the joy he shares with his lover, she too is female and feminine and he feels alienated from her.

The narrator's daughter, Matilde, cries for his bedtime stories of unicorns and mythical beasts. She shows fascination and not fear, for these creatures. Matilde seems to also be at puberty, a time of transformation in life. Childishly she yearns for bedtime stories, but she also shows a curiosity which is not childlike. Since her father's transformation makes the association between man and beast, perhaps her fascination is also for the male. This idea is further compounded by Matilde's sleepwalking intrusions on her parents. She seems to confuse her father, with the beast from his stories, and with her own dreams, but these dreams are "never nightmares". (Neil Jordan, 1983, p.31)

So Matilde's dreams explore her curiosities and the beast of her dreams represents a sexual awakening. She intrudes on her parents love-making:

"We made the beast with two backs
then and somewhere in between our
cries another cry was heard, a little
more urgent, Matilde was standing in
the doorway still in her dream"

(Neil Jordan 1983, p.10)

Since Matilde is changing into a woman, and since the narrator cannot meet the needs of his wife, perhaps he fears that she too will fail to understand him. He fears alienation from the female world. He also feels guilt for the breakdown in his family life. His dreams echo his feelings of entrapment and of guilt. On one occasion he dreams that he involuntarily drowns his wife and child:

"The grayness oozed from the keys
...I saw their hair, turned just
above the matter in the shape of
a fleur de lys. It bound and
unbound itself as if in final
parting then too went under."

(Neil Jordan, 1983, p.53)

Matilde also represents the middle ground between the couple yet they do not unite for her benefit. Instead she becomes another contributing factor to the tension

between them. There seems to be a rivalry for her affections. At one point Marianne refuses to let the narrator see the child. He begs her and finally she allows him to come upstairs. As he looks in on the child however, Marianne attacks him, aided by a baking tin and a stiletto heel, objects from the female world. She locks him in their bedroom. There he ponders his alienation, "woman and the world that word implied had become as strange a bestiary to me as the world I had become." (Neil Jordan, 1983,p.48)

So the protagonist leaves this female restricting domain for a new liberated existence. The boy he befriends seems to represent a male bond that he lacked or sought, perhaps the son he never had. The beast seems to become more chameleon like. He adopts traits that he formerly possessed as a man, he seems to change shape to suit his company or his environment. He changes, especially to please the boy, and his lover who visits him again.

Nevertheless this new existence does not remain idyllic. The beast's lover deserts him and the boy dies. Both beast and boy seem to fuse into one: "When the time came that I knew the boy was dying, I wrapped myself fully round him, assumed him into myself." (Neil Jordan, 1983, p.100). As the beast walks forward through a surreal but heavenly world, he encounters Marianne who tells him that Matilde is inside her. They walk forward, together, through this realm.

The fanciful transformation of this man seems to be a positive experimental process which leads him to find peace with his identity. He moves from domestic restriction to a somewhat anarchic freedom. Each character he meets, perhaps holds a lesson, or a way of understanding for him to learn. His new lover teaches him to reveal himself when she unwraps the bandages he hides behind. Additionally, she tells him

her story, a woman's story, and perhaps through her lesson, he is able to understand and re-embrace Marianne. Through the young boy, the narrator appears to remember his youth, and to understand adolescence once more. The boy dies, and hence youth dies, but it remains inside the man. Similarly Matilde remains inside Marianne.

Jordan's message seems to be that individual transformation can be possible and positive, even within the restrictions of the family. By revealing the beast within him, the protagonist allows his true feelings to come forth. By assuming innocence and childhood understanding into themselves, both characters achieve mutual understanding.

In The Company of Wolves Jordan also explores a fantastical, fairy tale transformation involving beasts and a beauty. Rosaleen, like Matilde, is a pubescent girl, who falls asleep and enters a dream world where her curiosities and fantasies come true.

The film is based on a collection of short stories entitled, The Bloody Chamber, by Angela Carter, and the script was co-written by Carter and Jordan. The film also expands on the Little Red Riding Hood fable.

Rosaleen tosses and turns on her bed, her lips painted red, and a teen magazine abandoned beside her. She is surrounded by her toys, a teddy bear and a granny doll among them. Rosaleen's sister bangs on the bedroom door, and mocks her. Their Alsatian dog barks and whines outside. The film then enters Rosaleen's dream. Her sister, clad in a white dress, runs through a forest of phallic trees. She arrives at an opening, where she encounters some of Rosaleen's toys, enlarged and come to life.

Wolves howl in the background. They chase the girl and eventually pounce on her. Rosaleen's dream world double lives with her mother and father in a medieval village at the edge of a huge surreal forest. After her sister's funeral, Rosaleen goes to stay with her grandmother who lives in the middle of the wood. Grandma tells Rosaleen stories of wolves and warns of werewolves, men whose eyebrows meet in the middle.

Rosaleen is constantly curious, and unafraid to explore the forbidden. As she embarks on her final journey to Grandma's house, she is warned not to stray from the safe path. A little way into the forest she encounters a huntsman. He makes a wager with her that should he arrive at Grandma's house before her, she must kiss him. Rosaleen agrees and takes the safe path. The huntsman, who is a werewolf, arrives at the house first and kills Grandma. Rosaleen is forced to fulfill her part of the wager, but she manages to shoot the huntsman. He transforms back into a wolf. Rosaleen's mother arrives at the cottage and sees two wolves leap out of the window. The sleeping Rosaleen awakens, screaming, as wolves invade her bedroom.

The film is a fairy tale exploration of a young girl's journey through adolescence, and of the feelings that become awakened along that journey. The story abounds with potent, poetic symbolism. Rosaleen is still surrounded by her childhood toys, yet she has begun to read teenage magazines, and has smeared her lips with lipstick. She is at a confusing age of change, torn between childhood and maturity. As Rosaleen's sister runs through the forest we see white dresses stained with red, hanging from the trees, symbols of menstruation perhaps, but also evoking ideas of virginity and innocence lost.

After the funeral Rosaleen walks with her Grandma through the woods. Grandma laments, "Your only sister alone in the woods, no one to save her, poor little lamb".

Rosaleen retorts, "and why couldn't she save herself?" (The Company of Wolves, 1984). Rosaleen is not a lamb, but a daredevil, constantly questioning and exploring. Sometimes her questions seem innocent, those of a child, but often they seem more layered.

