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Film in Northern Ireland:

Its representation of women in the context of the
society in which we live.

by
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Introduction

"It would be quite naive to suggest that the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland have not made their mark in the cinema" (McIlroy, 1988, page 54).

But it would also be quite naive to suggest that the 'troubles' can be the only means which to successfully depict life in Northern Ireland in the form of cinema. The truth is that many potentially successful stories that deal with issues other than those relating directly to the 'troubles' in the North have been cast aside. Instead there has been a rush to manipulate reality and monopolise on the almost certain commercial success that seems imminent when dealing with the 'troubles' as main focus. This is especially true of foreign film-makers.

For Hollywood, the possibilities for intrigue, romance, righteousness, violence and a cause offer an almost irresistible formula. Even better everyone speaks English. Most of these films despite aspirations to moral values have no integrity when it comes to Irish history, politics, or geography, let alone accents (Dean, 1995, page 27).

A few Irish directors, however, have in recent years made a conscious effort to discard the idea that life in the North of Ireland revolves solely around the political activities in the North, including the presence of the British military forces and subsequently the situations that arise as a result of their presence. In order to dispel this over-emphasised notion and create a true, unbiased, universal image of a typical way of life in the North it is (in most cases) necessary to place images of terrorism and violence in the background. Not disregarding them completely as this too would become a misinterpretation of the truth. Instead confront the other important issues that exist and desperately need to be acknowledged, discussed and made accessible to the world.

It is these films and the issues they present to us, adopting an alternative viewpoint to the situation in the North, that I want to discuss. I have chosen three films in particular that I believe successfully demonstrate these ideas. In producing such films moral issues that have previously been neglected now have a chance to present themselves in the form of films. The films cover the years from the early eighties to the present day and are:

1. Maeve, (1981), Pat Murphy
2. Hush a Bye Baby, (1989), Margo Harkin
3. The Crying Game, (1992), Neil Jordan.

These films deal with different people in different situations, each reacting to or against the control exercised over them by the norms created by their immediate surroundings, whether political, religious, cultural or a combination of all. They deal with increasingly common situations, among them teenage pregnancies, the role (or lack of) for women in society and the search for identity. They make us aware that difficulties exist and therefore changes have to be made. If it is accepted by all that there is a necessity for these changes then a society built on compromise will evolve and become accepted by all.

The reason why I have chosen to discuss cinema in Northern Ireland as opposed to Irish cinema as a whole is because I believe that Northern Ireland represents a segment within the boundaries of a society. A society where it is no longer acceptable to push aside the realities that are depicted in these films in order to form an impression of Ireland, south as well as north, as a magical, mystical land whose ideals and morals are predetermined as a result of an overpowering influence. This influence includes that of the Roman Catholic church. I believe that by isolating incidents such as those used in these films I can join together both communities of Ireland and by placing these stories in the same context they are surely representing a new approach to a more realistic and modern Ireland.

These films are the contribution of Irish people and therefore the perception of Irish people. They are based on incidents of the past and of the formulation of a present that has to face a social and politically confused society. This society begs for a new and acceptable change that will suffice in the future, and I agree with Duncan Petrie when he says "cinema can help us to recognise the complexities of identity, including processes of transformation and change" (Petrie, 1992, page. 3).

Chapter 1

Synopsis of films

Maeve, (1981), Pat Murphy.

Maeve tells the story of a twenty year old Belfast girl living in exile in London, who returns to Belfast for a week's holiday to visit family. During a bomb scare Maeve is reminded of her past and the reasons why she left Belfast in the first place. Maeve realises that her feminist beliefs still hold no place in the Republican area of the Falls Road where her family and former boyfriend, Liam live. Throughout the film Maeve faces each member of her family and sees how her mother and younger sister, Roisin have put aside their aspirations as women and have taken second place to the conflicts between the men in their lives and their struggles for liberation. Maeve questions the motives of this struggle and considers the consequences that will arise in the event of a liberated Ireland.

Hush a Bye baby, (1989), Margo Harkin

Hush a Bye baby is the story of Goretti, a 15 year old schoolgirl who leads a normal active life in the Creggan estates of Derry. With her three friends; Dinky, Majella and Sinead they spend their time in the pursuit of boys. When Goretti meets Ciaran a relationship develops and so too develops their exploration of their sexuality. After Ciaran is arrested by the British army and detained indefinitely Goretti discovers that she is pregnant. Because of the strong Catholic convictions of her family and surrounding community Goretti is forced to keep her pregnancy a secret. The film is loosely based on incidents that occurred that year in 1984, including the death of Ann Lovett, a fifteen year old schoolgirl who died in a field after giving birth to a stillborn child. It is also related to Joanne Hayes, a twenty five year old Kerry woman who after giving birth also to a stillborn child was falsely accused by local guards of murdering a baby found washed ashore in Co. Kerry.

