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Irish Cinema: Form/Content/Nationality

by

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Introduction:

This work sets out to examine national cinema in relation to Ireland. Ideas of Post-colonialism and Nationalism are strongly linked to representations in Ireland. Chapter 1 attempts to familiarise with some of these ideas, and examine their relevance to cultural production. Chapter 2 focuses more clearly on production and examines the process' through which film-making in Ireland has been realised. Chapter 3 is concerned with two examples of Irish films, and discusses the mythic content and the influences on both form and content that are apparent in each film and where, if at all, anything of the national cinema is evident.

Chapter 1

This chapter will attempt to provide an examination of some theoretical ideas which deal with post-colonialism and nationalism and their relationship to film-making . In looking at a cultural product such as cinema, and in the endeavour to ascertain its relationship with what we call a nation, we must examine what a nation is. In the case of Ireland, there is the question of our recent history as a colony of the British empire, and how its removal from such has affected the nature of Irish cultural products, in so far as a reactionary impulse is noticed, and cultural products seek to be defined as different from the now removed oppressor. In applying that to cinema, national cinema can be seen to require an 'other' in order to define its self.

Stuart Hall suggests that "old identities which stabilised the social world for so long are in decline."¹ Hall offers a theory on what constitutes identity, moving from what he calls *enlightenment subject*, through *sociological, subject* arriving at a *post modern subject*.² Hall's post-modern subject is of most use here as he identifies it as having arisen from conflicts existing in individuals regarding identity. It manifests, for example, where one is caught with differing senses of identity, say that of being Irish but also of being female or of identifying with a religious belief concurrent with a nationality.

An increasing number of possible identities one might relate to can lead to the fantasising of an identity that functions as "a comforting story or 'narrative of the self'."³ Moving into a larger arena, focus can be placed on national identity. Hall states that national culture and its products or representations which we experience are primary to the formation of cultural identity. It is true we almost all would consider ourselves belonging to a nation, whether South African or Guatemalan. Hall calls on others to emphasise the point that the nation is not something belonging to time immemorial, it is not in fact a very old idea at all: it is a social construct.

¹ Stuart Hall "The question of cultural identity." *Modernity and its futures*, Cambridge, (1992), p.274

² *ibid.* p.275

“Having a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity, but it has now come to appear as such.”⁴ A nation is an organised society of people, a political body, but it also produces representations. These inform the sensibilities of the populace, and therefore it is arguable that one is not born Irish but one becomes Irish, by receiving cultural messages and products. Of course representations are not actually the objects they represent, but they affect one's perception of reality, by use of ubiquitous symbols and recourse to shared knowledge. Louis Althusser calls the communications industries which produce representations, institutions of ‘Ideological State apparatuses’.⁵ State Apparatus, in Marxist theory consist of: the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police among others, Althusser points to a distinction between these (which he labels as primarily repressive) and Ideological State apparatuses, which he views as functioning “predominantly *by ideology*.” He notes however, “they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately...this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic”⁶ Cinema is only one of the means of representation that may be used by a nation. By Althusser's model it can promote an Ideology and is subject to an Ideology, and it can also function by repression, her perhaps in the form of censorship⁷ Therefore in a literal sense, a national cinema should produce representations that can be easily identified with by its citizens.

Returning to more generalised discussion, difference, according to Hall can be seen in the differing imaginings of nations.⁸ Benedict Anderson's phrase ‘imagined community’ perhaps describes such an understanding of a nation. To Hall the production of significant representations that a national

³ *ibid.*p.277

⁴ Ernest Gellner (1983) p.6 in Hall (1992) p.292

⁵ Louis Althusser “Ideology and the State”, *Essays on Ideology*, London, (1970), p.16 Althusser remarks “I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialised institutions.” Among these Althusser lists “-the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.)”,p.17

⁶*ibid.*,p.19

⁷Althusser notes “Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the cultural IS Apparatus (censorship, among other things)”*ibid.*,p.19

⁸ Hall (1992),p.293

audience can collectively relate to is important. Nations can create mythologies which feed into collective knowledge. An example of this could be the Gaelic game of football. This is a nineteenth century creation, but for many it has associations with myths of Celticism rooted in pseudo-history. After the foundation of the state, national schools would actively encourage Gaelic games among school children. An Irish national radio, which existed from 1927, and later RTE television, which began broadcasting on New Year's Eve 1960, could provide exposure for the game nation-wide.

→
Gibbons
Kearney
→

Nations are exclusive by definition. Intrinsically they are composed of multicultural components. People of different races, creeds and inclination can all be grouped under a national flag. The emergence of the nation can be seen now to exist within what is called globalisation. While distinct borders exist between nations, phenomena such as cinema, television, video, the Internet can often float across the dividing lines. The ubiquity of American, (Hollywood), cinema is an example of such an occurrence. Yet Hollywood is not considered an American national cinema. A distinctive difference that national cinema may display over Hollywood is that it may seek to perpetuate ideology of difference. This is evident in German propaganda film of the thirties. Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will" (1934) focuses on the Nuremberg Rallies in Nazi Germany. Following this many propaganda films were produced by the Nazi government, these were explicit in their racism and glorification of the Aryan race and demonstrate how national cinema may also focus on the existence of boundaries between nations.

The emergence around the first half of the twentieth century of a number of new nation states springs from the colonial nature of the imperial European powers, such as France and England. Decolonisation and Post-colonial are words used to describe some of the process' and status' of former colonies. Much thought and writing on Post-colonial issues place emphasis on representations and their function in Post-colonial nation states. There is much

debate over the relevance of representations in discourse of the nation and the national. Does art mirror society? or do representations, artistic aspirations aside, influence peoples' sense of identity? Luke Gibbons provides an answer suggesting that,

Cultural representations do not simply come after the event, reflecting experience or embellishing it with aesthetic form, but significantly alter and shape the way we make sense of our lives.⁹

The fact that Ireland is a former colony of an empire could therefore imply that representations produced in Ireland present different views of itself and of the world than would occur in national communities formed under different pretexts. Regarding cinema this point enables one to possibly differentiate between types of national cinema. The conditions of a nation's history would inform its choice of cultural representations. The national cinema of France, a former coloniser and republic of over two hundred years, would use different signs, identifiable to its domestic audience, than an Irish national cinema. (If such a thing did or does exist.) For example there are no Irish films dealing with the First World War, despite the fact that Irish people fought in it, and it is a war that is perceived as having had little direct effect on Irish national identity. The French film industry has produced a number including "La Grande Illusion" (Jean Renoir 1937) and "J'Accuse" (Abel Gance 1939).

Firstly, time must be devoted to post-colonial theory, and secondly national cinema, if we are to ask if there is an Irish national cinema. The validity of the term 'national cinema' is a contention currently. Colonisation has been a project of the major European powers since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was, however, in the nineteenth century that colonisation achieved its most far reaching heights. Essentially the imperialist ideology regarded European, white, male society as being superior, and obliged to explore all geographical locations. These new worlds were then subject to Eurocentric paternalistic ideology. This included a wide range of endeavours,

⁹ Luke Gibbons "Introduction." *Transformations in Irish culture* Cork (1996)p.8

from educating the natives as Christians to oppressing them. Often the impulse for this was tied to notions of modernisation and progress which provide justification. Capitalism and the desire to acquire wealth and power are significant driving forces.

Studies in post-colonialism have been described as a “way of ordering a critique of totalising forms of western historicism.”¹⁰ Slemon concerns himself with methods by which colonisers create identities. This is achieved through the establishment of texts and the production of texts. We can recall Hall’s ideas on the creation of self identities, Slemon argues that ideas of the self are created partly through considered educational apparatus and also by what is seen and read in an environment. When colonist ideologies are displayed “through strategic deployment of a vast semiotic field of representations”¹¹, the coloniser is empowered to create (in part) and influence identities of the colonised natives. The imposition of the coloniser's language and texts helps achieve this, but also through enforcing of coloniser's value systems which may or may not differ from native ones. This may be manifested in various ways, the outlawing of a particular religion or political party for example.