Grandma warns her of the worst kind of wolves who are, "hairy on the inside" (The Company of Wolves, 1984). As Grandma weaves her stories she makes Rosaleen a blood red, hooded cape. Grandma's role is to protect Rosaleen. She is like a life sized replica of the granny doll from the 'real' Rosaleen's bedroom. Grandma wishes to preserve her grandchild's innocence by warning her of beasts and men. Rosaleen proves herself capable of protecting herself and of deciding her own fate.

The wolf is Grandma's symbol of temptation, of evil and of sexuality. All the stories told link the wolf with men, and with sexuality or sexual acts. Grandma tells one story in particular of a woman who married a werewolf, but didn't know. The man disappeared on their wedding night while she waited for him to return and make love to her. Many years later he did return to find the woman remarried and alone with her children. The man became angry and changed into a wolf but the woman's second husband returned and beheaded the beast. The head fell into a cauldron and resurfaced as a human head. The husband hit his wife. The woman of this story, therefore, suffered for her relationship with a wolf man. The blame was laid upon her. Girls who play with wolves deserve their punishment, Grandma seems to say. Rosaleen makes the connection between man and beast, but does not see it in a sinister light. She begins to tell her own stories or to re-interpret her Grandma's. Rosaleen seems unafraid of beasts or men. She defies the warnings of her elders, straying from the safe path to tease her admirer, a boy from the village. On this particular excursion through the woods, the camera follows Rosaleen from behind.

The spectator is in the boy's position, frantically chasing after Rosaleen as she runs through the undergrowth. Quite suddenly, however, the view is changed. We are in Rosaleen position, high up in a tree, we sense Rosaleen's power and confidence.

Rosaleen's mother tells her not to take her Grandmother's stories too seriously "If there's a beast in men then it meets its match in women", she tells Rosaleen (The Company of Wolves 1984). Rosaleen later proves these words for herself when she encounters the beast.

As Rosaleen adopts the storytellers role, we sense a greater maturity in her. She tells her mother a story as if she is the elder, and her mother the child. She tells the story of a woman who, was made pregnant by a local lord, and then abandoned. With a protruding belly, she arrives at the lord's wedding and tells her story to the guests. She then changes them all into wolves. Rosaleen's mother asks what pleasure could come from such an act. Rosaleen tell her that the woman made the wolves serenade her and her infant every night. "The pleasure would come from knowing the power she possessed" Rosaleen remarks, (The Company of Wolves, 1984,). This power is one which Rosaleen comes to possess and it realises its full potential when she confronts the werewolf. It is a sexual power and one of knowledge. In contrast to Grandma's story, the woman here gains revenge on the man for abandoning her. She is not punished for her sexuality.

Rosaleen's mother prepares her for what will be her last journey through the woods. She wraps the red hooded cape carefully around Rosaleen's shoulders, and places a silver cross around her neck. It is as if the mother, knowingly prepares her daughter to do battle with the wolf. Like the heroines of the fables of Little Red Riding Hood, Alice in Wonderland and Beauty and the Beast, Rosaleen sets off on a symbolic

journey through the woods. As she enters a quite mystical snow covered forest, a white rabbit hops across her path. Other creatures, snakes, lizards and frogs appear from the undergrowth. Finally the huntsman surprises her and persuades her to stray from the path with him.

Grandma battles bravely against the werewolf, but loses. However, she doesn't seem to die, but simply smashes to pieces like a china doll, again, perhaps the grandma doll from the room of the sleeping Rosaleen. With the safe haven of Grandma's house in the wolf's control, Rosaleen is forced into a showdown. She is caught in a 'no-man-land', which is neither the wolf's territory nor hers. This confusion mirrors her stage of life, torn between the world of the adult and the child. The huntsman is also unsure of where he belongs, he is neither man nor beast. "I come and go between them, my home is nowhere", her tells her. (The Company of Wolves, 1984)

Rosaleen tells the wounded animal the story of a she-wolf who came up from the underworld in search of food and was wounded. She hid out in a graveyard and was discovered by the priest, who took pity on her. He tended to her wound, even though they were from opposing worlds. "After all she was just a girl who had strayed from the path and remembered what she found there", Rosaleen comments (The Company of Wolves, 1984).

So the she-wolf again contrasts to the beasts of Granny's stories. Rosaleen's she-wolf is just a girl who strayed, she is not to be condemned for the knowledge she found. The story is also Rosaleen's story. Rosaleen has found out for herself what lies beyond the path, and it is not a beast that drags a person to hell, but a wolf that cries. Rosaleen chooses her own destiny and elopes with the wolf.

CHAPTER 2: REALITY VERSUS FANTASY

One other notable thematic aspect of The Company of Wolves, is the tension between Rosaleen's dream world and her real existence. This theme, the relationship between the real and the surreal, occurs frequently in Jordan's work. Characters often seem to submerge and emerge from two opposing worlds of fantasy and reality. Jordan has spoken about this theme in relation to the films, Mona Lisa, Angel and The Company of Wolves:

"They are basically about the clash
between the real world and the world
of imagination and unreality, the
conflict between dreams and reality.
The constant concern is to do with
realistic and surrealistic explanations
of human behaviour."

(Neil Jordan, 1988, p.114)

So within this theme, Jordan is primarily concerned with portraying characters who live between fantasy and reality. He explores the way in which both their real experiences and their fantasies influence their actions. A character may mistake fantasy for reality but through the course of a work he or she may find this illusion destroyed and reality exposed. The individual may emerge somewhat heroically, to face reality, or he/she may be totally destroyed by it. In Jordan's work, the world of fantasy may also represent an escape for a character, or a means for that individual to explore certain feelings or concerns, perhaps even to adopt a new persona.

Let us first return to The Company of Wolves to examine this theme.

Rosaleen finds, within her dream a path of sexual discovery. Rosaleen's dream persona, wishes to explore and experiment with out care, and possibly she acts out desires which the real Rosaleen cannot. Rosaleen comes to reject the old wives tales of her grandmother and their condemnation of the wolf. She challenges these fantasies and develops her own opinions.