The Crying Game, (1992), Neil Jordan

The Crying Game is a story of confused identity. It begins when the IRA capture Jody, a British soldier when on a tour of duty in Northern Ireland. During his capture Jody forms a brief relationship with Fergus the IRA member assigned to guard him. From their conversation Fergus learns about Dil, Jody's beautiful girlfriend and becomes intrigued. Jody, who resigns himself to the fact that his death is at hand, requests of Fergus that he find and protect Dil. Fergus is then ordered to kill Jody but instead allows him escape only to be tragically killed by an

approaching Saracen. Fergus flees to London where he successfully tracks Dil, and begins a relationship only to discover that Dil is a transvestite. Meanwhile his former IRA comrades, Judy and Maguire find Fergus and give him the opportunity to once again redeem himself by killing a judge. Fergus refuses to appear and so foils the operation which in turn leads to Maguire's death. Judy then seeks revenge on Fergus but is shoot by Dil. Fergus takes the blame and the film ends as Fergus is sentenced and sent to prison.

Form and Content of the Films

The films that I have chosen represent in a broad context the basic forms of narrative associated with cinema today:

Hush A Bye Baby is in the style of realist narrative, Maeve is in the style of modernist narrative and The Crying Game is in the style of postmodernist narrative.

Realist films create a story which is as real to its audience as possible. In doing so the audience understands the film and can then make their own comparisons. Hush A Bye Baby presents its information in the form of a love story. This enables the audience to appreciate it firstly, as a film but at the same time relate to the subject's viewpoint. It is in the genre of Social Realism and therefore is informative as well as entertaining. The director refuses to glamourise any events in the film and it has an aesthetic rawness that compliments the storyline. The film alludes to other events outside the contours of the story by placing normal everyday objects in a symbolic context eg Goretti breaks an egg in the process of making bread, while she listens to discussions on the Abortion Referendum on the radio. The broken egg symbolises the act of an Abortion. As she sits on the beach a blue fertiliser bag is washed up on the shore. It alludes to the Joanne Hayes case etc. The film's narrative is simple and direct and this enables the director to include surreal imagery towards the end to represent Goretti's conscience in a very subtle but convincing manner.

The main feature with Maeve is its use of montage. Montage is the physical joining together of two separate film shots. In Modernist films the 'form of the work becomes as important than its contents' (O'Brien, 1989, page 18) and so the

physical make-up of the film is as evident to the audience as is its narrative content. Maeve could be described as a European art-house Movie, alternative to the big-budget commercial films like The Crying Game. The films contain theories but have no fixed meaning. In modernist films the narrative, space and time elements begin to dissolve and in so doing propose new meanings. Social contradictions are often thrown together and this is evident in Maeve where ideals of feminism and republicanism are compared. This technique helps the audience to take an alternative view of society because when feminism and republicanism are joined together they form a completely new term.

The Crying Game is more complicated in terms of genre. It switches from one genre to another in a style that is known as postmodernism. Jordan uses these genres in a style that Frederic Jameson refers to as pastiche. Pastiche is the imitation of styles and mannerisms of older films and in some cases it is also the mimicry of such genres (Jameson, 1985, page 113). The Crying Game has intentionally over used the ideas from Film Noir, gangster movies, melodrama, war films and the chase aspect of thriller movies etc. In this respect it is using all the tools of the Hollywood genre and monopolising on them in a commercial sense. Postmodernism echoes the society in which we live today, a society focusing on economy and consumerism.

A second trait of postmodernism is that Jameson refers to is called schizophrenia. This is symbolic in the lives of the republican members, especially Jude, as they cannot speculate the future and only live for the present. Fergus is part of this group and has to be led into his future where he discovers his true identity. (Jameson, 1985, page 113).

Chapter 2

Irish Women in Society

The Civil Rights Movement

The civil rights movement established itself in Northern Ireland back in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It campaigned collectively on behalf of the men and women of Northern Ireland in response to the unjust retributions inflicted on them by the Security Forces. This included the British soldiers present then also.

No separate movement existed on behalf of women at that time and the women involved in such marches appeared not to represent themselves as women but instead to represent common aspirations relating to men and women collectively. They recited such slogans as 'One man, one vote' regardless of its sexist implications. (Smyth, 1993, page 90). These campaigns did not benefit women exclusively but they did help in instigating the belief that women had to lobby for their own needs as individuals.

As a consequence of the civil rights movement the Northern Ireland Women's Rights movement was formed, and with its formation immediately began the campaign for the extension of the Sex Discrimination Act (already in operation in Britain) to Northern Ireland.

This was the first positive political step taken by women for women in Northern Ireland. Much has changed since the early 1970s but unfortunately many ideas have remained unchanged. The Women's Rights Movement has itself split into various groups. These groups have formed as a result of fundamental differences within the women's movement but each group actively supports complimentary issues relating to all women within Northern Ireland.

Feminism

Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of colour, working class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians and old women - as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. (Smyth, 1993, page ii).

