National College of Art and Design
Joint Course - Fine Art Printmaking

A Question of Identity
Northern Irish Communities in Irish Cinema

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by

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Introduction

The Northern Irish Community
A Question of Identity

In the North of Ireland there are political declarations everywhere. These tend to take the shape of easily recognisable emblems, which are forever vying for one's attentions. This seems to be a manifestation of the search for, and assertion of, an identity, by both sections of the community. It is this richness of visuals, made by, for and within the community, which makes the depictions of Northern Irish communities so interesting.

The divisions between Catholic Nationalist and Protestant Unionist in Northern Ireland are evident in their semiotic displays. The visual communications come in the form of certain signs and symbols. These include the political discourses of the Belfast wall murals, which take different shape according to the area they are based in. There is a strong tendency in Loyalist murals towards geometric forms, such as flags and shields (fig. 2). The image of King William on the Boyne is a stylised image, which is to be seen again and again in the Unionist murals (fig. 10). It is more of a triumphalist statement than a joyous exclamation. Slogans and written messages are also popular. These trends are similar to those of the Protestant Church, in which a stark aesthetic is the convention.

The nationalist murals also reflect the style of their community's worship. In the case of this community the images are narrative and emotional. The images of the Hunger Strikers sanctify their cause with the use of Catholic icons. They also portray their message in a sentimental way. These murals' imagery employ Catholic iconography, which is at times used as propaganda (fig. 5).

Even colours do not escape the war of emblem and tradition within the identities of Northern Irish communities. Orange is associated with the Unionists and the Orange

Order, while green has strong Nationalist associations. Their diverse traditions are particularly evident in the contrasting costumes, which they have adopted to signify their own identities. The traditionally English bowler hat of the Unionists is very formal, especially when compared with the more flamboyant costumes of Irish dancing. The native Irish traditions, dancing, Irish language and Gaelic games provide appropriate iconography for the Catholic community. The Protestant community, on the other hand, has found a space within the Orange Order for an assertion of their particular identity (figs. 1.1, 1.2). *"The Orange Order provided ... an elaborate series of communication emblems and rituals, (meetings, marches, banners etc.)."* (Tom Nairn, 1981, p.234)

There is an absence of an indigenous Northern Irish tradition, which is common to both communities. In many ways Northern Ireland is a 'No Man's Land' in which both sections are isolated from one another by asserting their own traditions separately. In the case of the Unionist community it is British, Scottish and Protestant customs with which they associate themselves, while the Nationalists assert their connections with Irish, Celtic and Catholic ones. This is hardly surprising since these two traditions have long histories and definite identities, which have formed over many centuries. They are two very different histories in which one is a coloniser and the other, the colonised. Northern Irish people have not got a particular identity in the same sense. Such an identity has never really emerged since they have always appropriated one of these two dominant cultural identities instead.

This is a problem which filmmakers face when they approach the subject of Northern Ireland. Indigenous filmmakers must decide what style, structure and format will be most appropriate for the situation and aspect of the communities they are tackling. The cinematic conventions they are looking to include the many films which have been made by filmmakers both at home and abroad about the North and South of Ireland.

Throughout the course of this thesis the depictions of these communities and their visual output will be examined within the area of Irish cinema. There will be particular reference to *Some Mother's Son* (Terry George, 1996) and *Nothing Personal* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1995). The former is a film, which is a portrayal of the Nationalist community, with particular focus on their attitude to the Republican paramilitary

element. *Nothing Personal* is also concerned with the paramilitary activity of a Northern Irish community. However, in this case it is the Unionists and their attitudes to Loyalist activists. Representations of violence in the context of Northern Ireland have a diverse history. Violence has been handled differently, for specific reasons, by different filmmakers at different times. This has affected the way in which the paramilitaries, and the Northern Irish people in general, have been perceived. Violence is the common denominator in the North of Ireland. It is this that affects both communities. It is violence, which many people associate with Northern Ireland. There are continuous images of Republican and Loyalist violence portrayed across the world through the media. This has become, in many ways, the 'stereotype' of this country.

Plate 1.1
Orange Order Series, Paul Seawright, Belfast, 1990, colour C type print

Plate 1.2
Orange Order Series, Paul Seawright, Portadown, 1991, colour C type print

Plate 2

Remember the Loyalist Prisoners, flag of St. Andrew and the motto of the Ulster Defence Association, 'quis seperabit', ('who will separate?'), Lindsay Street, Belfast, 1981., with Crown, Red Hand of Ulster, Union Jacks and

Chapter 1

The Iconography of Northern Irish Communities

In Northern Ireland there is a constant awareness of whether people are of one's own politico-religious group. *"To term someone a Catholic or a Protestant in this context conjures up a whole history of social, economic, and political attitudes not confined to religious affiliation."* (Brian McIlroy, 1993, p.96) This is highlighted by the fact that within most large towns in Northern Ireland, and most notably in Belfast and Derry, there is a strict division between Catholic and Protestant areas. These areas are at times, divided by barricades. The majority of people in Belfast, for example, would be able to tell whether a person was Protestant or Catholic just by finding out what street they lived on. This is also true of Christian and family names. Catholics tend to have names of Irish derivation, while Protestants usually have names which are more traditionally English or Scottish. For instance, William or Billy would be a popular Protestant name, whereas Liam would be the Irish version and thence more likely to be a Catholic name.