Jordan's films are stories with characters who, like Rosaleen, seem to rewrite their own tales. Similarly Jordan's fiction writing often refers to other media. Sometimes to cinematic images and most importantly to popular music. Throughout the works, we find Jordan's protagonists linked to some form of artistic process such as music, storytelling, writing and singing. They have outlets for their creativity and their fantasies. Dreaming, which we may consider as a creative process, also recurs.

Rosaleen's outlet is dreaming, and within that dream she creates her own story and her own truths, through adventure and encounter. "They say seeing is believing but I don't believe them", she tells the huntsman in Granny's house. (The Company of Wolves, 1984). Rosaleen's believing is testing, touching and trying things for herself.

Grandma and Rosaleen use stories to explain their thoughts on the wolf and on sexuality. Therefore, Rosaleen's stories are another outlet for her exploration of her own sexuality. The motif of storytelling continually arises in Jordan's work.(1) In The Company of Wolves the storytelling adds to the strange layering of fantasy within the dream itself.

Within the dream aspects of these tales seem to come true or to appear in another guise. Paul Taylor has commented that the fractured storytelling narrative of the film suggests: "the piecemeal and partial process by which adolescent self-knowledge is acquired". (Paul Taylor, 1984). However, in addition I feel the storytelling refers to a childish blurring of the distinction between the real and the fantastical. Rosaleen is at an age between child and adult, therefore she is emerging from a world of fantasy, innocence and wonder, into one of reality and maturity.

So the beast becomes for Rosaleen, not an evil to be feared, but an image with less sinister associations. The beast becomes more human to her.

The head of a wolf turns into a man's head in one of Granny's stories. Similarly Rosaleen's father cuts the paw from a captured wolf and finds, it too, transforms into a human hand, "'Was is a man or a wolf you killed?" asks Rosaleen, "Do we bury it or burn it?" (*The Company of Wolves*, 1984). Fantasies and realities are strangely confused, just as beast and man are confused.

The first episode of Rosaleen's dream, signifies that reality affects her fantasy. Rosaleen's sister thumps on her bedroom door and shouts mockingly at Rosaleen. Rosaleen tosses and turns and dreams up a forest where wolves howl and giant toys molest her sister. As the wolves descend on the frantic girl, the film flashes back to Rosaleen, who smiles mischievously in her sleep. At the end of the film wolves from the dream world crash into Rosaleen's bedroom. She awakens screaming. Her scream is perhaps a scream of horror at what would happen if all our subverted fantasies came true. Jordan also reminds us that just as the real influences the imaginary, imagination and fantasy play a part in everyone's reality.

In Angel, Danny's creative outlet is playing saxophone with a showband. He is gifted, according to his manager, Ray, and his lover, the band's singer, Deirdre. However, by swapping his musical identity for another more sinister role, Danny loses this gift.

The film, set in Northern Ireland opens at the Dreamland Ballroom. A young deaf mute girl, Annie, watches Danny and the band unloading their van. Danny brings her inside. After the gig, Danny goes outside to look for Deirdre. Annie surprises him, sneaking up behind him. Danny turns to kiss her, thinking she is Deirdre. When he sees her face he pulls away, but Annie leads him to a patch of grass, and, we presume, they make love.

Later, Danny and Annie sit in the shelter of some concrete pipes. They witness Ray being dragged out into the empty car park and shot by terrorists. A dazed Annie begins to walk towards the killers. Annie is shot by them, and as the gang drive off the ballroom explodes. Danny is stunned by the shooting. He sees flashbacks of the men's feet, and recalls that one of them wore an orthopaedic shoe. The detectives, Bloom and Bonner, question him in hospital. Danny becomes obsessed by Annie's death. He begins to seek out and kill the gang members, one by one. He lives, as if in a trance, moving from his role as musician to his role as killer. In the end Danny discovers he has been used as a puppet by one of the detectives, Bloom.

After Danny kills his first victim, he steals the victim's gun. He later takes his saxophone from its case and places the gun inside. This symbolic swap of instruments represents a swap of identities for Danny, from creative, angelic musician to destructive, demonic killer.

Avenging a lover's death is as age old theme in cinema, but Danny's story is a reassessment of this theme. Revenge, through the taking up of arms, is often a means of cleansing the soul, for our more typical hero. It may bring him to redemption, and enable him to make a new start. Danny, in contrast, is an anti-hero. For him taking up the gun is the first step in his own self destruction. Danny pursues a confused, dream-like path, often discovering his victims as if by accident.

The clash between reality and unreality in the film, lies in Danny's existence in two opposing worlds. The world of his music and his old identity, seems to become more surreal and false as the story progresses. The world of his violence becomes a harsh reality, a world which seems to engulf him. Danny's new role of avenger seems to be based on the false assumption that it will lead him to find comfort and perhaps a reason for Annie's death. However, he comes to lose sight of any cause for which to kill yet still continues his violent quest, as if under a spell. So Danny moves between two worlds, existing somewhere in between.

The Dreamland Ballroom seems to signal the film's entrance into a surreal world. With pink glowing lights, against a barren landscape, it looks like a mirage. Inside the ballroom pastel lights shine on the band and on the dancing crowd. Later, Danny's encounter with Annie has all the qualities of an enchanted, fairy tale, love scene. Out in the moonlight underneath the 'wishing tree', Annie surprises Danny. Her face is wide eyed and innocent and her dress is girlish. She pulls him to the ground and they embrace. The illusory quality of these scenes contrast sharply with later episodes. After Danny becomes a killer, scenes involving the band's gigs become more surreal and disturbing. The band's outfits seem more exaggerated and gaudy, as if to heighten the falsity of Danny's identity. The lighting is often more sombre, even sinister.

Before a gig at a holiday camp, Deirdre and Danny enter the dance hall. They begin to join in on a ballroom dancing competition. The music stops and they are asked to leave the floor. The older people look on as Deirdre and Danny continue to dance, in their own world. The scene alludes to another, typical cinematic story gone wrong. Deirdre and Danny seem to step back in time, becoming dancing lovers who capture everyone's heart with their dance. Deirdre and Danny are not the idyllic couple however. Danny is isolated in a world of his own, one which Deirdre knows nothing about.