Feminism by this definition encompasses every aspect relating to women, including their personal experiences, their feelings and their aspirations. This ubiquitous term thus in many ways hinders progress for women in that it is too broad in its definition. It is evident that women are demanding equality in their work environment, equality in the home, that they are fighting for sexual liberation and against sexual and physical abuse. But these categories taken together do not necessarily amount to feminism nor are they always the direct result of human rights for women campaigns. I believe that 'feminism' has played its part and now it has to go beyond the tenets it first adhered to. What women today should aim for is achievement through self-help. This in itself is a liberation.

With the introduction of the pill in the 1970s "fear was gone and women at last could take pleasure from sex... A kind of democracy was suggested when women could explore their sexuality with the same fearlessness (or thoughtlessness) as men". (Gerrard, 15th October, 1995, page 4).

Statistics today have also proven that by the year 2000 more women than men will be working and that in one in five couples today women earn more than their male counterparts. (Harris, 22 October, 1995, page 26). There have been radical changes in the lives of women over the last twenty years so the problem with feminist beliefs appears to stem from within the structure of feminism itself.

The fact that the modern Irish woman is on the pill, sexually free, demanding work outside the home, is not reflected in the official laws or literature. They are still desperately trying to keep the Virgin Mary and Irish colleen images alive. (Emerman, 1989, page. 40)

This quote from Neil McCafferty bluntly describes her view on the position that Irish women find themselves in today's society. They have called for people to understand the necessity for equal status to exist. So they appear to have caught up with the thinking process that women internationally have been adopting over the last twenty years. Should I not agree with McCafferty, an avid feminist, that the only thing that stops women today from what is equally and rightfully theirs is the interference of men?. Therefore overcoming this oppression by men life for women will become uncomplicated. She talks of 'they' as still desperately trying to keep the Virgin Mary and the Irish colleen images alive. As an active feminist and by the way she has worded her quote I think that it would be right to assume that she refers to

the 'men' of law or the 'men' of literature and that these men have and control the means in which Irish women are portrayed today. They still possess those pure virtues that are representative of a protective, passive, motherlike figure.

What if I assume that 'they' refers to the women themselves? I don't think that it's impossible to consider that they might want to combine the idea of themselves in the position where they can exert power, influence and control but retaining that sense of goodness and caring that appears to be carried with the stereotypical images of Irish women. It seems to be in the nature of Irish people in general to look back and grasp elements of the past in order to understand how and where they want to be placed in the future. What good can this do for women then as Pat Murphy reminds us :

You have to remember that history as we receive it has been coded and falsified towards a male basis. The most straightforward level is that women didn't write history, therefore they have been written out of history, and I believe deliberately so. (Murphy, 1984, page. 75)

And so it seems logical to realise that most women have only negative images of a male dominated past and therefore the only way it seems in which they can rectify the past is to concentrate on their present status and prove that they no longer are the victims of history, of society and of a male dominated sex.

Although Irish women have finally, over the past twenty years adopted a thinking process parallel to that of women internationally it is necessary that they focus not so strongly on themselves as victims. By doing so they then become victims of their own negative thoughts. In saying this I mean that women in general have realised that they are in an unacceptable situation regarding their status in the home and working environment. What has happened as a result of this realisation is natural in that they react against the things that have made them victims in the first place (men). They use all their energy in their attack on this source. Instead women have to have a clear-cut, positive understanding of their identity as 'women' and this understanding has to be based on themselves on a level that does not include comparisons to men. They have to consider the implications of a potential self and what it is in their opinion that constitutes a potential self. Considering this they will

realise that a masculine or even androgynous self does not necessarily constitute what they wish to be but, is if anything, only a substitute.

Another area in which women have over used their power as feminists is in a political context. In saying this I mean that they have pounced on injustices inflicted on women by men as a means of gaining political recognition. In this case the victims themselves are suffering in that they become no more than another statistic in order to represent injustices against women on a general level. Feminists are then as guilty of generalising women's issues as men are. By this generalisation they are implying that all women's rights and individual needs amount to the same thing, therefore can be solved using the same methods. This seems a contradiction of the principles which women first adhered to in their fight for equality.

The only chance to amend any difficulties within the structure of Irish womanhood is, as in any other case, the proper education and transition of information dealing with all aspects of women's problems in a form unbiased, to women. What better way in which to successfully achieve this than through the media, especially film. After all it was primarily through the media that the issues of inequality of gender first presented itself.

Chapter 3

Irish Women in Films

In the past Irish women and men have, in general, been given a series of stereotypical roles in the films and it appears to me to reflect the attitudes of a male dominated society. A society in which with time the male role has progressed in order to correspond with the politics and ever changing social issues. For women however there appears to have been set a predetermined image that has remained steadfast and predictable with every film made regardless of time.

Two images of women dominate the films: one where the woman is placid and attending to the needs of her husband, father or whatever male counterpart that is present, supporting him in everything he does, the second where the woman is seen to break away from her true nature as a woman and becoming thus almost monsterlike or abnormal in her reaction against her forced situation. That being that she is forced to take second place in everything she does because she is a woman in a male dominated society. This image of women is powerfully represented in The Crying Game in the character of Jude, as Sarah O' Hara states:

It reinforces negative images of women: woman as betrayer and seducer, woman as destroyer, woman as servant to men and woman as a weaker version of man (O' Hara, 1992, page, 24).