This sharp divide is not only confined to the streets, it also exists in the marital relations, or lack of them. Mixed marriages, (that is marriages between Catholics and Protestants), are not generally socially acceptable. This only results in the widening of the already deep-rooted divisions between the communities. "*The lack of marriage across the divide, and the lack of kinship ties which follow, are two of the key factors which perpetuate the notion of there being two distinct sets of people labelled as 'your own'.*" (Patrick Clancy, 1986, p.386)

It seems to be the case that being of either religion is important just as much for secular activities as it is for religious events. For instance, which village or town hall one attends is as much confined to one community or the other as churches and chapels are. Many rural studies have been conducted in this field. "*They have seemed to suggest that*

being a Catholic or Protestant is not as important for visiting or attending marriages and funerals as it is for events which take place in more public arenas." (Ibid. p.385)

Roman Catholicism and the Churches of the Reformation are both Christian religions and so much of their symbolism has the same origins. However, their emphases are quite different. For example, while the Virgin Mary is one of the most important icons of the Catholic Church, her place in the Anglican Church varies and does not hold the same strong symbolic position. It is the Word of God, which has particular significance in the Reform Churches, especially in Presbyterianism. The large pulpits in Presbyterian churches emphasise the centrality of the Word of God and preaching. This is reflected in Protestant homes, which often have illuminated texts on their walls, which are sometimes embroidered and inherited. There are also often quotes from the bible inscribed on the outside of barns and buildings.

Christian images which are common to Catholicism and Protestantism are: the Cross, the Trinity, Christ Crucified and the Madonna and Child. The images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Pieta are particularly Catholic icons.

During the Reformation, Protestants stripped their churches of the ornamentation and statues which adorned them. This reflected the Protestant aversion to the materialistic and superstitious and resulted in the puritanical and simple aesthetic of Protestantism. Meanwhile, Catholicism still demonstrates its love of ornament, statue and symbol. Catholic icons and statues are usually figurative and display an emotion, usually pain, suffering and devotion. These images tend to be sentimental and dramatic. (See fig.3)

Geometric designs are usually the only type of ornament one finds in Presbyterian churches. The cross is rarely seen because of its identification with superstitions. An inscription or written message such as 'We preach Christ crucified', which appears in Ian Paisley's own church, is more common. In Protestant homes the Word of God is often given pride of place.

In Catholic homes on the other hand, there are a variety of religious ornaments, which are likely to be adorning the rooms. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is generally depicted in

paintings and small statutes. These are often mass-produced. Jesus is usually portrayed exposing his heart, which is burning at the centre of his chest. This heart is often bound with a crown of thorns, which represents Christ's suffering and passion. This heart is considered the source of God's love, devotion, understanding, courage, sorrow and joy. These paintings, usually painted in deep pinks and reds are often given prominence of place in the home and may be hanging in a number of rooms.

The crucifix is also popular and is often hung in the kitchen or in the bedroom. This image of the sacrificial Christ is a very strong one and is remembered in the gesture of the sign of the cross, (which is made at prayers, during mass and when somebody dies). There are a number of customs, which are a reminder of Christ's suffering. One custom was particularly popular in Ireland, North and South. This entails leaving a candle burning in the window and setting an extra place at the dinner table on Christmas day. This was considered a way of welcoming Jesus into your home at Christmas time.

The image of the Virgin Mary is also a potent image and the cult of the Virgin survives today. Pilgrimage sites, such as Knock in Mayo, are testimony to the central position of Mary in Roman Catholicism in Ireland. Throughout the country there are many statues of the Virgin Mary in grottoes in the towns and on the sides of remote roadways. The notion of the Virgin Mary as an ideal - the mother who 'conceived without sin' has also been adopted by Catholicism as the shining example for Irish woman. She has been described as the *"model of Irish womanhood, which Catholic Ireland insinuates on its young."* (Martin McLoone, 1990)

The main problem with the notion of the Virgin Mother of Jesus is the idea that everything is either black or white. Catholic female symbols seem too easily divided into two groups, either that of virgin or whore. It follows that if one incarnates all that is good then the other must represent all that is not. In the Bible this theory is demonstrated; *"Eve the woman had been tempted and yielded, and so was held responsible for the fall, but Mary the maiden was the means of bringing the Saviour into the world to redeem mankind."* (Heather Child, 1971, p.87)

Therefore, Mary is seen not only as pure and virtuous, but as a woman whose duty it is to maintain these virtues. She is thence seen to be dutiful also. The fact that she conceived without sin implies that sex is a sin, perhaps the worst sin for women since such importance is placed on conception and pregnancy. It was by conceiving that Mary helped to redeem mankind. *" 'Now that a virgin has conceived in the womb and borne to us a child ...now the chain of the curse is broken. Death came through Eve, but* life *has come through Mary.' St. Jerome, Letter 22."* (in Marina Warner, 1990, p. 54)