The relationship between texts created and institutions can be at odds and can create complex and often contradictory cultural messages according to Slemon. A sense of identity may be modified directly by coloniser or indirectly as a reaction to colonist strategies. It can be difficult to avoid in post-colonial studies a “colonial discourse theory...a description of all kinds of social oppression and discursive control.”¹² In the post-colonial nation state it is more likely that reactionary representations appear in the media and communications spheres. The stories told by a community, whether in an oral tradition or not, are necessarily altered by the arrival of an imperialist force. It

¹⁰ Stephan Slemon, “The scramble for post-colonialism”, *The post-colonial reader*, Routledge London (1995)p.45

¹¹ *ibid.*p.47

¹² *ibid.*p.50

is precisely these 'unwanted guests' that Frantz Fanon argues spark the imagination

*The storyteller replies to the expectant people by successive approximations and makes his way...toward seeking out new patterns, that is to say new national patterns.*¹³

Much of this story telling may be concerned with attempts to remember a glorious past. In Hall's model of national identity this would often imply that false histories were being created and 'entirely' fictitious stories would result. The existence of nationalism and a national culture may not be completely a result of imperialism, but recourse to nationalism is often demonstrated as a resistance to colonialism. Story telling sympathetic to nationalism will frequently have elements of violent content. Stories told in the cinema being no exceptions, the violence of the oppressor such as in "Gandhi" (Richard Attenborough 1982) or the violence of the oppressed in "Michael Collins" (Neil Jordan 1996). In many cases colonists become very settled in the colony, self identity here is also altered. The influence of the native society cannot be totally resisted. While contributing to the classification and subordination of the colony the colonisers can assume other roles also. Often, for example, the colonists will add another dimension to any existing class system, or impose a new one. Another common occurrence is the shifting of the colonist's loyalties over time, here arguably it is incorrect to refer to the subject as a colonist any more.

Imperialist action against Ireland was chiefly met with fervent nationalism from the eighteenth century onwards. In "Yeats and decolonisation"¹⁴ Edward Said mentions nationalism and Anglo-Irish literature, in the form of Yeats', approach to nationalist ideas. Referring to Fanon, he finds nationalism problematic partly because of its use in "sloppy and undifferentiated ways"¹⁵, but also because it is a very broad banner used to

¹³ Frantz Fanon, "National culture", *The post-colonial reader*, op. Cited p.156

¹⁴ Edward Said "Yeats and decolonisation" *Field day pamphlet* No.15 (1988) p.8

¹⁵ *ibid.*p8.

describe great diversity. Nationalism has a tendency to define itself in relation to the imperialist, its horizons frequently cannot over reach this and nationalism is therefore severely limited.¹⁶

Said also considers the imagination. It is in the imagination that a colonised nation can first recover what the nation believes to be denied, autonomy, self determination, independence, all can be imagined before actually realised. After that the next step is to recover the physical geography, to counter "an act of geographical violence."¹⁷ One of the first actions of newly independent nations is to remove architectural reminders of the 'oppressor', thus removing the image of the coloniser. This reactionary response is a deliberate negation of the value or usefulness of the colonial power's infrastructure or culture. This sentiment can infuse into cultural production very easily, for example the revival or zealous adherence to a native language. In a discussion of national cinema the question of language is certainly relevant. In the early poetry of W.B. Yeats a Gaelicism with 'Celtic' preoccupation in subject and theme is noticeable.¹⁸ Nationalism by definition will have differentiating strategies in its ideology. In recent decades transcendence of this has to some extent occurred under process' of globalisation. Globalisation is mostly attributed to more exemplary communications technologies. Identification between cultures is more frequent because of ubiquitous representations made through the media (primarily the broadcast media but also in other areas such as manufacturing of clothes, foods and music). This often is justified as progress.

It can be argued that globalisation's homogenised cultural messages undermine the nation. Alternatives to domestic representations are not necessarily damaging of course. Smaller communities can resist bombardment by 'the media'(in a global scale), by local media products. In the press representation and emphasis can be used to target the interests of select

¹⁶ *ibid.*p.9.

¹⁷ *ibid.*p.11.

¹⁸ *ibid.*p.13.

audiences. Luke Gibbons states that identity has “the capacity to be realised in material form”¹⁹ by creating representations. Yeats was attempting to describe Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community”, and as such was a national poet and a poet of decolonisation.²⁰ Said’s reading of Yeats is that of one who can describe the violence needed for change. Yeats is a cartographer of the subversive ideas of nationalism. In Said’s paper work like Yeats’ poetry can regain lost ground but it is unclear if it can go any further, there is no blueprint for liberation after decolonisation, in the Said model.

In cinema to what degree will post-colonialism effect the content or form of what we see? This will be dealt with in later chapters but for the moment concentration will be on national cinema.

National cinema is a much debated issue against the backdrop of globalisation. In an address given at the Irish Centenary film Conference, “Projecting the nation” Frederic Jameson laid out two specific conditions for the existence of a national cinema. Firstly it must allow for a division of labour so that there is a role for the collective, and secondly there must be a great ‘other’ which a national cinema will be aware of and react to. This is reasonably straight forward and can be seen as ascribing qualities of the national to the domain of film production. National cinema is here described as something quite specific. The great ‘other’ for national cinema is Hollywood cinema, in that it is the largest force in cinema that crosses national boundaries. Having something to be other than allows definition to national cinemas and thus there can be a reliance upon the other to continue to be just that. It should be mentioned that other non-Hollywood cinemas can exist without being a national cinema and there can be much debate over classification.

For an emerging nation, forging its own images, which have a distinctive national dimension, is often a priority. Using, in the case of film-

¹⁹ Luke Gibbons ,(1996) p.11

²⁰ Said (1988) p.18

making, a familiar company of recurrent actors as prescribed by Jameson could aid this end. In Ireland many screen actors arise from a stage tradition, the theatre providing a background. The use also of techniques of film-making which contrast with those of the 'undesirable' other may also serve a similar function. From the model prescribed by Hall, however, some representations may if produced under the above conditions appear reactionary, which may call to question their significant value. [Hollywood may appropriate from national cinema and vice versa, Jean Luc Goddard's "À Bout de Souffle" (1959) is an example with its highly self-conscious referencing of the Hollywood detective genre.]

p.s. "react to"

Jameson's model of national cinema places great importance on social history. In the cinema of Sergei Eisenstein this is a foremost concern. Form can be seen to be as political as the content of the story. In Soviet cinema of the early part of the century stories told were in a distinctive nationalist (and socialist) vein. Through the use of montage editing a resistance to dominant bourgeois cinema form was displayed. Where Hollywood form followed straight line narratives with usually individual protagonists, Eisenstein in films like "Battleship Potemkin" (1925) directly counters Hollywood by using montage instead of linear narrative and focusing not on an individual or individuals but on the collective. In turn the ideology of communism is reinforced. This illustrates a case of a reactive relationship. In contemporary film making it is difficult to be so clear in describing difference as done above in that borrowing or appropriating of almost all style is possible and acceptable to audiences. The dominant force in cinema since before the thirties has been Hollywood however. Currently the majority of films shown in theatres in Ireland and Britain are American. This demonstrates that it is the most accomplished world cinema at selling its product elsewhere. It is not surprising coming from such a large capitalist country. America has the farthest reaching distribution networks enabling American films to be seen across the globe, many European cinema chains and theatres are controlled by American studios. It is, as mentioned, the other to most European national cinema. It is also by Jameson's definition not itself a national cinema. He suggests that

Hollywood of the thirties and forties did bear features of a national cinema, it used recognisable stereotypes (and still does), and had a familiar family of actors, however the star system which emerged does not fit Jameson's model. Unmistakable in Hollywood's system of production is the evidence that film making is treated as an industry, it is a product which has to be viable in the marketplace and films are produced primarily with this in mind. Audience taste is carefully watched and whatever satisfies the public is produced. The complete control by any one person of a film project is less frequently seen and became more prevalent in Hollywood cinema mostly due to commercial success' of independent productions such as "Easy Rider". It became recognised that allowing some who have demonstrated ability the licence to an authorship of the films they create can reward commercially. →