I find that there is still confusion as to the true nature of women and I'm prepared to admit as a woman I realise that a greater part of this second image of women is created by women themselves. It is as a result of their reactions, their desperation to become normal not subnormal human beings. There is no common ground, it appears on which women can adopt a role that encompasses both these images in an acceptable format that progresses in time parallel to the progression of men. In doing so creating an acceptable situation, a compromise on both accounts that is acceptable to both genders. But I believe that the nature of women cannot and should not be changed. It is a natural process that distinguishes the fundamental differences that separate male and female. Therefore it is necessary to obtain a neutral image for women in film that permits her to be a woman (with all the traits of women) without having to prove herself in all she does and attempts to do.

The Role of Females in the Film

Maeve

Maeve is the first woman that we must consider as she can be seen to represent the society in which she grew up, questioning the actions she believes to be unjust. She accepted the politics of Feminism as an optional path to pursue, just as Liam accepted Republicanism. Immediately there is a division of opinions because, as Maeve tries to explain to Liam they are fighting two absolutely separate issues. Murphy allows us to become sympathetic with Maeve's character because she portrays Maeve as someone with no alternative but to turn to feminism in order to survive. Maeve's strength is not that she has created an ideal situation in which to live but that she has the courage to question the norms of the society in which she lives. In doing so has no alternative but to leave. Almost ironically Murphy has placed Maeve in the martyr situation in which many women in Irish history have been subjected and which Murphy herself is trying to dispel through Maeve's character. However she redeems her beliefs in that she demonstrates that it was through choice that Maeve left and by choice that she decided to return.

Maeve demonstrates an open-mindedness that so many people in such small communities cannot accept. Maeve symbolises the voice of the future. She realises that there is another alternative for women and in doing so she understands that there also has to be an alternative to the violence and unrest in the North.

Of all the female characters in the films listed I think that Maeve's is the more pragmatic and closest to an absolute definition as to how women should or wish to be viewed. Maeve is a feminist but not a man-hater as some feminists appear. Her character is gentle but yet determined not to be forced into the role of the docile female whose only asset and means of liberation is that of her body. Roisin, Maeve's younger sister represents, unfortunately, a large number of women who believe that the ultimate means to their liberation is through their sexuality. Maeve herself points out to Roisin that the confusions in Belfast make it almost an act of liberation to become a sex object. For Roisin this is something that she has to live with, its a fact of life.

An important element in this film is the fact that Maeve has gone beyond the boundaries of her society and has seen it from another, objective angle.

Hush A Bye Baby

Goretti is the main character in this film. In Maeve Maeve is shown to question the theory of the politics in the North as a result of her self-education and experiences of life. Goretti however, is placed in her situation by circumstances (her unexpected pregnancy) and as a result has to question her situation in order to understand her dilemma. Maeve has the ability to assess her own situation and form the objective opinion that leads to her polemic discussions that occur throughout the film. Goretti however is too young, uneducated and therefore too ignorant to form objective opinions. She represents the innocence of youth, so the message of the film is the reality that teenage sexuality must be recognised. The film is more importantly about teenage sexuality from the point of view of pregnancy. It takes the role of women to the extreme in that it deals with that part of sexuality that all women fear: pregnancy.

Goretti thus represents society and the dilemma that that society is faced with in a social and sexual context and her decisions can be considered to be made on behalf of her society. But what can also be seen to represent the society is the confusion, the helplessness, the fear and the hesitation that Goretti demonstrates in the decision she makes in keeping her child. She also decides to remain in her parents' home and not to face her dilemma alone. This, I believe, indicates a certain hope in that she still feels a sense of belonging within her family and within her community, indicating that all aspects of her society are not negative and therefore there is a chance for a realisation of change, although it may be a gradual process.

The Crying Game

The Crying Game projects a variety of perspectives when dealing with women. It shows women not in a perfect flawless position but rather in a position of self-help and self-destruction. Perhaps the reason is that Maeve and Hush A Bye Baby are made by women for the education and self-realisation of women and therefore carry an intentionally biased message. The intentions of this to be translated literally into a positive and constructive form. Jude, however, the only 'real' woman in The Crying Game, is not sympathetic, neither is she a role model, nor does she represent any positive image of any society. Instead she is represented as the *femme fatale*: an

image of the past. Not only does she represent the past but she is represented as "the antithesis of the maternal-sterile or barren, she produces nothing in a society which fetishes production". (Donane, 1991, page 2)

I think that Jordan here is giving us an example of the consequences that will arise for women if they don't consider very carefully the delicate position that they are placed in. They now have the choice to decide which direction they wish to take in regards to their sexual identity. To choose a role such as Jude's will probably be the least acceptable of all female roles in the future. This is represented in her death.