This sanctifying of chastity, conception and pregnancy has resulted in the Catholic Church's emphasis on the domestic role of women. It has also resulted in the production of the notion of women as either without sexual needs or without control of them. These factors are what make the Catholic image of the Virgin Mary oppressive.
It is the different approaches and attitudes of each community to similar debates that make them so divided. For instance, the Unionists treat the emblem of the female as representative of a country, place or a queen quite differently to the Nationalists. The image of Ireland is often portrayed as a virgin and a mother by Nationalists. Meanwhile, the Unionists use more independent and powerful women such as Queen Victoria, Ulster and Britannia. *"It is a Virgin/Mother/Ireland who watches over the dying Republican in a 1972 Easter card ... and in the mural painted in Rockmore Street off Belfast's Falls Road in 1981."* (Belinda Loftus, 1990 p. 20) (See Fig. 5)

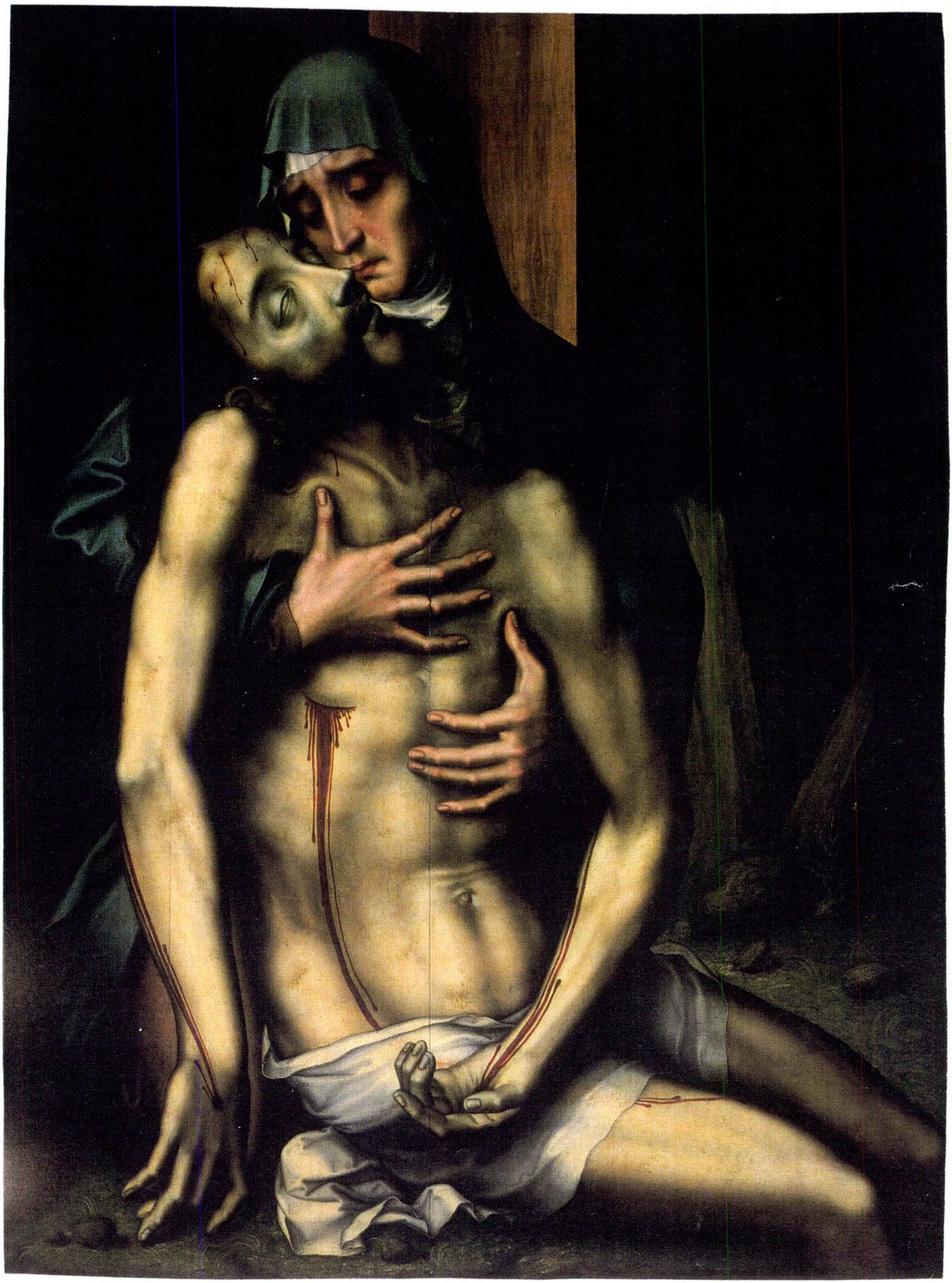

Plate 3
Pieta, Louis de Morales, 1560-70, Madrid, Real Academia de Bellas Artes, Panel

Chapter 2

Irish Cinema and Northern Ireland

Films have been produced in Ireland for over a hundred years. During that time Ireland has witnessed many political and cultural changes, not the least of which being the achievement of independence in the South and the establishment of the Northern Irish state in 1922. However in 1922, cinema in Ireland was already in existence for nearly three decades. In many ways these early years helped to shape the films which followed. Despite the many political changes, several stereotypes, myths and themes have prevailed. These stereotypes often have a long history, and in cinema one finds only a recent expression of them.