Other sinister scenes follow when the band prepare for a gig, which is to take place in a public hall, in the grounds of a mental hospital. Danny sits alone, playing random notes on his saxophone. Some of the patients enter and stare at Danny their faces blank. Danny continues to play, staring back at them with the same empty expression. It is as if he identifies with the patients. He too is living in a surreal world of his own. In the hospital garden Danny kisses Deirdre. "You're nuts", she tells him. "Yes, like them", he replies as he turns her round to see two more patients gazing vacantly at them. (Angel, 1982)

The violent scenes in the film are lit more harshly, and most occur outdoors. Danny is no longer the smoothly dressed musician, but is always pale and bedraggled. The dialogue between him and his victims often sounds crazed and frenzied yet they seem to identify with one another. ""We know where the badness is, don't we?", John, one of the killers, asks Danny." (Angel, 1982). Both John and Danny share a common ability to kill without emotion for their victims. The badness seems to lie within them both.

In the film, this 'badness' is also related to the supernatural, again implying tat it is a surreal and strange force which Danny has become immersed in. This also suggests that Danny is possessed and not responsible for his actions, like the patients in the mental hospital. Danny's Aunt Mae speaks of a sinister power, the 'nobodaddy'. To her it is an evil which lurks everywhere, and which has its potential in everyone. (Angel, 1982).

The real world holds Danny's creative identity, and the affections of his lover, Deirdre, but it also holds memories of death and horror. Instead of finding comfort in those around him and in his music, Danny seeks to escape these memories by immersing himself in a world of destruction. Entering a trance-like state, he seems to set himself an abstract mission of revenge. Nevertheless, ultimately this surreal existence proves not to be an escape, but to lead him back to where he started. In the end Danny is forced to face reality at the shell of the burnt our ballroom, where his journey began.

CHAPTER 3: VIOLENCE AND NORTHERN IRELAND

For any artist in Britain or Ireland, it is difficult to produce a work which addresses the delicate subject of political violence in Northern Ireland. Whether the artist attempts to produce a politically unbiased, neutral work, or chooses to approach the subject from a particular political viewpoint, her or she is guaranteed some negative responses from all quarters.

While in America The Crying Game was hailed as a challenging thriller and as a discussion of homosexuality, in these islands it was seen in a completely different light. Many critics felt its portrayal of terrorism was problematic. Angel too received criticism for its attempt to discuss a universal violence, without specific discussion of Northern Ireland's own troubles:

"By attempting to show all violence
as the same, irrespective of political
context or motivation, the film
defied the possibility of any political
explanation, and indeed, any political
solution, to the conflicts"

(John Hill, 1987, p.180)

In both films Jordan is addressing themes which are more central to his main characters, Fergus in The Crying Game, and Danny in Angel. Northern Ireland becomes a backdrop for their more personal, stories of violence. Jordan does not offer a political solution for the widespread violence in the North, as John Hill suggests he should. Instead the director offers more personal solutions for each

character. This chapter will examine Jordan's exploration of violence and the motivation behind it, in relation to both Fergus and Danny.

The Crying Game opens in a fairground in Northern Ireland. Jody is a black, British soldier who is being decoyed by Jude, a blonde woman, for an I.R.A. group. Jody is captured and brought to the group's hideout. He is told that he is to be held as hostage in response to the capture of an I.R.A. leader by the R.U.C.. Jody refuses at first to eat or talk, but eventually begins to talk to Fergus one of the gunmen. Fergus and Jody spend many hours together, and they form a bond. Jody shows Fergus a photo of his girlfriend, Dil. When Jody is told he is to be shot he asks Fergus to look Dil up and to tell her he was thinking of her. Jody is marched out into the forest by Fergus. He begins to run and Fergus chases him, unsure of whether to shoot or to let him go. Jody makes it to the road, but is struck by a British tank. Fergus flees as tanks and helicopters arrive and open fire.

The film then shifts to England where Fergus takes work on a building site. He seeks Dil out and they have a drink together in the local 'Metro' bar. Fergus and Dil are attracted to one another and their relationship progresses. However, Fergus is shocked to discover that Dil is a transvestite. Their relationship continues but on a confused level.

Fergus's anonymity is destroyed when Jude and Maguire, from the I.R.A. group track him down. They threaten to shoot Dil unless Fergus does one last job for them, the assassination of a British Judge. Fergus tries to protect Dil by disguising her and moving her to a hotel, but a drunken Dil wanders back to her own flat. There Fergus confesses to her the story of his involvement in Jody's death. The next morning Fergus awakens to find that Dil has tied him to the bed. He is unable to leave and

consequently Maguire carries out the assassination and is, himself, killed. An enraged Jude arrives at the flat wielding a gun and Dil shoots her. Fergus tells Dil to leave the flat and he waits for the police to arrive. The film ends with Dil visiting Fergus in prison.

Both films present us with a negative view of violence. Angel portrays a violence which is as destructive to its instigator as it is to its victim. As we have seen Danny seeks comfort in revenge but he becomes gradually eroded by his own path of violence.

Fergus's situation is in part a reversal of Danny's since he seeks to flee from his terrorist identity for a new anonymous existence. While hiding from his past, Fergus too seeks redemption. His path to deliverance however, is to carry out his victim's last wish. Nevertheless by tracking down Dil and looking after her, Fergus does not solve his problems. Instead he discovers that he cannot hide from the past and must face up to his former identity before he can leave it behind.

In both works the theme of transformation arises once more, both protagonists adopting new identities. Fergus's original identity is that of a soldier, never betraying too much emotion. Jody penetrates Fergus's surface easily, revealing something of his personality which denies his cold machine-like role. Fergus's new identity is to be lover and protector of Dil, yet once again Fergus tries to hide truth about himself. Dil's actions force him to face up to the truth and to his violent past.

Both Danny and Fergus realise that the victims of violence are not faceless. In different ways both characters seem to identify with their victims. It seems significant that Danny encounters all of his victims in places which connect with their normal, or

family lives. In each case this seems to create an intimacy between killer and victim. While Danny awaits George, his second victim, he wanders about the man's cottage examining photos and pictures on the walls. He confronts one of the killers, John, with his girlfriend. "How did you do it?", Danny asks him, "Its not that hard when you put your mind to it . You know yourself," John replies. (Angel, 1982) John continues to relate himself to Danny. He seems to ask if there is really any difference between his violence and Danny's violence: "y'see me and him, Beth, we know where the badness is, don't we?" (Angel, 1982).