If all story telling is focused on the idea of the quest or journey then it is a trademark of Hollywood, to reinvent the same stories in various guises. ✓ This led to the evolution of what is known as 'genre'. The genre emerged where westerns or gangster movies, for example, presented audiences with formulaic story lines. Outcomes are usually quite predictable in such cases. The classic Hollywood narrative was relatively unchallenged in Hollywood until the seventies. This is not so in European cinema however, such as in the German expressionist cinema of the 1920s, the Italian post war film-making of the 1940s and 1950s of which "Bicycle Thieves" (Vittorio de Sica 1948) is an example, and later in the French 'New Wave' with directors like Jean Luc Goddard and François Truffaut. — — — *Burmes, Campbell*

Currently the debate about existence of a national cinema under globalisation is very much alive. Jameson states that "nations do in fact serve a function in a 'global village' in that they prevent the emergence of 'leftism'"²¹ → He also commented on the emergence of regions, Europe or Japan for example. In Ireland the most prolific images viewed on television or cinema screen are largely American or British in origin. The representations seen have *rep?*

²¹Frederic Jameson, "Is national cinema possible", Keynote address, Irish centenary conference, I.F.C., Dublin 15/12/1996 (unpublished)

generally little dealing with Irish national issues. Albert Moran states that Hollywood film has an explicit project of promoting American manufactured goods, clothes, cars and so on, and also of promoting the American world outlook for others to consume.²² Is this the cultural imperialism of the Americans being purveyed under the far reaching arms of the phenomena of 'globalisation'? This is perhaps too simplistic a view in that America contains a wide range of culturally diverse people. Despite the hegemony within the United States of the White, middle class, heterosexual male, it is perhaps almost impossible to avoid receiving representations from diverse sectors. } →

It is through the quandaries of national cinema, post-colonialism and identity issues that we can now look at Irish representations and whether or not it is even valid to apply nationality to film. Regarding Irish domestic film production there are economic issues which overshadow a virtual cottage industry by American standards. While the money comes mostly from outside, who do the images reach and what do they tell us?

Said
Globalisation
post mod.

²² Albert Moran "Terms for a reader: Film, Hollywood, national cinema, cultural identity, and film policy." *Film policy* Routledge (1996) p.5.

Chapter 2

This chapter will focus on the Irish condition specifically, paying attention to economics, and the relevance, if any, of the term “national cinema”. Cinema is no newer to Ireland than any where else in the world, yet there is little by way of a film-making tradition in Ireland by European or American standards.

Kevin Rockett tells us that cinema first arrived in Ireland but four months after the lumières’ first public cinema screenings, in 1896.¹ The first cinema in Dublin, the Volta, was opened in 1909 by James Joyce and local businessmen. American interest in Ireland as a source of locations and story lines was manifested as early as 1910, when the Irish-Canadian film-maker Sydney Olcott arrived at Queenstown, (now Cobh), county Cork. Olcott represented the Kalem film company. In many of Olcott’s films set in Ireland, America is represented as “the land of bounty freedom and opportunity.”² This is not altogether that surprising considering the large number of immigrant Irish people in America, who were the target audience. Also notable in Olcott’s films is a sympathy towards Irish nationalism and the portrayal of English rule as oppressive. This is obvious even from some of the titles of his films, “Bold Emmett, Ireland’s martyr” (1915) is one example. It also proved to be a somewhat controversial film as it acclaimed a rebel, tried for treason, as a hero. Other films by Olcott had a distinctly political emphasis such as “Rory O’More” (1911), in which the eponymous hero thwarts the British by avoiding arrest and ultimately execution. In “Rory O’More” America is the only place for the fleeing Irishman to escape to, he is aided in his flight by his girlfriend and a priest. The stereotype of the faithful female partner occurs frequently in the silent period and beyond. The church is depicted as supportive of the man’s plight, and is represented in a positive light. Also recurrent in Olcott’s films was the happy ending, usually with the hero heading off to the West.

¹ Kevin Rockett, “*Cinema and Ireland*” (1987), p.9

² *ibid*, p.9

The first two decades of cinema in Ireland were the most productive in volume in the history of Irish film-making, something which is only now beginning to change. It has been argued that the twenties and thirties represent a time when film-making in Ireland was more of “relevance to contemporary and historical events in Ireland”, than any other period until the seventies.³ However true this may seem, it should be noted that the image makers of these Kalem company films were producing for an American market. Perhaps the representations made can be seen as taking the first steps towards widening the gap between what Ireland is perceived as being, by an audience of various cultural backgrounds, and possible real experiences.

“Man of Aran” (Flaherty 1934) was a British production with a budget of between £30,000 and £40,000. It is noted that the lifestyle depicted was quite contrasting with that which existed on the island during the 1930s.⁴ The primitive sketch of the hardships of life, constant backbreaking labour and ferocious weather were exaggerations of the reality. The film viewed sixty years later could be deemed, as Kevin Rockett puts it, Robert Flaherty’s “poetic documentary”, however the premier screening was attended by President de Valera, members of the Executive Council and other high profile public figures such as W. B. Yeats. It appears to have, therefore, become a national event perhaps not unlike the theatre release of “Michael Collins” (1996), which generated much debate in Ireland in November 1996. “Man of Aran” was entirely funded by British money and was heralded often as a documentary. Flaherty did not make a completely factual documentary as his comments illustrate:

We select a group of the most attractive and appealing characters we can find, to represent a family, and through them, tell our story. It is always a long and difficult process, this type finding, for it is surprising how few faces stand the test of the camera.⁵

³ *ibid*, p.46

⁴ *ibid*, p.71

⁵ Rockett, (1987), p.91

It is important to note however that Flaherty's film may have been attempting to offer a philosophical realism when reality is impossible to adequately capture on film. "Man of Aran" has similarities with John Millington Synge's play "Riders to the Sea" which deals with the hardships of life on a western coastal island. Pivotal is the image of the suffering woman, who loses all her male relations to the treacherous Atlantic ocean. Synge's dialogue tries to remain faithful to the nature of spoken Irish, and as a result sounds unusual in English. It can be argued that the exaggerations and simplifications which are evident in "Riders to the Sea" intended to describe the fundamentals of existence on a western island. "Man of Aran" spawned a number of Irish made films in a similar vein. Irish film-makers were not responding to contemporary life of the 1930s but instead were reproducing the "ahistorical *ethnicity* represented in *Man of Aran*...the tourist landscape film."⁶ Examples of such were "Oidhche Sheanchais" (Storytellers Night, 1935) a pseudo documentary which received some state funding. As cinema moved into the "talkie" period Irish film production began to falter. An indication of the confusion surrounding film-making in Ireland is found in the 1943 publication *Irish cinema handbook*, in which a section is called, "What kind of films should we make?" The new republic was careful about state sponsorship, and during the 1940s it was largely 'propaganda'-like documentaries that were produced. Liam O'Leary, a maker of documentaries, criticised the government regime:

*Would we stomach the making of films which reveal our less attractive characteristics- our unemployed, our slums, our emigration, our escapism, our trusted educational system?*⁷

O'Leary's call would go largely ignored for about forty years. In the 1980s many Irish made films began exploring the darker sides of Irish society. Pat Murphy's "Maeve" (1982) examines the role of women against a background of a catholic based education system. Also made in 1982 was "Our Boys"

⁶ *ibid*, p.72

⁷ *Leader*, 15 June 1946, p.16 in Rockett, (1987), p.76, p.92

(Cathal Black) which delivers a critique of the methods of teaching employed by the Christian Brothers, the 'great educators' of Irish male children. "Our Boys" was shunned by Irish television for ten years after it was made before it finally was aired. This clearly demonstrates the sensitivity toward criticism of the catholic church existing as late into 'the modern age' as the 1980s.

Irish state censorship of film is nothing new. The men who founded the free state and later the Republic were united in a belief that freedom meant freedom from British rule. This included British cultural influence also. The catholic church became the guardians of public morality. One of the first of the Free State's legislative actions was to pass an act establishing a film censor. This was in 1923, and by the 1960s over 2,300 films had been banned and approximately 6,000 had been cut.⁸ The Censor was never obliged to give any reasons for cutting or banning films, this is still the case today. Most of the films in question were foreign films, indigenous production was still on a small scale, and the opening of a native film studio in Ardmore⁹, county Wicklow, proved, contrary to many peoples hopes to be of no assistance in developing a film industry in Ireland. Due to the failure on the part of sponsorship bodies, such as the specially formed 'Irish Film Finance Corporation'¹⁰, to ensure adequate provision was made for employment from the Irish labour force, the independent operators of Ardmore entered into an agreement with an English trade union, and before long almost all who worked at Ardmore were foreign. Similarly virtually every film made there was a foreign production.