An indigenous film industry in Ireland, both sides of the border, and even before its existence, has found many difficulties in establishing itself. These included a lack of funding and technical expertise, and the dominance of the world's film industry by Hollywood. In Northern Ireland there has been the added difficulty of the sensitive subject of 'the troubles'. The North of Ireland gained little support from Britain for its film industry. *"Historically treated as rather a neglected province of Britain, Northern Ireland has been a long time developing its own focus as far as film production was concerned."* (Terry Byrne, 1977, p.177) Therefore, images of Northern Ireland and the South of Ireland have by and large been produced by foreign filmmakers, in particular those from Britain and America.

Films about Northern Ireland usually employed 'the troubles' as a background to a personal story. This was considered more marketable by the Hollywood producers and anything, which delved too deeply into the conflict would not have been passed by the British censors. Therefore, films set in the North were deliberately careful to avoid any political content. This resulted in the production of films, which not only focused on personal dramas but on acts of violence, (especially paramilitary) while not grounding

them in any real political context.

Violence is approached very differently by British and American film makers who chose Northern Ireland as their location. The cinema of Hollywood tends towards an attitude that violence is positive and necessary for advancement of character and situation. "*Violence in this respect, in central to the positivism and dynamism characteristic of American cinema.*" (John Hill, 1987, p.151) Meanwhile, in British cinematic traditions violence is disruptive and regressive for both character and plot development. "*Violence in British cinema characteristically thwarts drives and ambitions, indicates character flaw or lack of self identity, exacerbates problems and tensions and signifies either regression or fatalism*". (Ibid. p.152) When these cinematic traditions are translated into Northern Irish themes these attitudes to violence are combined with traditional British and American attitudes to Ireland and the Irish.

The sizeable Irish-American audience and input to Hollywood has led to a quite positive view of the Irish in the United States. On the other hand, British political involvement in Ireland over the centuries has led to a more negative viewpoint. In British films violence occurs which seems to have no political reason and the only one offered is fate or the violent nature of the Irish. "*It is only metaphysics or race, not history and politics which offer an explanation of Irish violence.*" (Ibid. p.149) This attitude to Northern Irish violence is also evident in past media coverage of 'the troubles'. "*British television's coverage of Northern Ireland has relied on 'a series of de-contextualised reports of violence' which have failed 'to analyse and re-analyse the historical roots of the conflict.*" (Ibid. p.177) Films such as *The Gentle Gunman*, (Basil Dearden 1952) and *Odd Man Out* (Carol Reed 1947) are examples of this. "*The North was seen to be in the grip of dark mythological forces, and it was never seen that people created these problems and that people could solve them.*" (Pat Murphy, 1993)

Cinematic representations of paramilitaries in the North of Ireland invariably portray Republican gunmen. Depictions of Loyalists on the other hand are conspicuously absent. In fact, portrayals of the Unionist community are very rare. Even though the Catholic community is the minority in Northern Ireland the majority of films deal with them. The main reason for this seems to be the notion that the Nationalist community

are the minority and the underdogs of the situation. *"Most films blindly accept the assumption that the Catholic community is an oppressed minority. Since the I.R.A. casts itself as the protector of this be-leaguered community, filmmakers deal with the I.R.A."* (Brian McIlroy, 1993, p.96) Filmmakers who wish to deal with Loyalist violence must look to the handful of depictions of the Protestant community and to the abundant portrayals of Republican violence. They can also refer to universal conventions of cinema which employ violence as a theme. In the seventies, a few films were produced which portray Republican paramilitaries as gangsters. *The Long Good Friday* (John Mackenzie, 1979) is an example of these. *"The problem with the film from an Irish nationalist perspective is that I.R.A. violence simply functions as a form of gangsterism (which to the British government it has always been)."* (Ibid. p.97) *Nothing Personal* also employs the iconography of gangsters to portray the character of the Loyalist paramilitaries in the film.

The way in which Republican violence was portrayed reaffirmed the notion of the inherently violent Irishmen. This idea has its origins in the typical character of the Irish 'Paddy'. This notion referred to a character from the South of Ireland, but it was formed at a time when Ireland was united and part of the British Empire. It is this tradition that the Nationalist community of Northern Ireland are coming from, and therefore is relevant to their more recent portrayals.

This stereotype was frequently used in early Irish cinema and a number of its traits lasted throughout the years. The Irish 'Paddy' had a likeable personality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, in the nineteenth century, " a more hostile view emerged as a consequences of the increasing resorts to violence to achieve independence"(Jeffery Richards, 1966 p.26). This 'Paddy'' was particularly noted for his proneness to violence. In many ways, the stage Irishman was employed as a device for convincing the British public that the expansion of the empire to Ireland was in fact a way of helping in the civilisation of this violent and drunken race.