The other representation of women in the film is the character of Dil. She displays all the traits of a woman who is desirable to men. But she too does not represent the real impression of the modern woman, rather I think, symbolises a male interpretation of a woman: after all Dil is a man. Women like Jude have forgotten the true definition of female where as women such as Dil have collected those words defining the female, using them in a way endearing to men, destroying all progress made so far by women. Where Jude is determined, self-sufficient, crude and business-like Dil is dependent, caring romantic and passive. A role reversal is evident here with both 'female' characters in that they seem to describe physically and mentally their interpretation of the opposite sex. Role reversal is however never a solution to any problem. It is an easier option that involves less mental frustration.

Fergus is also involved in a reversal of roles, adopting female traits rather than the stereotypical male role that Jude is trying to represent. In saying this Fergus never really had any identity or personality. He was just there. He might have drifted onto the set by mistake and as a consequence was used to relieve the real actors during their breaks. What Jordan might be implying is an androgynous future. In a sense it is an unbiased solution where each individual carries both male and female traits. A fantastic solution to a fantastic film.

Chapter 4

The Complexities of Identity Within a Nationalist Environment

Identity has always been a key element in the story of Irish films. It has been an issue that has time and time again been raised, questioned and debated. As Jim Sheridan said "we're always trying to figure out our identity because some where really deep down inside we feel we really don't have one".(Ted Sheehy,1995, page. 30). This search for a true Irish identity can be categorised in a national and a sexual context.

National Identity

Nationalism simultaneously represents an ideology of the core to identify peripheries within itself, and of the peripheries in response to colonisation".(McIntyre,1985,page. 68)

With national identity especially in Northern Ireland where the three films are centred the perception of identity becomes firmly based on the establishment of (one) Ireland, North and South combined as a nation or (two) the continuation of Northern Ireland as a part of the UK. In both senses identity is a broader view of a corporate identity for a country with two predominant communities. Perceptions of identity here in Ireland are based, I believe, on the history of a people with an unstable background who as Sheridan has already stated have a powerful need in believing that they belong. Ireland has over the years been subjected to invasions and its people subjected to forced changes to their ways of living. These constant changes naturally affected the social and political status of the people of Ireland extending right back to the 14th century. As a result we really don't originate from a stable background and therefore really can't have common, steadfast beliefs.

Instead there has been created a romantic notion of a former Ireland that symbolises that which we wish to have restored. It is this romantic notion that has engulfed the aspirations of young Republican Irish men and women: their final solution will be a romantic one. Their ideals are carried from the past and their memories are a coagulation of the memories handed down to them and their own personal experiences of hardship and violence. The irony here is that the violence is a result of their desire to live again in a past that most likely did not exist:

There is a sense that traditional literary forms of Republican pedagogy - the Romantic, conservative organicism of Pearse and the legacy of the Irish Republican Brotherhood are up for scrutiny (Roberts, 1988, page. 96).

In Maeve when Maeve returns from London lapses into memories of her past and it is only through these memories that the story can continue. That it appears necessary to reveal the past in order to live in the present seems evident. But Maeve proves that by isolating herself from the past she can continue her life. She has broken from the past also in order to identify herself as a woman, and the implications that arise in the struggle for such an identity are that in order to gain feminist liberation, national liberation and the complexities of a mythologised past that has been determined by men must take second place.

The problem, Maeve realises, is that the same path of action has been adopted for a long time by the Republican men of her society. They consider that Nationalism is of paramount importance and that with its realisation all other aspirations such as equality for women will simultaneously be realised. Local issues, they consider, are bound deeply within the structure of their concrete plans for the future of their society and ultimately, their country, but are not considered serious enough to be placed in a position requiring immediate attention. They (the Nationalists) have proven to Maeve through their disregard for the urgency of issues such as Maeve's, that it's impossible to struggle for both causes together even when the aims of each are ultimately the same: the freedom from an overpowering force (one; the British soldiers, symbolising British occupation, and the other; male domination of society and occupation of women). In the film Maeve describes the relationship men have to women in conjunction with that of the British to the Irish "You're in possession of us. You occupy us like an army".

Thus women can only gain equality when they convince men that there exists a clear division between the issues that amount to the formation of a national identity, and that a radical revision of the motives and ultimate aims of the Republican movement in the North is necessary in its interest of a successful outcome.

In The Crying Game the desire for a national identity is dramatised in the figures of the IRA members. They consist of a body of men and women who have been drawn together in the hope that they can succeed, through any means, with whatever consequences, in the realisation of their common goal: Ireland as a Nation. Their interpretation of nationalism is the event of a number of people aspiring to the same cause and therefore they believe that their definition of a national identity in terms of the liberation of their country, is a legitimate one. This as we have already discovered is not acceptable as they will realise, in time, if their aspirations are realised, that sovereignty is not enough, that it is the inhabitants and their mental and physical wellbeing that truly matter. Their broad idea of nationalism is shown to be insufficient when we realise that the subject of the film is not the story of an IRA man in pursuit of a national liberation, but rather an IRA man who in the circumstances in which he finds himself is made to question his own true identity. In doing so he discovers, just as Maeve discovers, that this personal identity is the first step in the process involved in creating a national identity. He also realises that his identity is made up of many smaller components, such as language, social class and culture etc and that these components change as his environments changes. In the film his environment changes from Northern Ireland to London. "National identity is made up of an ambiguous pattern of linguistics, cultural and historical determinants of social and individual classifications".(McIntyre, 1985, page. 68).