Film production is a costly business, and in a country as small as Ireland significant investment is needed to make films. This cannot realistically all come from within the country. The implementation in 1987 of

⁸ Ciaran Carty, *Confessions of a sewer rat*, Dublin (1995) p.34

⁹ Ardmore studios was opened in 1958, by Sean T. Lemass, and in his opening speech as recorded in the Irish Times, 13 May 1958, he emphasised the importance of the studios from the point of view of employment and economic exports rather than its cultural potential

a tax incentive scheme which allowed a significant tax-write off for investment in films to be in part made in Ireland, and a subsequent increase in 1993 of the amount from £600,000 to £1.2million, has encouraged foreign investment, and has brought many productions to Ireland which otherwise would have been made elsewhere, such as "Braveheart" (Mel Gibson).¹¹

Less than one hundred films have been made by Irish film-makers, (referring to Irish productions) during the same number of years, yet over 2000 films have been made by others about the Irish.¹² Hopefully this is beginning to change, fourteen Irish productions were due for release in 1996 according to Kevin Rockett's *Irish Filmography*. Nine feature films released in 1996 received funds from the recently re-established *Bord Scannán na hÉireann*.¹³ This represents a dramatic increase from the average figures of about three or four films produced per year during the 1980s and early 1990s. Helpful in getting films onto the screen are co-productions. "Guiltrip" (Stenbridge 1995) involved six production companies from three European countries, and demonstrates that many opportunities exist for finding investment on the European mainland as opposed to trying to provoke American interest. "Michael Collins" (Jordan 1996) was entirely funded by Warner Brothers, although written and directed by an Irishman, Neil Jordan. Virtually all revenue from box office takings therefore goes directly to Warner Brothers. The nationality of "Michael Collins" is considered to be American because of the origin of finance and because also the film is made to serve Warner Brothers commercial interests. Is it then impossible to work in an international framework and still preserve national interests, as many would feel is necessary, in a historically derived film such as this? Is it important to preserve national characteristics at all, and in the case of Ireland it is difficult to say

¹⁰Rockett, (1987), p.100. The 'Irish Film Finance Corporation' was established as a subsidiary of the 'Irish Credit Company' in 1960

¹¹ Kevin Rockett, "Culture, Industry and Irish cinema", *Border crossing: Film in Ireland, Britain and Europe*, Belfast (1994), p.131. This provision was made under Section 35 of the Finance Act (1987) and (1993). The figures of maximum investment under Section 35 augmented from IR£200,000 to IR£350,000 in any one year. The figures quoted above refer to maximum investment under Section 35 over a three year period.

¹² Kevin Rockett, *Still Ireland*, Dublin, (1995) p.2

¹³ Bord Scannán na hÉireann, Review 1995/1996 and annual report 1995.

what constitutes national characteristics in indigenous film. In the small sphere of Irish film-making, both small films dealing with national questions are represented as are larger budgeted ones. While people like Jim Sheridan and Neil Jordan produce mostly homogenised films of the Hollywood ilk, there is a different camp represented by film-makers such as Joe Comerford, Cathal Black, Maurice O'Callaghan among others who produce small budget films without the help of the Hollywood studios. Without studio backing it is difficult to get distribution, and many films such as "Korea" (Cathal Black 1995) while receiving success at film festivals, do not secure wider releases.

One of the key bodies that are of financial assistance to independent film productions are television stations. Many European television stations help produce feature films for theatrical release as well as for small screen exhibition. The British independent broadcaster Channel 4 has had a successful career in feature film investment. In Ireland Radio Telefis Éireann (RTE) has traditionally offered little help in financing feature film production, even smaller budget made for television movies are a rare occurrence. RTE's policy has changed, or more accurately, has been changed by the Ministry for Arts and Culture, to include increased requirements for investment in feature film production. Unfortunately RTE is reluctant to commission independent productions that do not use their technical crews (this is a way of increasing earnings) and so limitations are placed on what is commissioned from independent sectors. In 1993 Minister Michael Higgins set down new requirements and the budget of £5 million for 1994 is expected to rise to a figure of £12 million by 1999.¹⁴ This may or may not present itself as beneficial to an Irish film industry. R.T.E has shown little interest in this area however. Money is perhaps more readily available through the Irish Film Board, the European Media 2 Fund and British television companies such as BBC 2 and Channel 4.

¹⁴ Rockett, (Belfast, 1994), p.131

The case of Channel 4 provides an insight into how a television company can provide assistance to independent productions. The key to Channel 4's success has been that there is no immediate necessity to finance only the films that are deemed to be likely to give substantial returns. This may not seem a recipe for success to many business' but it allows the company to finance features on artistic merit. The reason for this is that, from its inauguration on 2 January 1982, Channel 4 was given a "public service remit to appeal to the tastes and interests not generally catered for by the existing T.V. stations (in Britain), to encourage innovation and experimentation in form and content of programmes".¹⁵ Initially the channel was paid for by the other ITV companies, and a special fund was allocated for commissioning or buying independently produced feature films. This ensured that the Channel could choose what it purchased to in accordance with the public service remit it operated under. In addition to this Channel 4 undertook a sustained policy of investment in feature films. While many of Channel 4's ventures enjoyed critical success few performed well at the box office. "The Crying Game" (Neil Jordan 1992) and "Shallow Grave" (Danny Boyle 1994) are notable exceptions. Despite the 'non commercial' nature of many of Channel 4's projects, the Channel has been of assistance to the meandering British film industry, as John Hill says, "Channel 4's success depends upon its insular position regarding commercial concerns".¹⁶

Other British broadcasters have followed the example of Channel 4. Jim Sheridan's "My Left Foot" (1989) and "The Field" (1990) both received funding partially from Granada television. John Hill is critical of the British governments film policy; "The channel (4) has been committed to a subsidy of film production on the growth of its cultural worth and importance in a way which the British government has not".¹⁷ This criticism of British (lack of) film policy cannot be simply applied to the Irish scenario. Clearly RTE is not engaging in a sustained subsidy of film production and arguably the country is

¹⁵ British Broadcasting Bill 1981:13, in John Hill "British Film Policy", *Film Policy*, Routledge (1996), p.105

¹⁶ *ibid*, p.106

too small to support an independent broadcaster, however the government, while not providing one way or the other for questions of cultural taste (and this is perhaps beneficial), has provided more encouragement to film production than the British government has in recent years. Section 35 of the Finance Act (1987) and (1993), can be welcomed, as a recognition of the commercial value of film-making. As was seen in relation to Ardmore studios, what type of film that is made in Ireland is not (no longer) the concern of the legislators. That expensive American projects, such as "Braveheart" (Mel Gibson 1995), have been shot in Ireland is of benefit to the economy, but it would be unwise to rely upon the apparent attractiveness of Ireland as a location for Hollywood companies to shoot films to provide stability and training for Irish technicians and film crews. Also the cost of supporting a distribution company in Dublin for example would be too great to make it at least match the prices of British and American rivals. It is not an economic viability.