> "The portrayal of the Irish people as inherently flawed, (shiftless, lazy and often drunk), relieved the English of the need to treat them humanely and permitted the characterization of the conquest and plunder of Ireland as something of a noble gesture."(Terry Byrne, 1997, p.55)

A portrayal of violence, especially when linked with sexuality and the Catholic faith, has been inherent in the Irish cinema of both the North and the South of Ireland. In fact, it seems apparent that a number of myths and themes have sustained a place in Irish cinema since its earliest productions.

> *"Irish cinema has been dominated by a number of inter-connected motifs: the idealisation of the past, the lure of the primitive landscape, the compelling power of violence and its quasi mystical rapport with a feminine sexuality or Catholic spirituality and finally an unflagging fidelity to motherland, tribe and family."* (Kearney, 1988, p.173)

These prevailing themes were in many ways biased, destructive and consuming. They have affected portrayals of the Northern Irish State because this is the tradition filmmakers associate with it. They seem to be largely the result of the foreign input in Irish cinema, especially in the earlier years. It is only in relevantly recent years that these myths have been challenged by indigenous filmmakers, for example; Margo Harkin, Pat Murphy, Orla Whealan and others. A revision and challenging of such traditions and stereotypes is necessary for an informed perception world wide of the nature of the Northern Irish. *"Such alternatives serve to reassess the dominant myths of national culture*" (Kearney, 1988, p.174)

However, such conventions have strong foundations. Irish cinema of the past does serve as a reference for modern Irish filmmakers, whether they decide to break with, or conform to them. Indigenous filmmakers, such as Thaddeus O'Sullivan, would be literate in the traditions and themes of Irish cinema, recent and past. Terry George would be informed in the past representations of Republicans, in cinema, media and in imagery such as the wall murals.

The Irish Landscape

Traditionally, the Irish Landscape was idealised and romanticised. Ireland's primitive areas were revered for their romantic beauty and sublime qualities. In the early days of cinema, the Irish countryside was one of the main attractions for foreign filmmakers in search of a romantic setting. Also, filmmakers who wished to appeal to the Irish Diaspora employed famous tourist scenes like the Lakes of Killarney, and the Gap of Dunloe, within their films. This played on the national pride and sentimentality of the Irish abroad. This resulted in, or reinforced, a relationship between the landscape and Irish nationalism.

The romanticization of the rural coincided with an idealisation of the past. The simple rural lifestyle seemed to represent all that was pure and good, while urban excessiveness symbolised all that was superficial and tainted. This rural idyll became synonymous with Irish cinema and the revival of the past and return to the rural became an integral part of the nationalist sensibility. In the silent films about Ireland, made by Hollywood filmmakers, these notions were enforced. "*Many Irish dreams of a romantic nationalist tinge (were created)*" (Jeffrey Richards, 1996, p.21). While these films were referring to Southern Ireland they are relevant to the development of films about Northern Ireland since they reflect the tradition which the Nationalist community in the North of Ireland are looking to, as are the filmmakers and the audiences.

Filmmakers who wish to deal with subjects in the context of Northern Ireland are working within the field of Irish cinema. Directors like Margo Harkin and Thaddeus O'Sullivan are aware of the manner in which such motifs as the rural idyll have been used in the past. In order to reform a tradition such as this, certain filmmakers have taken a particular theme and portrayed it in a different light. In this way the myth is exposed and challenged by its own transformation.

In *Hush-a-Bye-Baby* (Margo Harkin 1989), this notion of the rural idyll is turned upside down. The film revolves around a teenager from Derry's Bogside. Goretti, (Emer

McCourt), lives in a world of segregated housing estates, unemployed parents and convent schools. The British military are a constant presence in the film. She goes to an Irish class where she meets a young man and they fall in love. After a couple of sexual encounters, Goretti finds herself pregnant. Her boyfriend is sent to prison for involvement with the IRA before she has a chance to tell him.

In order to come to terms with her predicament she seeks refuge in the gaelteacht area of Donegal. With the excuse of improving her Irish, she and a friend spend a couple of weeks there. While there, the myth of the countryside being in some way pure and free is dispelled. It soon becomes evident that it is in fact more oppressive. The statue of Virgin Mary, situated at the crossroads, is a constant reminder of the traditional expectations of women in Ireland. Many of these expectations were implicit in the Catholic notions of the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Mother of God.

Goretti is well aware that her pregnancy, which is outside marriage, will be considered a disgrace. "*Catholic girls were to model themselves on the image of the Virgin Mary by maintaining their chastity and purity.*" (Eamonn Hughes, 1991, p. 85) Goretti's has nightmares about the oppressive statue of Mary, which reflects this. However, when this is placed in conjunction with the debates about the Abortion referendum in the Republic of Ireland on the radio, the imposing nature of the Catholic Church on issues of morality and sexuality is emphasised. The importance of community values over individual values is expressed by Goretti's fears at how she will be treated as a single mother.

Goretti's dilemma is not eased by her rural surroundings. The landscape around her is not presented as a romantic notion version of the rural idyll but as being intricately connected with its inhabitants. The attitudes of these people are in many ways similar to the attitudes of the urban Bogside community.