Later, as Bonner, the leader of the gang dies, he clings to Danny:

Bonner: "stay with me"

Danny: "I can't"

Bonner: "I grew up around here"

Danny: "So did she"

(Angel, 1982)

Jordan seems to comment that both killer, Bonner, and victim, Annie, have the same origins. Through choosing to allow the violence within himself to come to the fore, Danny has become like his victims. Ultimately they reflect Danny's own conclusion. When faced with their death, each man seems unable to recall the cause behind their violence. Like him they seem numbed and confused. They are unable to give Danny the reasons for Annie's death, which he seeks. They cannot tell him what prompts them to be violent, but, like John, they explain it in terms of an abstract force.

As we have seen, throughout the film there are references to violence as an evil omnipresent force. When Aunt Mae reads Danny's cards, she tell him:

"I used to read them around
here till it got too uncomfortable.
they kept turning up black.
who wants to pay to see the
Ace of Spades?"

(Angel, 1982)

Mae sees the Ace of Spades in Danny's cards and he too becomes immersed in evil and violence. The detective Bloom, also sees violence and evil as untouchable: "its deep Danny, its everywhere and nowhere." (Angel, 1982). Bloom uses Danny as a puppet, to touch and trap part of that evil. Since Danny gets in touch with the evil within himself, he can penetrate the mystical force that Bloom speaks of. Danny's violence is closely linked to his identity as a creative musician, through it, he finds another means of escape:

Bloom: "You know Danny, you can go
places I never could. You
understand? ...A kind of poetic
licence."

(Angel, 1982)

Immersed in this violent identity, Danny can wander, like a spirit through a surreal underworld, seeking out kindred spirits and killings them.

Many of the characters Danny encounters, Bloom and Aunt Mae among them, talk to him in a paternal manner. They speak of their experience of violence and death.

Aunt Mae hides the Ace of Spades from Danny. Perhaps she hides it because she too feels guilty, partially responsibly for the omnipresent evil or for her nephew's particular situation. "I've lost the Knack," she tells him. "I've lost my saxophone," Danny tells her, "We've all lost something," she replies. (Angel, 1982). Perhaps the most potent speech in Angel is that made by Mary, the farm woman, who gives Danny food and clothes. She passes on to Danny a message of the futility of evil and hatred, a lesson which she learned too late:

"Hating is easy that's what I found out.
It has its own ways. It just grows. My
man who's clothes you're in. I
hated him for years. I'd stand beside
him at Mass and pray: 'Lord let me be free
of him'. Love is kind the priest told me
but I never felt it. Then he went. I felt."

(Angel, 1982)

In The Crying Game, Fergus and Jody become aware of the common ground between them. Firstly, Jody constantly refers to Fergus as 'Soldier', as if they are comrades fighting same battle. Their common involvement in violence unites them, but in many ways both captor and captive are outsiders within their respective armies. Fergus seems to be the odd-man-out in his I.R.A cell. He is rebuked by Maguire and by Jude for his unprofessional attitude to the prisoner. He is unable to carry out his duties as coldly as the others. Jody also makes references to himself as an outsider. His service duty in Northern Ireland is not chosen, but is compulsory. He has been abused because of his race, and now his life is threatened because of a job in which he had no choice:

Fergus: "Why did you sign up?"

Jody: "It was a job. So I got
sent to the only place in the
world they call you nigger
to your face."

(The Crying Game, 1992)

When Jody attempts to escape, he shouts at Fergus, "You wouldn't shoot a brother in the back." (The Crying Game, 1992). He does not need to ask for he knows that he has made a bond with Fergus.

Through Jody, Fergus comes to realise that behind each victim of violence there lies a personality. Perhaps through Dil he also learns something of the experiences of those a victim leaves behind. When Jude and Maguire catch up with him he can no longer carry out their mission as a cold hearted killer. The terrorists take him to the proposed assassination point and point out the target:

Fergus: "Who is he?"

Maguire: "Doesn't matter who he is
what we would call a
legitimate target."

Fergus: "Thank God for that."

(The Crying Game, 1992)

Fergus violence is something which he tries to escape from. he seems to achieve anonymity in England under the false name, Jimmy. However while comrades from his past find him, his own violent nature also re-emerges. Violence in The Crying

Game seems constantly entwined with sex and with power. Jody's only act of violence when captured is to attack Jude. Gagged and bound to a chair, Jody manages to writhe on top of a screaming Jude, calling her a bitch and a whore. He shows no aggression to the other terrorists. It is clear that he resents her because of the sexual power she held over him and used to lure him. Her power, unlike that of the other cell members, is a psychological one and not a physical one. Perhaps it is for this reason that Jody seems to resent, and even fear, her the most. So in a soldier-like way Jody goes for Jude's weakness, which is a physical one.

Fergus later enacts violence on Dil which seems to echo this resentment of sexual power. When Fergus discovers Dil's sexuality he is shocked to the point of nausea. Dil tries to console him and he kicks her, but Dil seems used to such treatment, she says: "It's alright Jimmy, I can take it, just not on the face." (The Crying Game, 1992). Fergus is indirectly responsible for other violence inflicted on Dil. The death of Jody left Dil vulnerable, hence Fergus discovers she is being abused by a thug, Dave. Fergus uses violence to drive Dave away, but then he himself is aggressive towards Dil. So violence seems to further compound Fergus's problem rather than solve them.

When Jude returns to Fergus's life, she has a new tougher look. She is cold blooded in her use of violence. She seems to desire power, perhaps a sexual power, over Fergus. Fergus shows no interest in her advances towards him however, so Jude settles for psychological power. She holds control over him by threatening to shoot Dil.

In Both films the sub plot of self discovery is central to the protagonists.(2) Both protagonists are not merely confronted with questions of their identity, but also face

questions of what is natural to them. What both Danny and Fergus discover, is that violence is not true to their nature, but leads to their own detriment. Danny realises too late that his destructive actions are alien to him. "That gun doesn't suit you.", Danny is told by George. Deirdre also speaks of a change in him as if he is under a spell." (Angel, 1982) By the time Danny meets Mary at her farm he is devoid of any reason or explanation for his actions. Danny's discovery is that his journey of violence has been futile and unnatural.