Elsewhere in Europe funding in film frequently comes from television companies like Chanal + in France. Perhaps the greatest obstacle in getting an independent (non-Hollywood) film to audience is distribution difficulties. Small budget Irish films such as "Korea" (Cathal Black 1995) and "Broken Harvest" (Maurice O'Callaghan 1995) were unavailable to audiences outside Ireland and in the former case Dublin, with the exception of some film festivals. A film-maker such as Neil Jordan, because of his success with "The Crying Game" (1992) and the relative success of "Interview with A Vampire" (1994) can obtain backing and distribution for a project such as "Michael Collins" (1996) on the strength of his reputation (but not exclusively, a studio of Warner Brothers kind will be careful about the projects they fund). It is unlikely that Warner Brothers would have made "The Crying Game" in 1992, as its subject matter which explores homosexual love, transvestism, and terrorism, is not the conventional staple of Hollywood thrillers or romances, and an unknown director and cast would not attract audiences.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 106

American audiences are not the only ones who prefer Hollywood movies however, there is an increasing amount of support for American films in European box offices and this applies to mainland Europe in that it has always been the case in Ireland and England that Hollywood predominates. The American share of the French film market in 1980 was 35.2% by 1990 this figure had risen to 56.9%. A similar occurrence is evident in Italy and both countries produced less indigenous films in 1990 than they did in 1980.¹⁸ The American Share of Irish audience figures has always been very high, in 1991 it represented 91.5% of the Irish market.¹⁹ Distribution is the key reason for this occurrence. Hill notes that there has been poor distribution of European films in the United States. "80% of European produced films are not distributed beyond the borders of their country of production and...many of those which are receive only modest release."²⁰ This situation could be altered if more attention was given to the mediums of television and video. Both prove cheaper than theatrical releases. It might be noteworthy that RTE is currently screening a series of 'Irish' feature films, this is an unusual occurrence in the history of a station which screens more Hollywood films than any others. Regarding video, it is also an ignored vehicle for producing film that is accessible to a large audience. 28% of US studio revenue in 1990 came from video sale and rental.²¹ What this amounts to is that US studios are reaping many of the benefits from a foreign market because there is a gap to be filled. That audiences in Ireland are more receptive to a foreign product is a different matter and will be discussed in a later chapter. The problem for smaller national industries is that Hollywood is such an efficient producer that it can infiltrate foreign arenas with comparative ease. There is no European equivalent of the major studios.

Hollywood cinema couples its dominant distribution network with a language of film which is designed to be as inclusive as possible. Universal

¹⁸ Hill, Belfast,(1992), p.74-75

¹⁹ European Audio-visual Observatory, 1994/1995 Statistics Yearbook, p.105

²⁰ *ibid*,p.57

appeal is necessary in order to cross as many national boundaries as possible. John Hill calls for a European cinema, and Irish film-making can apply as easily as any other, that is less 'specialist'²² If European cinema began to target American audiences equally with native audiences this may cause a break down in 'national cinema' as discussed in the previous chapter in that the 'other' may become less clearly definable. "Shallow Grave" is a useful example here. "Shallow Grave" was made by Channel 4 and the Glasgow film fund. Scottish cinema could hardly be said to exist, Scotland exists as peripheral to England and its film production is grouped under the banner of the British film industry. The disadvantaged position Scotland is in is outlined in Steve McIntyre's *Vanishing point: feature film production in a small country*. The situation is stated with grim realism that Scotland needs to produce many small films before it can hope to ever uphold a sustainable (cottage) industry. Boyle's film and particularly his next, "Trainspotting" (1996), which reiterated many of the themes of "Shallow Grave", both met with box office success. The latter of the two becoming a commercial hit both sides of the Atlantic. Perhaps some of John Hill's non 'specialist' film-making is occurring here. "Shallow Grave" (1994) is a psychological thriller which is nothing new. Its significant difference is that it is set in Edinburgh. The opening words of the film, which are given in a voice-over by David (Christopher Eccleson), on of the main characters, state :

*Take trust for instance, or friendship these are the important things in life, these are the things that matter, that help you on your way. If you can't trust your friends well what then? This could have been any city they're all the same.*²³

²¹ *ibid*,p.59

²² *ibid*,p.76 National languages and the use of subtitles is a discouragement to audiences. Hollywood uses established formulae such as classical narrative principles (explained in later chapter) to add predictability and stability to its films. Audiences can then quickly familiarise themselves with the particulars of a film. As audiences see more film and become more sophisticated film can exploit the assumption that the audience is familiar with cinematic conventions. Thus American films such as "Pulp Fiction" (Tarantino 1993) can disrupt linear plot mechanisms and experiment with conventions without causing confusion to the mass audience.

²³ *Shallow Grave* Danny Boyle, 1994, Written by John Hodge.

Immediately an audience is reassured that there is universality in the story that is about to be told. The story concerns three flat mates who come across a dead body in possession of a large amount of money. What ever friendship existed is then eaten away by the ramifications of this discovery. The story is not particularly original being reminiscent of John Huston's "Treasure of Sierra Madre" (1948) where the nature of human paranoia, greed, and friendship is explored. The tone is of 'Film Noir' where none of the characters are identifiable as the 'Hero' yet the most charismatic 'Alex' (Ewan McGregor) seems to triumph, despite all three emerging as mercenary and less than likeable. The pace of the film is fast and the first five minutes are overlaid with a dance music track, the editing is sharp and rhythmical. The 'target' audience is 18 to 30 year olds. Apart from the opening sequences and some others almost the entire film is filmed indoors and all that is left to remind the audience of the setting is the accents of the characters.

"Trainspotting" was made on a larger budget than "shallow Grave", this film was aggressively marketed with a large advertising campaign. It fared well at the American box office, and was quickly released on video in time for Christmas 1996. Successful marketing of the film on many levels helped "Trainspotting" to work on the level of 'the Event' something more social than a film, for example a soundtrack album was on sale virtually immediately and featuring contemporary 'pop' songs as opposed to an orchestral score it increased the exposure of the film, as radio stations were playing songs featured on the film. Much of Trainspotting's success can be attributed to the use of what Mc Intyre calls a "must see" strategy. Hollywood 'blockbusters' such as "Braveheart" (1995) or "Independence Day" (1996) are often given as much media exposure as possible before release through trailering, advertising and preview screenings. Boyle's next project will reputedly star Ewan McGregor, who played leading roles in both previous films. The casting of McGregor, who has become known in Hollywood, should boost the film's performance in the early days of release. It is unlikely also that Danny Boyle should encounter funding difficulties in future projects due to the success of "Trainspotting".

Finding finance for a project may not be the most problematic area of producing a film, McIntyre points out that "European bankers assert that their problem is in finding credible European films to finance, rather than an innate conservatism on their part."²⁴ It is McIntyre's conclusion that there are insufficient projects which have a structure that make them attractive to the apparently willing investors in Europe. Where Hill calls for a less 'specialist' approach to film-making in National cinemas, in order to appeal to a wider market, McIntyre sees only small budget films as being able to preserve their 'specialist' nature if they have one. However, generating stylish "...this could have been any city, they're all the same." films is the surest way to impede on the American market at the moment. Frequently European directors have made the transition to Hollywood in the advent of the Second World War many left notably Fritz Lang, more recently Ireland's Neil Jordan, Italy's Bernardo Bertolucci, Holland's Paul Verhoven, among others have enjoyed varying success. Directors and actors are not the only ones to have made an appearance in Hollywood, European financiers have significant holdings in Hollywood studios. For example the state owned bank, Crédit Lyonnaise has a large stake in MGM.

Underlying this discussion is the fact that relying on American distributors means that only films deemed by a given studio to be of interest to the American audience will prosper. In a climate like this, European film-makers may indeed travel to Hollywood to work and perhaps fundamentally decide whether to innovate or imitate.

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²⁴ *London Economics. The competitive position of the European and US film industries*, Media Business School, 1993 in Steven McIntyre, "Vanishing Point: Feature Film Production in a Small Country", *Border Crossing* eds. Hill, McCloone, Hainsworth, 1994, Belfast, p.92

Chapter 3

This chapter will examine some of the ideas outlined previously, in relation to filmic examples. Concentrating chiefly on “In the Name of the Father” (Jim Sheridan 1993), narrative structure and the implications of the representations made will be studied. In concordance with this some space will be given to discussing “Dear Sarah” (Frank Cvitanovich 1990) which is a small budget film based on the same events.

“In the Name of the Father” was first screened in Ireland and Britain in December 1993. The director, Jim Sheridan, had already met with some Hollywood recognition when his film “My Left Foot(1989)”, a biography of Christy Brown a disabled novelist, won two Academy Awards. “In the Name of the Father” is also based on true events. One of the sources of the screenplay by Sheridan and Terry George was “Proved Innocent” an autobiography by Gerard Conlon. Conlon along with three others were convicted on dubious circumstantial evidence of a terrorist bombing of a Guildford pub. Dubbed the ‘Guildford four’, Conlon, Hill, Armstrong, and Richardson were finally released in 1989 after their convictions were revoked. Central to these events was the unusual occurrence that Conlon’s father Guissepe Conlon along with other members of Conlon’s extended family were convicted of terrorist activities also, and received sentences. Guissepe Conlon died in prison.