> *While the urban landscape is clearly formed in a concentrated way by people, the countryside is also the result of a long accumulation of changes due to human agency. In this sense, the urban and the rural cannot be clearly separated.* (Christina Bridgwater, 1995, p. 2)

The theme of the Irish landscape has a strong tradition in the Irish visual arts, and is of

special importance to artists dealing with issues in Northern Ireland. In particular, the issue of Irish identity is explored through this theme. Both communities in the North of Ireland lay a claim to their exclusive Irishness. The Nationalist Catholic community claim to be the original Irish people and that the British colonists attempted to steal their lands and destroy their culture. The Loyalist Protestant community proposes that their right to the land is even stronger since their chosen monarch, King William of Orange, defeated the Catholic opposition for the throne, at the Battle of the Boyne. This is remembered annually with Orange Order parades and wall murals dedicated to this event. (See figs. 2.1, 2.2 and 11) In both communities the landscape is symbolic of their identity. The I.R.A. and loyalist paramilitaries both employ these notions for the justification of their campaigns.

> *The IRA campaign in Tyrone and Fermanagh has had elements of a peasant war, aimed driving one part of the population off the land.... There is a determined attempt by loyalist groups to appropriate Celtic legendary history for their own bloody purposes driving back the enemies of Ulster. Defensible territory is the key to Belfast's housing policy.* (David Brett, 1995,p.22)

This aspect of the land being intricately linked with identity of the community which inhabits it is explored in *December Bride*, (Thaddeus O'Sullivan 1990). This film is a stark evocation of the life of Presbyterian settlers, on the shores of Strangford Lough, at the turn of the century. The people are portrayed as strong and defiant and are depicted close to the land in all its harsh realities. Long sweeping shots of the shores of the Lough are portrayed in subtle dark tones. The mood is reminiscent of Northern European filmmakers. The cinematographer for *December Bride* was a Frenchman called Bruno de Keyzer who, along with O'Sullivan, were clearly influenced by directors such as Bergman and Dreyer in the execution of this piece.

December Bride clearly challenges prior representations of the landscape in Irish cinema, and in particular, its connections with nationalism and Southern Ireland. "*The film presents the turn of the century Ulster Presbyterians as settlers, close to the land in a way that subverts the general associations of the land with Catholic Ireland.*" (Brian Neve, 1995,p.91)

Therefore, it seems apparent that the land is of great importance to these communities and their identifies. The use of the landscape in film representations of Northern Ireland holds strong meanings for both Loyalists and Nationalists. This importance of place is often territorial as is evident in the dissection of Belfast into Catholic and Protestant areas and streets, clearly marked by wall murals, symbols and, at times, barricades.

> *" There are very good reasons why land (real, farmable territory), and the land (the symbolic domain of a people) has been and continues to be and will continue to be a serious issue for the inhabitants of Ireland. There is a dismal history of claim and counter exclaim to greater authenticity; who are the most genuinely Irish?"* (David Brett, 1995, p.22)

Many of the films which deal with the Northern Ireland conflict are set in urban areas. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that they are generally focusing, not on the nationalist aspect of these paramilitaries' cause, but on the violence and the terrorism they commit. *Nothing Personal* is a film which employs the conventions of the gangster genre. Traditionally the gangster genre is set in an urban environment. *Odd Man Out* was made in the style of film noir movies and these films were also usually set in the city. The city, in the case of these cinematic conventions, was generally depicted as a sordid place where violence was an everyday occurrence. This suited the approach of early filmmakers. Also, the city in Northern Ireland is a complex place in itself, full of partitions, divisions and enclosed spaces. It would be difficult to describe the lifestyle of the communities of the North of Ireland without showing how they coexist in their urban environment.

Some Mother's Son is also set in the urban environment of Belfast but there are many rural scenes, which seem to coincide with the Republican attachment to the land. The opening scene is of fishing boat in peaceful waters with green hills in the distant. As the film progresses there seem to be more and more scenes set in an urban environment. This coincides with the growing political involvement of the women. The rural scenes seem to be an indication of what the Republican men are fighting for, while the urban ones seem to suggest the realities of how it is to be achieved.

Irish Communality and Cinema

The primacy of family and community was another prevailing theme in Irish cinema. This emphasised the importance of the community over the individual in Irish society. This was in tune with the Catholic Church's influence on society, and in particular, the central position of the priest and the mother. This alliance of priests and Catholic mothers instilled in Irish society a strong emphasis on the value of community. These notions of society were particular to Southern Ireland. However, traditional ideas on the position of the family and woman's roles were not exclusive to the Catholic Church and the Republic of Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, Protestant fundamentalism shared many of the traditional views of family and community values, with Catholicism. Whereas in the South there was an alliance between the Catholic priest and mother, in the North of Ireland the alliance was between the Protestant Church and the State.