Fergus throughout the film shows no signs that he is avidly involved in the Republican movement. Rather Jordan has us believe, by his quiet natured character, that he has drifted into his role through chance or as the natural progression of a man in his circumstances. If this is the case then his nationalists views might be considered views that he has taken for granted or not considered at all. This, I think, is a deliberate portrayal on Jordan's behalf showing that the film does not sympathise with the IRA, through Fergus's character, but in fact exposes a very large flaw in the Republican system. It shows that Fergus has been a victim of circumstances, just like Maeve on account of the politics of the society. He shows that he has no true identity and that this is the root of all his problems. Neil Jordan in an interview realises that this is the cause of many problems in the North when he says:

the violence in Northern Ireland often has origins which are far less political and far more personal than people are prepared to admit".(Browne, 1995, page 32)

So the initial implications that the film is based on a national identity are overtaken by the urgency of the implication of a more personal identity, in this case sexual (which I will discuss further in the next chapter).

In the case of Jude, 'the IRA woman with a vengeance', the direct relation to a national identity are much stronger. She along with Maguire demonstrates the true nature of Republicanism that is associated with the IRA. She is forceful and unyielding in her determination to support the cause, even to the point where she uses her powers as seductress to capture Jody, their hostage. Jude has actively dedicated herself to the cause but the film implies that her motives may not be entirely true. She is lacking something more satisfactory to occupy her time, whether it be men, or a rewarding profession. If the attitude of the IRA members towards her in the film is anything to base an assumption on I would say that undoubtedly her role as a female in an equal status in society does not exist; that she has renounced all connotations of a feminine status and the artificial niche that she has found to fill that need is the IRA, and their quest for a national identity.

Maguire appears to be the only person with a desire for Nationalism that is straightforward in its intent. He is a real man and can be seen as stereotypical of the kind of person that Jude emanates. His approach is neither personal nor confused. He is domineering when tells her to shut the fuck up, unrelenting in his bombing mission. Finally shows his true faith in 'the cause' by carrying out the suicide bombing mission in which he is killed. He has left his territory by leaving Northern Ireland and is vulnerable, like any ordinary person. He is not invincible and neither is the IRA especially when it consists of a variety of people who really haven't considered why they are there, or who have self gratifying motives rather than true ones.

In Hush A Bye Baby national identity appears as a means of binding people together, in the form of a community, from a nationalist area in Derry, which is I believe a truer version of Identity than previously articulated. The Irish language is

for the first time used to represent the cultural aspirations of the community and thereby demonstrating a positive view of identity. With the cultural background and a mixture of the tenets and norms determined by the society an identity is formed. This, however is where the problems lie with Goretti. She lives in a community that try too hard to maintain an identity. For young people like Goretti the restrictions are too much or too tempting to break. She is blocked from assuming an identity that she desires, and becomes, rather, oppressed in her efforts to comply with the restrictions of her community.

In Goretti Friel's society, adherence to fundamental principles outstrips the capacity for compassion and her anguish is borne in isolation and rejection. (McLoone, 1991, page 55)

Martin McLoone's description of Goretti's society is unfortunately one that might adequately represent every community in Ireland. I say this because I believe that the incidents on which this film is based came about as a result of oppression from within small communities. This oppression, was I believe, not intended, nor was it meant for these consequences to have such shocking results as those for Goretti and the others like her. She discovers that she is pregnant but cannot confide in those who consider themselves her family. The problem is that there is a failure with members of society to progress with the years and so these members have lost contact with the younger generation. These young people are the ones with whom the principles of the society were meant to assist. Instead young people like Goretti are creating their own norms and tenets to coincide with their progression through life. These norms may not be acceptable with the older people but they are less constricting in that they allow young people the freedom of individuality.

The main problem in our societies today is that a steadfast iconography exists on which people are supposed to model themselves.. In the case of young women this model is based on the Virgin Mary

Not only were Catholic girls to model themselves on the image of the Virgin Mary by maintaining their chastity and purity, but equally they were called upon to adopt the mother's passive, unquestioning role. (Smyth, 1993, page 83).

This was the Roman Catholic Church's method of avoiding sexual related issues and the emphasis on the Virgin Mary separated the link between sexuality and Motherhood. With the formation of the woman's rights movements these ideals were no longer acceptable. As a consequence people depend less on the moral teachings of the Church. This lack of dependency on the Church can only be the fault of the Church itself in its resistance to compromise.

Harkin did state however that the community, including the Church were, in fact, more caring towards young people who found themselves in such predicaments. At this stage however it is too late to show sympathy. I believe that they have not educated young people in the preparation of a process of self discovery, or the consequences that arise from the abuse or unsafe handling of sexuality and therefore cannot reprimand young people in their ignorance.