It was Guissepe Conlon’s story that was filmed in “Dear Sarah”. The differences between both films are quite great and both will be examined. Prior to the theatrical release of “In the Name of the Father” (1993), there was a stir among the British press over the film. It was reputed by some, before its release, to harbour pro- IRA sentiments. This controversy gave the film quite a bit of coverage in the media. The screenwriter of “Dear Sarah”, Tom McGurk, was also critical of “In the Name of the Father” because of the less than conscientious adherence to the true events. McGurk, a journalist who had helped campaign for the release of the Guildford Four, felt that the use of artistic licence was to the detriment of the message of the film. McGurk wrote in the **Sunday Business Post** dated January 2nd 1994, that “In the Name of the

Father” doesn’t live up to it’s responsibility to the truth. His criticism illustrates a sentiment that films based on true events must be faithful to the facts. However in any adaptation for film a screening of events and editing of what is thought to be important or not will occur. The real cannot appear on screen only a definition of reality, John Hill suggests that “The immediate difficulty arising is what or whose definition of reality we then accept”¹ It is perhaps a more clouded issue when one considers that “ ‘reality’ is nothing but an expression of the prevailing ideology.”² Which indicates that all attempts at realism are informed by dominant ideology. This in turn implies that every stage in the production of a system of representations like a film, is subject to the influence of that ideology. In adaptation a philosophical realism is usually sought by film-makers. That is, that rather than attempt at thorough factuality, the spirit of the original events or original texts is conveyed. In John Millington Synge’s play “Riders to the Sea” a dramatisation of hardship and ultimately an exaggeration of reality is presented as being descriptive of a type of existence, it attempts a philosophical realism. “In the Name of the Father” may be also attempting to offer a type of philosophical realism. It’s success or failure remains to be seen. Sheridan remarked that his interest was mainly in exploring a father son relationship rather than making an exposé of the British judicial system in the 1970’s. In the **Irish Independent** McGurk wrote, “At the moment in Britain in many establishment circles the word is that ‘of course these people were guilty but they got off on a technical argument’”. McGurk is interested in the potential that a large budget, well advertised, film has to influence public opinion. Basically the argument is that a film dealing with this type of subject matter will be subject to different political readings. Care should be taken in what is constructed on the screen.

“In the Name of the Father”, filmed in Dublin, London and Liverpool, was a British, Irish and American co-production. “Dear Sarah” was made by two television companies RTE and Granada (an ITV company). Executive

¹ John Hill “Real to Reel”, *Film Directions*, Irish Film Centre.

² Jean-Luc Comolli, Jean Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism”, in Mast, Gerald, Marshall Cohen, Leo Braudy, eds. *Film Theory and Criticism*, Oxford (1992) 4th edition, p.685

Producer of "Dear Sarah", Joe Mulholland told the **Irish Times** on 6 February 1990 that "the film was made (only) because of a pre-purchase deal with ITV). The budget was IR£1million.

In many respects "Dear Sarah" emerges from a traditions of documentary making prevalent in Ireland during the 1940s and 1950s and more recent drama television than it does from a school of feature film-making intended for theatrical release. Films such as "W B Yeats a tribute" (Fleishman 1950) or "Ireland Rome" (1950), about President Sean T. O'Kelly's trip to Rome, had subject matter that met with the approval of the 'cultural relations committee' which funded them. It was favourable for Ireland to be depicted in documentaries as a literary bed and devoutly catholic state. Where Edward Said noted that it was in the imagination that those who feel dispossessed can first reclaim anything (discussed in Chapter 1), where better to articulate ideals than in motion pictures. A 1954 documentary "Fionta - a study of housing discrimination" dealt with alleged anti-Catholic behaviour in County Tyrone, the political nature of such film-making is evident. "Dear Sarah" is a dramatised documentary, with all documentaries the facts are edited and it is easy to sway the tone of the piece in question. The narrative offered in "Dear Sarah" lacks the hallmarks of classical Hollywood narrative and attempts to recall the film-making ambition of the Lumières, who have obtained a symbolic association as opponents to Georges Méliès' cinema of the fantastic. By that reading Méliès tradition lives in the structured fantasy of Hollywood narrative format. But

"In the Name of the Father" can easily be read as following the format of typical Hollywood feature films. It is classical Hollywood narrative while "Dear Sarah" is not. It may be useful here to examine this in some detail. The narrative structure of "In the Name of the Father" follows closely what David Bordwell calls the 'straight corridor of Hollywood cinema';

The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals, who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem, ...the characters enter

*into conflict with others. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat*³

“In the Name of the Father” has a definite hero figure in Gerry Conlon (Daniel Day-Lewis). He is first depicted as an irresponsible youth in Belfast of 1974, from this point he is subjected to disturbances which force him to act decisively and he finishes victorious. Dramatic spectacle is used in the opening scenes, while stealing scrap metal Conlon is fired upon by the Army who suspect him to be a sniper. In the ensuing chase Conlon upsets an IRA hideout. A violent riot follows, the camera moving from a bird’s eye view to ground level (suggesting a descent into the mêlée), and also asserting the camera as an ‘autonomous figure’⁴ which enables the story to be presented. Locals swarm around to ‘protect’ the IRA members from the search. Gerry is unable to behave as his parents would wish. His father has to intervene and use his influence as a community member to prevent the IRA from ‘kneecapping’ Gerry as punishment. Guiseppe is initially portrayed as Gerry’s saviour, whereas Gerry is seen as an unkempt and disaffected person.

Within the first few scenes of the movie the principal characters and their relationship has been explained to us. Gerry is what Bordwell calls ‘principle causal agent’⁵ and the events of the film follow his actions for the most part. In “Dear Sarah” both the characters of Sarah Conlon and Guiseppe Conlon fit this description, they are seen as partners and the events of the film are seen at different times from both their points of view. Gerry Conlon is but a minor character in “Dear Sarah”. While based on the same events the two films are telling different stories, in “Dear Sarah” it is the woman who is the focus of attention, while “In the Name of the Father” shows an essentially male perspective. Many of the scenes in “In the Name of the Father” that do not feature Gerry Conlon do have a voice over by him, such as the scene in which Gareth Pearce (Emma Thompson) listens to Gerry’s audio tape letters.

³ David Bordwell “Classical Hollywood cinema: Narrational Principals and Procedures.” In Rosen (Ed) **Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology**. Columbia (1986)p.18

⁴ Stephen Heath *Narrative Space*, **Questions of Cinema**. London (1981) p.51

⁵Bordwell (1986),p.18

This scene occurs near the beginning of the film and tells the audience that the story is based on Gerry's recollection of the events. He is the principle concern of the characters on screen.

In classical Hollywood cinema a 'star' is usually cast in the leading (male) role an Academy Award winner such as Day Lewis is such a 'star'. Gerry Conlon in "In the Name of the Father" is in the position of many classical Hollywood heroes before him, he is subject to cause and effect and has limited goals initially, but due to chance (misfortune, in this case) and his reactions to what happens to him, his disposition is altered and he is potentially better off by the end of the narration than he was to start. Bordwell states;

At the level of the syuzhet⁶ the classical film respects the canonic pattern of establishing an initial state of affairs which gets violated and which must then be set right

Gerry Conlon is placed in an unjust position which classical Hollywood cinema demands is put right. This contrasts with "Dear Sarah" which doesn't meet these demands in that it ends in tragedy.