> *The role which both the Church and state play shapes not only the more traditional thinking behind some of the major institutions... but it is also responsible for the extremely conservative ideology for which the province has become infamous.* (Monica McWilliams, 1991,p.81)

In certain films, which are set in Northern Ireland, a strong sense of this loyalty to one's community is evident. Foreign filmmakers often exaggerated this communality and portrayed it as a quaint aspect of the Irish. The British sought a contrast to their own society and so projected an image of a communal, peasant one onto depictions of the Irish. *"The communality, a product of peasant society is the mirror image of the bourgeois individualism and imperial supra-nationalism of England."* (Geoffrey Richards, 1988, p.32) At times the two communities are portrayed as being like two tribes. The film *Cal* (Pat O'Connor 1984), is in many ways an exploration of the tenuous relationship between the two communities. The main character, Cal, (John

Lynch) is a Catholic who lives with his father in a mainly Protestant housing estate, which seems to be in Derry. The film was actually shot in Meath and Kildare due to the state of the conflict in the North at the time.

Many of the Protestants, who live in the housing estate, do not like the idea of sharing their 'territory' with Catholics. They constantly threaten Cal and his father. However, they do not do this as individuals but as a community, or a tribe. The Orange Order parade, which passes the front of Cal's house, is particularly intimidating. Cal and his father cannot venture outside, and keep the curtains drawn. The threats from their neighbours to 'burn them out' are particularly tribe-like and Cal must soak blankets in case they act on this very real threat. Finally, their house is burnt down. This is reminiscent of the Western genre in which the Native American Indians would shoot blazing arrows at the white settlers' camps. This emphasises the territorial significance of the streets of Northern Irish towns. There are two camps, settlers and natives, however it is not clear which is which.

> *We are shown scenes of life with Cal and his father: parades of Orangemen, (militant Protestants), in the street outside their house, nights of fitful sleep between street fights and car burnings and finally threats from their Protestants neighbours to 'burn them out'.* (Terry Byrne, 1997, p. 99)

The difference between the two 'tribes' is highlighted when Cal goes to work and live on a Protestant farm. This is this house where he assisted in the I.R.A. shooting of an R.U.C. officer. He has now transferred his guilt into a morbid attraction to the officers widow, Marcella, (Helen Mirren). In a very significant scene Cal is entrusted with the locking up of the house. He abuses the trust of his employees by exploring the interior, and particularly Marcella's bedroom. While Marcella is herself a Catholic, the house is very definitely upper class Protestant. This is depicted as being like an alien world to Cal. One is once again reminded of the Western and the image of the American Indians creeping through the house of a settler, which is so different to his own domicile

The Protestant is here associated with the land and the upper middle class, while the Catholic affinity is with the urban and working class life. This is a subversion of the traditional associations of the land with Catholic Nationalists. However, within this

framework, Cal is seen living in a run down cottage. When Cal first sees it, it is a run down shack, but he transforms it into a cosy homestead. In fact, it becomes more attractive than the 'big house'. So much so that it is here that Marcella and Cal can make love. This reflects the history of Irish settlement, when the Protestant land-owning class lived in big houses and mansions, while their Catholic tenants lived in small cottages. This reflection on the traditions of land ownership and colonisation again refers to the deep divisions between the communities.

As Cal tentatively touches Marcella's things he is intruding on a different lifestyle. His own house was rough and quite poor in comparison to this more luxurious country house. He is not only intruding on Marcella's privacy, but on the private territory of a Protestant upper-class family. "*Here he finally crosses over into the inner sanction of his traditional enemies. It is a brief but important journey into hitherto unknown and mysterious territory, and as such is illustrative of the gulf between factions in the two societies of the North.*" (Terry Byrne, 1997, p.101)

This depiction of the community demonstrates the importance of communality over the individual. They are portrayed as tribes, each with their own beliefs and identity. Their traditions and conventions seem to overwhelm them so that it is difficult to make individual choices. This is demonstrated when Cal attempts to sever his ties with the I.R.A. The reasons for his involvement in the first place seem not to have been personal ones, and seem to have been made for him. It is this dangerous aspect of communality which has been explored in some more recent films about Northern Ireland.

Representations of violence

Paramilitary violence and activity depends on the support of the communities. Since the majority of nationalist supporters are Catholics, Irish Republican violence has been romanticised and sanctified by the use of Catholic iconography, signs and symbols. I.R.A. gunmen are at times presented as martyrs, willing to die for the cause of Republicanism. Their leaders are sometimes presented as similar to the ultimate martyr, Jesus Christ. This appears to be the way in which some I.R.A. members see themselves. They have been represented in this way in films such as *Some Mothers Son*. They have also been portrayed as inherently violent, fanatics and also as being uncomfortable with their violent activities and wanting out of their part in the I.R.A.

Loyalist violence, on the other hand, lacks this kind of obvious religious symbols attributed to republican activity. Therefore, Loyalist activity is not only portrayed less often, it is usually portrayed in a more brutal and stark light. The nature of the Reformed Churches, and in particular the Presbyterian Church, are stark and they lack the often gaudy and imposing symbolism of the Catholic Church. In the absence of any obvious icons to model themselves on, cinema attributes the iconography of gangsters to Loyalist paramilitaries, as in *Nothing Personal*, or of tribal settlers, as in *Cal*.

In the earlier decades of Irish cinema, the cause of Republicans in Southern Ireland, often appropriate Catholic symbols to sanctify the cause. For instance, in John Ford's *The Informer*, (1935), there are a number of examples of this.