Sexual Identity

Sexual Identity as previously portrayed in Irish cinema were accepted and never questioned and thus reflected the apparent views (or lack of) of society in general. They were, as in many cases in history, the formation of a male opinion of women and this male opinion not only represented the fathers, husbands etc. but the paternal figure of the Church. With the devotion that was evident in Ireland to the Church it is not surprising that women today find themselves in a situation of passive oppression, not entirely their own fault but but nevertheless with their acceptance of it as a way of life.

With the gradual change in the social politics over the last years and with the introduction of Ireland into a community much larger and more culturally diverse as is the European Union, the perception in Ireland of sexual identity has begun a process of transformation, especially in respect of women's attitudes towards their own needs and desires of an individual identity. This, I believe, has been aided greatly with the access to film by women and at last they are being granted the opportunities to portray themselves and the reality of the circumstances, as they see them, in which they are surrounded.

With access to film the few female directors that exist have an enormous responsibility in making films, not only for women but for the representation of women within modern society. I think, that in order for women to have recognition and an appreciation from society they have to demonstrate the necessity for such a cinema to exist.

Maeve is predominately about the theory of sexual identity rather than sexuality itself. It is an argument with two legitimate issues clashing. Maeve argues the fact that the history of the Republican movement has and still does exclude women. Liam argues that Republicanism, rather than Nationalism, includes the issues of women as part of their struggle. (The fact is that the republican paramilitaries refused to see any connection between violence inflicted on women by the state forces, by husbands etc and their so called 'punishment beatings').

Murphy also demonstrates the oppression of women, not only by their own partners etc, but by the British occupation of the North. This is graphically represented when Maeve and Roisin are publicly humiliated by British Soldiers, who request that they jump up and down in order that they can derive pleasure from watching their breasts move. The soldiers are exploiting female sexuality and are laughing at the fact that they still have the power to dominate it. Their aim as soldiers in the North is to keep control of the social and political issues and this includes the control of women, as shown in this gesture. Through this scene Murphy represents well the attitude that exists. It not only represents the attitudes of the British army towards Irish people but the effort of one gender to control another. And so it is that it is in the nature of men to control women, land etc that is the problem. And so the conclusion is that women can become women only when men accept the truth that they are women or entitled to be women, not items of possession like land. For Maeve to communicate with Liam she has to refer to the land to express her opinion:

..a space for things to happen, a technique, a way in, a way out, a celebration, a guide, a release, a lie, a truth, a lie that tells the truth, a projection, a memory.

Here Maeve uses land symbolically in representing women. In doing so she shows

Liam that men need women and everything women represent just as they need land and what it represents: freedom.

Freedom represents a new way of life both for Liam and Maeve and this is what each of them strive for. They also strive for a better quality of life and a better understanding of that life. Maeve believes that Liam is denying the truth about his past and so is denying the truth about his present, which ultimately includes the truth about who he is as a person both socially and sexually.

There is a recurrent pattern of stunted sexuality in connection of violence. Liam is not visibly represented as a violent person but as I said previously Maeve is more involved in the theory of sexuality. So his denial of Maeve's theories on sexuality and equality represents his lack of knowledge of sexuality in respect to women. It also shows his lack of understanding of Maeve's dilemma.

In Hush A Bye Baby sexual identity is perceived through the eyes of an unmarried pregnant teenager. Goretti as a result of innocent exploration of her sexuality with Ciaran becomes pregnant. While Maeve considers sexual freedom Goretti experiences imprisonment as a direct result of her exploration of her sexuality. The fact is that as a woman Goretti faces the risk of becoming pregnant. As a result of his activity in the Republican movement Ciaran is made inaccessible to Goretti and through the restriction at the prison of the Irish language, Ciaran remains ignorant of the fact that Goretti is pregnant.

All the elements needed for a National Identity are present in this film i.e. the Irish Language, activities such as Irish dancing, the interest in politics and history of an Irish society. Yet they prove to be instrumental in the isolation of Goretti, rather than help her. (This is why Maeve has such strong views as to the rethinking of the principles within the Republican movement). She is alone and decides to keep her baby, not because of her devotion to the Catholic Church. It is I believe because she really has no other choice, she has no alternative. In reality an abortion is an alternative but Goretti has neither the means nor the support of her community to have an abortion. The Church in small knit communities such as Goretti's does have a strong influence. It has proven its determination to preserve the status of

community and family rather than the individual (Smyth, 1993, page 86). Goretti's pregnancy is therefore seen in relation to her family and her community.

By having her baby instead of an abortion she can have a more secure life within that community but with a lesser status as a woman. Goretti demonstrates the negative implication of being a woman. This negativity stems from the community surrounding her, and that community includes women. This is evident in the scene where Goretti's friend Majella refers to a young unmarried woman as a "slut". It proves that women too have to rethink their attitude to sexuality, just as men have to rethink theirs to nationalism and its relationship to women.