This sub-theme is raised to the surface through storytelling in The Crying Game. Early in the film Jody tells Fergus a parable-like story of a scorpion and a frog. The scorpion asks the frog to carry him across the river on his back. The frog refuses protesting that the scorpion would sting him. The scorpion explains that it would be foolish for him to sting the frog since then they would both drown. So the frog agrees, but halfway across the river he feels a burning spear in his side. He asks the scorpion why he has stung him. The scorpion replies: "I can't help it, its in my nature," and they both drown. (The Crying Game, 1992). Jody then asks Fergus to take off his hood: "cause you're kind, its in your nature," he tells his captor. (The Crying Game, 1992)

By wiping Dil's fingerprints from the gun used to shoot Jude, Fergus accepts responsibility for his past and gives way, once more, to his kind nature. When Dil visits him in prison she wonders why he has taken the blame for her actions:

Dil: "You're doing time for me.

No greater love, as the man says.

Wish you'd tell me why."

Fergus: "As the man says, its in my
nature."

(The Crying Game, 1992)

Fergus then recounts for Dil the story of the scorpion and the frog. The Crying Game seems to present a positive view of Fergus's transformation to a kinder self nature. Through his imprisonment he seems to make retribution for his violent past, and perhaps for Jody's death. The film seems to end on a hopeful note for Fergus and Dil yet it seems ironic that it is their separation that enables them to remain together. Fergus has far from reconciled with Dil's sexuality or with his own. Without a screen between them perhaps violence would return to their relationship.

Both films complete a circular journey. (3) Just as Danny's quest begins and ends at Dreamland Ballroom, Fergus's journey also ends as it started, but with a reversal of roles. Fergus as captor, found friendship with his captive, Jody, early in the film. The story ends with a captive Fergus and another new friend and potential lover, Dil. The film begins and ends with a theme of friendship attempting to overcome violence and political issues, as well as other factors.

To conclude, and in answer to John Hill's argument, mentioned above, it is obvious that neither of the films discussed make any radical political statement about the situation in Northern Ireland. I Feel that it was not the director's intention to make such a statement. It is clear that the main objective of both works, was to tell a story of violence and its roots within the individual. In The Crying Game Jordan refers to

a violence linked with sexuality and power, while in Angel he discussed violence as an abstract yet sinister force, that lies potentially in everyone. The experiences of Danny and Fergus are related to the wider context of Northern Ireland, but are also universal.

One statement which may be derived from the works is that of the futility and hopelessness of violence in any context. Danny becomes automaton, unsure of his motives for violence. Jordan seems to suggest that violence in the North has also lost its motives, continuing for so long, that many of the reasons for which the war there began have now become irrelevant. Danny's story is one which has repeated through generations. It was George's story and Mary's story before it became his. It is a story of futility. The Crying Game's message is perhaps a simple one. It is a story of bonding between three people who disallow their imposed causes to inhibit their friendship. In Jordan's own words it is a story of:

"The friendship that develops
between two protagonists in a
conflict, that grows paradoxically
deeper than any of their other
allegiances"

(Neil Jordan, 1993, p.xii)

CHAPTER 4: SEXUALITY

Discussions of sexuality are intrinsic to Jordan's work. Two main concerns of the artist are easily identifiable regarding this theme. Firstly Jordan is concerned with the confused awakening sexuality of the adolescent as we have already noted when discussing The Company of Wolves. This concern resurfaces in the Miracle, and in many of the stories form the Night in Tunisia collection. However, in these works Jordan portrays adolescent experiences from the perspective of the male. Secondly social issues such as racial and class differences, and sexual orientation separate Jordan's lovers or would-be lovers, in The Crying Game and Mona Lisa.

The Miracle is set in the seaside town of Bray in Wicklow. Many of the stories in the Night in Tunisia collection are also set in Irish summer resorts, relating to Jordan's own childhood summers.

The title story form the collection centers around a pubescent boy who returns with his father, (a saxophone player), and his sister, to one such resort. The boy becomes obsessed by an older girl, Rita, who was his childhood playmate in previous years. He senses awakening feelings of desire, for this girl, within him, feelings which he does not truly understand. The older boys, who hang out at the pier, call Rita a whore, a word which he has to ask his father to explain. The boy takes up playing the saxophone, which pleases his father immensely. As the boy's playing improves he begins to feel a new maturity in himself and to see a change in his physical appearance. His father pays him for learning the instrument. Clutching his money, the boy approaches Rita and the story seems to imply that they have a sexual encounter.

The Miracle seems to expand on this story. Jimmy, a boy of about fifteen lives with his father, Sam, who also plays saxophone. Jimmy believes that his mother died when he was young. The boy spends his days with his friend, Rose, inventing imaginary histories for the people they encounter along the seafront.

Jimmy becomes obsessed by a glamorous American woman, Renee, who they meet on the cliffs one day. Unknown to Jimmy, Renee is his mother. He mistakes her attention for romantic affection and pursues her relentlessly. Eventually Sam discovers that Renee has returned. Renee is an actress, playing Frenchy in a production of Destry Rides Again. Sam visits her at the theatre and begs her not to reveal her identity to Jimmy. Sam forbids Jimmy from seeing Renee, but Jimmy mistakes Sam's anger for jealousy and continues to see her.

Jimmy discovers, by accident, Renee's identity. Confused, he goes to a church and proclaims that he will not leave until something happens. He awakes later to find an elephant in the church. In a dramatic gesture Rose has released all the animals from the local circus, having stolen keys from one of the circus boys, Johnner, during sex. Jimmy and Rose walk on together, through the mayhem the animals are causing and begin once more to invent stories.

Foremost, both The Miracle and Night in Tunisia are Oedipal dramas. A maternal figure is absent from the homes of both boys. The boys seem to transfer a hidden desire for a mother figure, into desire for a romantic or sexual experience with an older woman. Each character seems to seek some sort of fulfillment that is lacking in their lives.

The Story's protagonist is lonely. He feels alienated from his older sister and from the older boys with whom he seeks company. He prefers not to join in their discussions of sex and girls, but to ponder silently his own sexual awakening.