The main events of "In the Name of the Father" are concerned with eliminating the disturbance to normality. The plot is structured in such a way that there is little to divert audience attention from this. Bordwell points out that classical Hollywood cinema rarely offers parallel plots to audiences. Guiseppe Conlon goes to London to organise a solicitor for his son and is consequentially arrested for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Deadlines are frequently employed in order to provide parameters for the plot, this is done explicitly such as in "High Noon" (Zinnemann 1952), or more implicitly as in Guiseppe's immanent death. In both "Dear Sarah" and "In the Name of the Father" the countdown is reversed in that every moment passed is borrowed time as these are innocent people imprisoned. Also present in

Bordwell's classical Hollywood cinema model is the secondary plot involving usually a heterosexual romance. In "In the Name of the Father" this is replaced with a study of a father to son relationship. Any Oedipal conflict is resolved when the father dies and Gerry begins to act responsibly and decisively.

The sequence of scenes in "In the Name of the Father" is constructed in a causally related pattern. Each scene will display an exposition which will specify time and place and often the current states of mind of the characters (this as a result of preceding scenes), "midway through a scene the characters, more often the central character, will act towards their goals"⁷ this may involve making a decision, performing a task or action among others. In any given scene some cause and effect lines will either be continued or resolved. This linearity of plot mapping is very characteristic of classical Hollywood cinema, numerous examples of this can be found in "In the Name of the father". In one instance a scene shows Gerry and Paul Hill (John Lynch) arguing with a squatter in their house. As a result they decide to leave, Gerry says "We'll sleep in the park or something". The next scene establishes the existence of an IRA contingent, Joe McAndrew (Don Baker) is on the telephone to superiors and is ordered to plant a bomb at eight o'clock. The audience has been informed of the imminent bomb strike and are also aware of Gerry and Paul's lack of an alibi. Two scenes one of the two men talking to a homeless man and another of a pub being destroyed in an explosion are placed in quick succession beside each other, indicating they happened at the same time. Each of the above scenes run consecutively, contain a short preamble which allows the audience to recognise features, makes it's contribution to the plot and quickly finishes.

This adherence to Classical Hollywood cinema format leaves little work to the audience and makes the plot easy to follow as it follows conventions closely. Classical Hollywood formats are so named because they

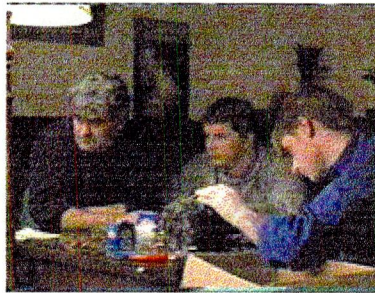
⁶ Bordwell explains this word as "Russian formalist term for the systematic presentation of fabula (*story*) events in the text we have before us. (Sometimes translated as plot)" (1986), p.18

⁷ *ibid*, p.20



Figure 1

Direct causal lines exist between scenes. Following a dispute, Gerry and Paul Hill agree to leave the squat. Gerry kisses his girlfriend good-bye. This establishes why Gerry and Paul became suspects as their whereabouts were unknown by their friends.



The following scene shows the real bombers preparing.

This establishes who the bomber really were.



Gerry and Paul arrive at a park.

This establishes their whereabouts at the time of the bomb.



The opening scene of the bomb exploding is recapitulated. Confirming that Gerry and Paul Hill were not involved.



The concurrent scene immediately reasserts the situation of Gerry and Paul Reinforcing the innocence of the characters from the audience's point of view.

succeed in conveying many stories in a pleasing fashion. Style and technique become vehicles for conveying the essentials of the plot, there is little room for subjective activity in these fields, although as Heath points out, classical narrative does not necessarily attempt to create a text where all process is rendered invisible, all process is contained within conventions, "what counts is as much the representation as the represented, is as much the production as the product."⁸

"In the Name of the Father" offers moments of spectacle, the pub explosion, the riot, the abusive interrogations, these are also conventions of Hollywood film-making of the past twenty years. Violence has played an integral part in Hollywood narrative from the beginnings of Genre. The western revolved around the geographical violence of occupying territory and pushing out the frontier. The detective story balanced the violence of the wrong doers with the capacity for violence of the hero, which is exercised in justifiable ways, that is the villain is killed by the hero in an act of self-defence. "In the Name of the Father" continues in this tradition, only the violence the hero inflicts is that of humiliating the regime which imprisoned him. The emphasis is placed upon the movement of the plot and not on the detailed drawing of character. This is not the case in "Dear Sarah", perhaps confined by its budget, violent spectacle is not explicitly shown. The viewer sees a bruised body, or a news readers voice telling of a bomb. This contributes to a tone of reportage and focuses attention on character reaction and response. The violent scenes in "In the Name of the Father" are intended to be abrasive, as the film is based on real events this violence is intended to be accepted as fact. The violence of the past twenty to thirty years in or concerned with Northern Ireland is acknowledged by most. That film-makers address it is not surprising. "In the Name of the Father" uses conventions that

⁸ Heath (1981),p.51 Heath argues that classical cinema does not attempt an absolute realism, but instead contains its signs of production. "It is too readily assumed that the operation... of classical cinema lies in the attempt at an invisibility of process, the intended transparency of a kind of absolute 'realism' from which all signs of production have been effaced. Classical cinema does not efface the signs of production, it contains them,...",p.51



Figure 2

In "Dear Sarah" no physical acts of violence are shown, only the aftermath.



In contrast, there is a long intensive interrogation scene in "In the Name of the Father."



In "Dear Sarah", Sarah's face is all the audience sees of Gerry's arrest.



In "In the Name of the Father" the arrest scene is noisy and violent.

emerge from Hollywood, this makes the film more likely to succeed abroad, it also presents a certain picture of Ireland or Northern Ireland.

If films such as “The Quiet Man” (John Ford 1952) present an image of Ireland that is rural idyllic and ‘other’ for Americans such as Sean Thornton (John Wayne), “In the Name of the Father” offers an image of Ireland as violent and urban. The ‘peace keepers’ are the Army and the RUC or the IRA who at one point the viewer learns have killed a friend of Conlon’s because he was an ‘incurable thief’. This portrayal is potentially as romanticised as the Ireland of “The Quiet Man”. Sean O’Faoláin said

*Romance is not made of pretty things. As a movement, it began in France out of dissatisfaction and despair... romance comes out of blood and toil and tears and sweat.*⁹

Violence may be a part of life in Northern Ireland in the context of “In the Name of the father” and “Dear Sarah” but it is also the crux of much of Ireland’s past as well as recent history. While being an archetype of classical Hollywood cinema “In the Name of the Father” also presents a working of some of the myths which are applicable to Irish society. Richard Kearney quotes Patrick Pearce saying “bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing.”¹⁰ Kearney sees a correlation between the so-called violent past of Ireland and the ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland. Some myths of Ireland’s past may prove to be the bases to some ideologies in Ireland. To clarify this Kearney quotes the provisional IRA’s declaration of 1970 where it was said “...we take our inspiration and experience from the past.”¹¹ What is meant is that it is likely that the authors of IRA propaganda or ideology look to the ‘heroes’ of 1916 as fellows. Kearney points to a tradition that exists of looking back to a heritage that may be false. The execution of the rebellion leaders of

⁹ Sean O’Faoláin in Luke Gibbons “Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema” **Cinema in Ireland**, Dublin (1987), p.196

¹⁰ Richard Kearney, **Transitions**, Dublin, (19), p.213

¹¹ *ibid*, p.200

1916 made them into martyrs and this is often remembered as sacrificial and plays on a myth of bloodletting; “those who were executed became martyrs whose blood was the seed of the Irish Free State”¹²

This ‘bloodletting’ myth is explained as using blood sacrifice to alleviate an unsatisfactory situation. Was there an identification made with the 1916 organisers and some mythical past of Ireland and is that analogy still used by so called revolutionaries today? Both Patrick Pearce and Thomas McDonagh were poets and Kearney suggests that the rising was conceived in ‘mythic-poetic’ terms, in that a sacrifice was necessary for any real difference to be made.