The Crying Game is predominately about sexual identity in itself, rather than demonstrating theoretical opinions about it (like Maeve, or alluding to an outside impression of identity like the community in general in Hush A Bye Baby). It is also an indication as to how one can open one's mind and discover new possibilities. It is basically about education or the accumulation of knowledge and permitting this knowledge to take over from the narrow-minded ideals (as those of the Republicans) that first appeared in the film. Fergus's identity changes when he travels outside the North of Ireland to England. The saying that 'Travel broadens the Mind' is put to good use in this film. Fergus's progression and acceptance of his sexuality represents the future where religion and politics no longer dominate society. It is what I considered when talking about the sexuality in Hush A Bye Baby that the process of rethinking of sexual identity has occurred and Fergus has stepped outside the circle of oppression and made his own choice, in accordance with his own true feelings.

Dil represents the male view of women. In the film there are only two female figures, neither one being the 'true' female. Dil's character is in many respects similar to Jude's as she has chosen to identify herself as a woman whereas Jude uses male characteristics, which, in her opinion strengthens her character. Dil's sexuality creates such an atmosphere that she becomes enchanting. Fergus is definitely bewitched by her presence.

In the case of Jude, she has like Roisin and her mother in Maeve cast aside her aspirations as a woman to fit into the environment that she wants to be a part of. In

adopting this role of *femme fatale* she is in fact not progressing rather is digressing into a past where women had no identity and therefore copied men. The men in the film understand Jude's desperation and use her for their own advantage. Jude therefore has sold her identity as a woman:

She is willing to prostitute herself, for the men in charge of the IRA operations, and in this respect, she fulfils the stereotype of a passive woman (Bell, 1993, page 262).

Describing Jude as passive seems a contradiction. It is evident that any passivity related to Jude is used for her benefit; as a passport to get what she ultimately wants: power. Jude is cunning in that she knows the mentality of her republican male comrades and that they would never accept her as leader, only as a helper. Knowing this about Jude's character makes her more detestable by both men and women. She fits into no acceptable category. In a sense her character becomes almost pathetic and it is for her own benefit that she is killed, put out of her misery. For no matter how much power she might have gained she would never have been happy. Power was only a substitute to her for something that she lacked. Jude's problem was that she did not know that she was really lacking in a true identity as a woman.

I believe that the questioning of Identity in The Crying Game has already begun here in Ireland. We have begun to question identity, moral issues, and social issues such as abortion or the right of women for information on all such issues. Therefore the next stage is ready to begin: the application of all these principles (without the influence of such bodies as the Church), and the acting upon them by both men and women.

Conclusion

I have deliberately chosen these films because taken together they dramatise many of the events that have occurred over a period of years, beginning in the 1970's through to the present day. An era in which much has happened in the North and South of Ireland, a politically active period in which women and men began their demonstrations for civil rights and their rights to be heard in the society in which they lived. They wanted to diminish the received image that the media portrayed. These films, I believe, come together as one story and produce an almost chronological account of life as it was then.

Maeve is the first film where the past is dealt with. It hosts a series of flashbacks and informs us of the situation then. It explores through questions that Maeve posed, her confusion and her acceptance that she is confused but not prepared to accept her situation, and of the necessity for her to break away and consider her past from another perspective. The film does not answer her questions, rather it proposes them and ends with them unanswered. Even when the questions are unanswered there is still indication that the system needs to be changed. As John Roberts states "The necessity for a post romantic cultural politics has become paramount" (Roberts, 1988, page. 97).

Hush A Bye Baby deals with the present, what resulted from the questions proposed in Maeve. It shows the changes that have occurred suddenly, politically and socially and the community's inability to deal with complicated issues such as abortion. It proves, that the Catholic Church no longer dictates to all the way in which they must lead their lives. Edward Daly, former bishop of Derry, once said "The Church can only lead people where they want to go" (Daly, Edward, 1996,)

It is evident that many people, now, no longer wish to be influenced solely by the Church. And although Goretti makes the decision to keep her baby there is a very visible hesitation when she listens to the abortion referendum on the radio. It proves that she is considering an abortion but has not the means nor sufficient information to help in her choice as regards to having an abortion. The film proves that Hush A Bye Baby implies a gradual understanding of the social changes occurring for example the need for information in the Republic relating to the Abortion Referendum. An issue that would never in the past been considered in a

country so dominated by the Church. It proves that Goretti is part of a younger generation who make their own decisions about issues directly relating to their own individual situation.

The Crying Game deals with the future. In the film we see Jude's character, a splendid example of a monstrous outspoken female who, is in the end eliminated. It is symbolic of the changes that have been made in society. It implies that there is no place for Jude's character and the hope that at last a comfortable, acceptable position for women is accepted by men. This is seen in the form of Dil who has accepted his feminine attributes. It is also demonstrated in Fergus's acceptance of these. The Crying Game is an accumulation of all the events of Maeve and Hush a Bye Baby and proves that in any circumstance whether political, social, sexual etc compromises can be made for a better life for all. I believe that The Crying Game can be seen indirectly as an acceptance of men of women's right to equal status in their experience of the characteristics of the opposite sex. I believe that Maeve's proposals in this light were realistic, not only in their theories but in their actual application to the society in which we live.

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