The saxophone is a popular motif in Jordan's work. (4) To the boy it is his father's instrument, which at first holds no interest for him. Ultimately, however, by playing it he discovers a new music with, "no tunes only patterns like water that shift and settle." (Neil Jordan, 1979, p.70). This music alludes to natural rhythms and hence to the boy's natural sexual awakening and his transformation from boyhood to manhood. By teaching the boy, the father is responsible for his son's progression to maturity, and by paying his son he becomes indirectly responsible for the boy's first sexual encounter with Rita.

Rita becomes for the boy a symbol of his emotional and physical desires. One of the older boys likes to 'philosophise' about the opposite sex to the others:

"There were girls, he said, and women
and in between what he termed
lady, the lines of demarcation
finely and inexorably drawn."

(Neil Jordan, 1976, p.58)

The protagonist decides that Rita is "none of these of all of these at once." (Neil Jordan, 1976, p.58). To him she combines many roles. She was his childhood playmate, but she is now a woman and as such she is exotic and desirable. She is an outcast to the town's society because of her behaviour. She is voluptuous, promiscuous and garish, but along with these traits she is confident and unashamed.

Rita contrasts with the boy's sister who is embarrassed by her transforming body, and with his father whose body seems old and haggard. The boy seems fascinated by the notion that Rita's body has been explored flaunted and sold. The local golf course is rumored to be a night-time haunt for prostitutes and their clients:

"He thought of the women who sold
their bodies for monetary gain...
He imagined fairways full of them,
their monetary bodies covered in
find drops of water."

(Neil Jordan, 1976, p.66)

Ultimately Rita does seem to fulfil the needs of the protagonist. When he confronts her we sense that she understands him: "She raised her head and opened her mouth, her answer already there. She inhabited that place, was already there." (Neil Jordan, 1976, p.72-3). "That place" is perhaps symbolic of an emotional and physical void in the boy's life which he hopes she can fill.

In The Miracle Jimmy enacts a similar drama. He sees in his relationship with Renee an opportunity to make a fantasy come true. Renee is a romantic and sensual, yet maternal figure. Rose and Jimmy seem to also need something in their lives. Both have difficult relationships with their fathers, but also seem to lack something in their own friendship, perhaps romance. Jimmy, like the boy in the story, pursues an older woman seeing in her, a potential lover, but perhaps many other roles. Jimmy sees many sides of Renee. She plays a Mae West type character on stage, she is a sophisticated mysterious woman when he first encounters her, and she is a seductive

sensual singer at the theatrical party he attends. He moulds these aspects of her character to create an image of Renee which is far from the truth.

Unfortunately for Jimmy, Renee never comes to fill the roles he imagines her to possess, even when he discovers that she is his mother. She remains a fantasy figure who floats in and out of scenes but never reveals clues to her personality. Renee is a central character to the plot yet she does not seem to be explored or exploited enough. The film never probes beyond the surface of her character, hence her feelings, her past or her identity are never truly revealed. The dialogue between Renee and Jimmy does not seem to progress, but continues on the same confused and often unemotional level, even when she admits the truth to him. Renee becomes somewhat incidental to the film, merely a means for Jimmy to progress from childhood fantasy to adult reality.

Although we only catch glimpses of Rose, her journey of sexual awakening seems more hopeful than Jimmy's. Rose loses her virginity and her innocence in order to create a "Miracle". She seems in control of her actions, she has a "plan". (The Miracle, 1990). Her Miracle, releasing the animals from the circus, is ultimately what answers Jimmy's prayers. Rose, however, does not sacrifice her virginity just for Jimmy's sake. She exercises power over Johnner through her sexuality, a power which she lacks in her relationship with Jimmy. Her release of the animals seems to allude to her own liberation through sexual encounter. The couple know that all the animals will be recaptured, but the gesture will remain in their minds: "'To have done something rather than nothing", Rose explains. (The Miracle, 1990). Their journey has led Rose and Jimmy to maturity to sexual awakening and to discover in their friendship the miracle or magic lacking in their lives. Both works seem to allude to the conventions of cinematic romance. Both boys fall in love with a beautiful or

exotic woman against a background of sunny days, moonlit evening, and the seductive music of the saxophone. However, Jordan's imperfect couples often seem to clash with their perfect settings. The thwarted love story also becomes the theme of The Crying Game and Mona Lisa. These works have less romantic settings for their potential lovers. Both deal with harsh social realities, but still manage to refer to romantic themes. Each film takes its title from a classic love song which is played during the film.

Mona Lisa begins with the release of George from prison. George goes home to see his daughter, Jeanie, but is chased away by his wife. His friend, Thomas, discovers him and brings him home. George finds that many things have changed while he was imprisoned. He tries to trace his old boss, Mortwell, but discovers that his work place and the surrounding streets have become a red light district.

George is given a job driving a high class prostitute, Simone. At first their relationship is strained, but George gradually becomes attracted to Simone. Simone asks George's help to find her friend Cathy, (also a prostitute). She fears Cathy is in the hands of a pimp, Anderson, Simone's former, Violent, Boss. George searches the streets and brothels and is shocked to find girls as young as his daughter working as prostitutes. He discovers a young girl May who is being abused by Anderson.

By following Anderson George discovers Cathy and he and Simone rescue her. However, George is stunned to discover that Simone and Cathy are lovers. He feels Simone has taken him for a ride and he is angry and violent towards her. Mortwell and Anderson catch up with George and Simone and in a frenzy Simone shoots them both. She then turns her gun on the outraged George. George turns his attentions back to his daughter and his friendship with Thomas at the end of the film.

In both The Crying Game and Mona Lisa, the theme of transformation appears once more. However, in these films the transformation is linked with the desire to be attractive to someone else. In The Crying Game we find various changes of image. When Fergus first meets Dil she cuts his hair giving him a new look which she designs. This situation is later reversed when Fergus cuts Dil's hair. In an effort to disguise her, he gives her a more boyish appearance. Dil only agrees to this disguise because she thinks it will please Fergus. Desperate to win Fergus's affections Dil is willing to sacrifice her adopted female identity to please him. However, Dil soon returns to her old identity, one with which is not inherent to her, but one with which she is content and confident.

George also seems willing to transform in order to become desirable to Simone, in Mona Lisa. Simone gives him money to buy more suitable clothes for his job, but he arrives back in an even more garish outfit. Simone brings him shopping and chooses expensive suits and coats for a disbelieving George. George seems to believe that his transformation brings him a step closer to Simone. He tells her a story:

George : "Y'see there was this frog ...and
no one wanted to kiss him...
you know the way frogs are, sticky.
till one day ...you know the story."