“In the Name of the Father” foregrounds a theme of the redemption of the imperfect son running through. Gerry is unable to get a job; “Can’t get a job, there are no jobs, you know that” he says to his father. In a later scene when Gerry and Guiseppe are incarcerated together a confrontation takes place. Here Gerry voices his frustration with the pressure he felt from his idealistic father. Guiseppe wants to know if Gerry committed the murders. Gerry is angered by this question, and recalls a childhood episode when Guiseppe questioned Gerry’s sportsmanship in a football match, “...I’m talking about the medal... The medal I won at football, ... you ruined that medal for me... and that’s when I started to rob; the proof that I was no good.” Gerry had won through playing dirty and Guiseppe was not content to let it be, Gerry couldn’t face his fathers disappointment and became disillusioned with himself. This scene is pivotal to the plot of the film, the traumas experienced by the characters have led them to a position where they are able to communicate in a way they may never have (as we are led to believe by opening scenes) otherwise. Through his imprisonment and suffering Gerry is saved from a fate similar to his friend Danny, who is murdered by the IRA for civil disobedience. The central section of the film provides evidence of the hero maturing from irresponsible criminal to responsible ‘father’ figure. Later

¹² George Bernard Shaw in Kearney (1988),p.208

when Guiseppe is dying and Gerry is trying to reassure him, saying he will look after his mother, Guiseppe says “ Do you think I’d leave Sarah in your care?... You haven’t the maturity to look after your self let alone your mother.” The scene ends with this comment, the camera pointing at Gerry’s face and so the audience is led to believe that Gerry is taking his fathers criticisms on board. Guiseppe dies two scenes later while the previous conversation is still fresh in the audience’s mind.

Guiseppe’s sacrifice is signified by a scene showing prisoners throwing flaming papers from the prison windows. A visual metaphor, perhaps signifying funerary fire and the expectation of renewal. The Gerry Conlon portrayed in the following scene is different to that previous to Guiseppe’s death. The audience are left in no uncertain position when Gerry tells Gareth Pearce (Emma Thompson), “They fouled the ball Gareth, ... and they’re as guilty as sin.” The expression “foul the ball” is one Gerry tells the audience his father used when questioning him after a childhood football match. Gerry is next depicted doing ‘chin-up’ exercises in his cell accompanied by a ‘Thin Lizzy’ soundtrack, reminiscent of Sylvester Stallone in “Rocky” (John Avildsen 1976). A cinematic metaphor for the underdog training in order to overcome adversity.

If myth can often be the translation of the “Impotence of mans historical existence into the omnipotence of a prehistory”¹³ then this is at work in this story. Telling such a story through the medium of cinema is significant in that it ensures its place in the repertoire of stories which appear in society. Through television and video this story will be retold. If it reworks a myth then this reworking will be underlined each time the film is screened. Might this underline a “mythological cult of sacrifice”¹⁴ which is reiterated throughout recent Irish cultural history? A reading of Yeats’ poem, “Easter 1916”, according to Kearny, may be read as an expression of wonder at what transformations can occur once blood sacrifice is made, beauty comes from

¹³ *ibid*,p.221

¹⁴ *ibid*,p.211

terror (*A terrible beauty is born*). While Yeats' poem does not necessarily glorify death for a cause, as he asks, "*Was it needless death after all?*" , the writing the poem gives recognition to a blood sacrifice myth.

Possible origins of this myth are in pagan seasonal rituals, according to Kearny. Rejuvenation through blood sacrifice was a feature of cults of Attis or Dionysis. The Christian message of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus also encompasses this myth, Martyrdom "stands in a lineage of sacrificial cultism which dates back to the ancient mythological cycles of renewal and rebirth"¹⁵ In myths such as this features occur like 'the scapegoat' or victim and the idea of the benefits to the many which emerge from the sacrifice of the few or the one. In "In the Name of the Father" Gerry assumes the role of his father as responsible 'head of the family' after Guiseppe's death. Violence is not condoned by the film in any way however. Perhaps eager to appeal to a British audience the IRA bomber is portrayed as a cold hearted machine-like killer capable of extreme brutality. This is demonstrated in another pivotal scene when the IRA man Joe McAndrew (Don Baker) maims a prison guard with a makeshift flame thrower. This affords Gerry the opportunity to take a stand against McAndrew and make his true inclination clear to characters onscreen and audience alike. Gerry is liberated by his decision in this scene to defy McAndrew, his confidence grows from here until the end of the film. The film finishes with a free Gerry vowing to fight to clear the name of his father. Gerry is an improved version of the man that went into prison.

"In the Name of the Father" cannot inspire action because all causal lines are resolved. The individual is the prime focus, Gerry Conlon, the injustice ends when he is freed . It is in this respect that the film cannot offer the 'philosophical realism' its film-makers might hope.

¹⁵ ibid,p.221

"Dear Sarah" avoids many of the characterisations that appear in "In the Name of the Father". Here Guiseppe is imprisoned despite his innocence, he and his wife Sarah campaign for a revoking of his sentence, but the film ends with Guiseppe's death in prison. There are little of the conventions that appear in "In the Name of the Father" such as the struggle against the disturbance which ends in an improved stability. By adhering to a strict retelling of events as they happened and an unostentatious style, screenwriter Tom McGurk avoids making a film that will be instantly recognisable to an audience as an entertainment piece. "Dear Sarah" has little to offer also as a myth of sacrifice, Guiseppe's death is portrayed as pathetic and pointless. Gerry a possible hero figure is a secondary character, Sarah, the hero figure of the film, is shown to be unable to overcome the monstrous institution of the British justice system. Like Maggie Derrane in "Man of Aran" and Maurya in "Riders to the Sea" Sarah Conlon is burdened with hardship, and in the former and latter cases the death of a husband at the hands of and uncontrollable force. The approach of the film-makers here is to show the effects of violence and prejudice and to tell a true story. This story is one of victimisation¹⁶ and the film offers no solution to the problem other than its own informative power. Where "In the Name of the Father" resolves its moral dilemmas within its own textual parameters "Dear Sarah" is designed to provoke an audience reaction that is based on a recognition of the events as being true, much in the manner of a documentary. However, T. W. Adorno states that,

The ideas of order that [the culture industry] inculcates are always those of the status quo... the culture industry does not resolve... conflicts except in appearance- its "solutions" would be impossible for them^{as well as Conlon} (the helpless) to use to resolve their conflicts in their own lives¹⁷

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that an image of victimisation is one favoured by the IRA in the past, most prominently in relation to media censorship of Sinn Féin/IRA spokespersons and also in relation to the hunger strikes of the 1970s. Bobby Sands and others convicted of terrorist crimes died on hunger strike following a dispute over the status and rights of IRA prisoners.

¹⁷ T.W. Adorno in Judith Hess Wright, "Genre Films and the Status Quo", in Grant, Barry Keith, *Film Genre Reader*, Austin, (1986), p.41

Figure 3



Woman of Burden :Maggie Durrane faces the oppressive elements



Sarah Conlon facing the oppression of the British justice system.

In "In the Name of the Father" the victim becomes the victor; Gerry is empowered by his ordeal. In "Dear Sarah" the victims suffer and are unable to avoid tragedy.

It is probable that the attitude of Jim Sheridan and Terry George towards "In the Name of the Father" was that it was a story worth telling. By constructing it as a classical Hollywood narrative it enters a different frame of reference whereby it can expand upon a myth of sacrifice and blood letting. In order to fulfil the requirements of the classical narrative type, many of the events in question were ignored. If there is a subversion of classical narrative, this allows film to be received by audiences of differing cultural backgrounds in different ways,¹⁸ yet "In the Name of the Father" does not subvert, a reading of it as a projection of Irish myths of bloodletting gives it specificity on one level but it does not undermine the ideology in which it stands.

To conclude with "Dear Sarah" it has fulfilled a set of criteria which might define national cinema; it uses indigenous actors and it is structured very much as other than Hollywood. The light in the film is cold and bright which helps redefine the film's 'otherness', whereas the ubiquity of Kodak film stock and Panavision cameras means that Hollywood cinema 'looks' a certain way. A national cinema is more than one film or a group of films however, it is an industry within a secure space, film-making in Ireland is not. Secure spaces are not easy to find.

¹⁸ This is reminiscent of the phenomena of *Culture Jamming* as expanded by Mark Derry from original concept by Umberto Eco. "The receiver of the message seems to have a residual freedom: the freedom to read it in a different way... I am proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its... possibilities of interpretation" in Mark Dery **Culture Jamming** Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, New Jersey, (1993), p.6 *Culture Jamming* as illustrated by Dery is a militant deliberate exercise in subordination.

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