Simone: "Turned into a prince."

(Mona Lisa, 1986)

Sadly, for George his transformation is only an exterior one and does not seem to change his relationship with Simone.

In both films Jordan uses black actors. Dil and Simone are portrayed as sultry exotic and mysterious women, with unusual beauty. Jordan has said however, that his decision to use black actors for these roles, related to the underlying issues of racism in the films. He has spoken of his casting in relation to Mona Lisa:

"Cathy Tyson was black because
Bob Hoskins in the film was a
racist. She was the furthest
thing from what he would consider
acceptable"

(Neil Jordan, 1993)

Both protagonists make false assumptions about the nature and identity of their potential partners. George seems to build a fantasy image of Simone which changes as the film progresses. His view of her ranges from 'black tom' to 'lady' to 'sister of mercy' and finally to 'dyke'. He never discovers her true personality.

Sex and violence are inseparable in both works. In Mona Lisa, Simone and Cathy have suffered abuse at the hands of men. Most of the male characters in the film have instigated some violence towards women, even George is at times aggressive towards Simone. Simone has been beaten in the past by Anderson. She has left this past behind. By escaping from male control, Simone has established an independent identity for herself beyond her role as prostitute. She can transform herself to please clients, but her true existence is outside these transformations.

Dil is also content with the female appearance he/she assumes, and with her sexuality. It is problematic, however, that Dil's survival as a woman is ultimately through adopting stereotypically female traits of passivity and loyalty to her man. In contrast Jude adopts more aggressive, somewhat masculine traits. She is brash and open in her sexuality. "So I suppose a fuck is out of the question", she asks Fergus when she surprises him in his flat. (The Crying Game, 1992) Jude seems to crave power, especially sexual dominance. She forces a kiss upon Fergus as she holds a gun to his head.

The Crying Game results in a conflict between Jude and Dil. Dil's passivity and her acceptance of violence inflicted on her by Fergus and by her former lover Dave gives way to aggression. The two female characters shoot it out while a bound and passive Fergus looks on. This showdown seems to also symbolise a battle between Fergus's old sexuality represented by Jude, and his new, if somewhat confused, sexuality embodied by Dil. Jude becomes a scapegoat for Dil's anger. Unfortunately by killing Jude the film seems to condemn a female character who rebels against her own confinements and becomes aggressive. It seems Dil's gun would be better aimed at Fergus, Dave or Jody, all of whom betrayed her or were violent towards her.

When male control and violent abuse appears once more to threaten Simone, she becomes violent and kills to avoid it. Like Jude, Simone is punished for this attempt to take control. Simone does what Dil fails to do which is to turn her gun on all her abusers, including George. This action is to George a final betrayal. He has "sold himself for a pair of dykes." (Mona Lisa, 1986)

So both films are concerned with unlikely romance between two individuals separated by social and sexual issues that seem impossible to overcome. Issues such as politics,

racism, sexism and sexual orientation separate Jordan's protagonists from their possible lovers.

The Crying Game seems to conclude that such difficulties can be overcome. Fergus and Dil overcome the political issues. However, Fergus escapes having to overcome the issue of his sexual identity and hence his relationship to Dil. It is the barrier between the couple that allows them to continue together. The film seems to promote the idea of transformation as a constructive possibility for an individual. However, the new identities adopted by Fergus and Dil are grossly stereotypical roles of female passivity and male protectiveness.

Mona Lisa's conclusion seems to oppose this. The prison bars between George and Simone do not allow their relationship to progress. Instead George steps back out of the lives of Cathy and Simone, and returns to his relationships with Jeanie and Thomas. George seems to have come to a realisation that his relationship with Simone is now in his past and that he got the story wrong: "he was just her driver, just for a little while and that's the story". (Mona Lisa, 1986). George's opinions do not change and his identity is not altered. His final statement to Jeanie seems to suggest that he will never change. "No I'll never grow up". (Mona Lisa, 1986). He will remain the same naïve character. George is naïve in his racism and sexism, and seems to suggest he will stay this way.

So Mona Lisa denies the possibility for transformation. This is one aspect of the film which I find problematic since it seems to suggest that George cannot overcome his prejudice because of his working class identity. He doesn't seem to wish for reconciliation with Simone, but rather to make the entire episode into an imaginary sequel

CONCLUSION

To conclude briefly, Jordan is concerned with taking the above themes of transformation, fantasy, violence and sexuality, and overlapping them. This creates films which cannot fit into any specific genre.

Instead Jordan takes elements from conventional genres such as the horror, the thriller, the fairy tale and especially from cinematic romance. He weaves these elements together to create works which are layered, in their complexity. Aspects of the works collide as characters move between reality and fantasy. His imagination is certainly vivid. His preoccupation with dreams and fantasies is evident all the work, and accounts for surreal images and fairy tale settings in the films.

Ultimately Jordan is a romantic. The love story is dominant in all his work, but what interests him primarily, is whether or not the desire for love can overcome the restraints placed upon it. Can two lovers triumph despite their differences or is their love destroyed by other political or social issues.

NOTES

1. STORY TELLING

The motif of story telling occurs throughout Jordan's work, and perhaps refers to his own literary background. It is often a means for a character to explore his/her own emotional or sexual concerns. The motif is especially important in The Miracle, where Jimmy and Rose translate their desires into they stories they invent and attempt to make some fantasies come true.

2. SELF DISCOVERY

Most of Jordan's characters make an exploratory journey in the course of a work. Many, like Fergus in The Crying Game discover truths about their self nature through a process of trial and error

3. CIRCULAR JOURNEY

The five films discussed here, complete circular journeys. At the end of each film the protagonist arrives at a similar or identical place or situation to where he/she began. It is usually at this point that the character comes to a realisation of the reason for his/her journey and the film's ultimate message is made clear.

4. THE SAXOPHONE

The saxophone is a favourite motif for Jordan. It plays a major role in three of the works discussed , The Miracle, Night in Tunisia and Angel. In all three works the saxophone represents a vehicle for the creation of fantasy and escape. In The Miracle and Night in Tunisia it also represents a sexual awakening as discussed in Chapter 4.

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