> *Catholic imagery and symbols are deployed to sanctify the struggle, the priest with the cross in the post office, the Madonna - like shawled woman.... and the death of a boy sniper, shot from the roof by British troops, and sliding down from the roof his arms outstretched like a suffering Christ.*
> (Jeffrey Richards, 1996 p.13)

The use of Catholic imagery to further the cause of Republicanism was also employed by the Republican leaders of the 1916 Rising. The plays and literature of Pearse and McDonagh in the run up to the rising demonstrate how they realised the potential of the

faith of the majority of the Irish people at that time, Catholicism. He realised that *"the potency of Republicanism lay in the ability of its architects to ground it in Catholicism which was now the cement of the people nation."* (Cairns, 1988, p106) Pearse exploited the force of the Catholic faith in the South of Ireland, by romanticising the nationalist cause as the cause of martyrs. *"Pearse was seeking to be the sacrificial Christ just as he inculcated the same spirit of sacrificial selflessness in his pupils."* (Ibid. p.111)

The Republican cause of Pearse was based in Southern Ireland, but it is still relevant to the cause of the I.R.A. in the North of Ireland since they affiliate themselves with the same ideals. In *Some Mothers Son* there are similar attitudes expressed to that of Pearse. The juxtaposition of the Republican cause, in the case of the 1981 hunger strikers, and Catholic iconography is quite deliberate.

Therefore, the depictions of paramilitary organisations, activities and violence are apparently very different and dependent on their own community's identity, especially its religious identity. To examine these traits more carefully two films, both dealing specifically with one of the two communities will be addressed in the following chapters. *Some Mother's Son* is a portrayal of the reaction of the families, and in particular the mothers, of a number of I.R.A. activists when they decide to go on hunger strike to protest their criminal status in prison. *Nothing Personal* is the depiction of an unstable time in the Northern Ireland conflict when the Loyalist paramilitaries are faced with the truces and cease-fires of the 1970's.

Chapter 3

Some Mother's Son
Comparing Republicanism with Catholicism.

Plate 4
The Citizen, Richard Hamilton, 1982-83, oil on canvas, two canvases

Terry George's film, *Some Mother's Son* (1996), is one of the most recent portrayals of active members of the Irish Republican Army and the effects of their actions on their families and communities. The main character is Kathleen Quigley, (Helen Mirren), whose son, Gerard (Aidan Gillen), is imprisoned in Long Kesh for his involvement with the I.R.A. Bobby Sands (John Lynch), is his cellmate in Long Kesh. Together with Sands and other inmates, Gerry goes on hunger strike in protest at British treatment of political prisoners. At first, Kathleen does not want to become involved in Republican politics. However, she is gradually drawn in and develops a close relationship with Annie (Fionnuala Flanagan). Annie also has a son on hunger strike, Frank (David O'Hara), who is an I.R.A. leader.

In relation to *Some Mother's Son,* I intend to explore certain aspects of the lifestyle of the Nationalist Catholic Community**:** Catholicism and Nationalism, Representations of Republican violence and the role of women in the context of Republicanism. These are key aspects of life of this community and have a history of representation, and misrepresentation, in Irish cinema.

The focus of the film is the role of women in relation to Republicanism. It is set in the time of the Hunger Strikes of 1981, a time of crisis and change for Republicanism. The plot revolves around two mothers of Republican prisoners on hunger strike, Kathleen and Annie. Only their mothers have the right to take them off the strike when their conditions become critical. The film questions the role of women who have male family members incarcerated, and their loyalty to Republicanism. While Kathleen is anti-violence and has never been involved in Republicanism, she is very loyal to her son and respects his beliefs. Annie, on the other hand, is fiercely loyal to Republicanism as well as to her son. She will even allow her own son to die rather than break that loyalty. Kathleen on the other hand, is a humanist and refuses to allow her son to die for the sake of his politics.

The main difference between this and earlier representations of the I.R.A. is that the film deals directly with the politics of the situation. For instance, the focus of the film is on real events, which were to be influential in the future of the Northern Ireland political situation. In the past, films about I.R.A. gunmen have generally depicted them as

interested in violence for its own sake or as looking for a way out of it. They are either on the run, as in *Odd Man Out*, and *Cal*, or seeking revenge, like Danny (Stephen Rae), in *Angel* (Neil Jordan, 1982). However, in *Some Mother's Son* the chase is short lived and it is the defiance of the prisoners against the British authorities which is emphasised. Terry George was himself a Republican prisoner which has contributed to speculation about whether or not this was a propaganda film for the I.R.A. George has denied such allegations, claiming that his motivations were to redress the balance of biased coverage of the Hunger Strikes in the past.

The Hunger Strikes and events surrounding them marked a turning point in the history of 'the troubles'. The way in which the British government handled the situation was condemned in the world's media. Also, world sympathy for the Republican cause grew. It was a time when the attention of the world was on the political situation in the North, and not only on the violence there. *"There were at least four hundred reporters in the North, and three hundred photographers covered his (Bobby Sands'), funeral."* (Liz Curtis, 1984, p.203) Since the media coverage of Bobby Sands' funeral all the major funerals in the North have been reported on.

The nature of the Belfast wall murals changed at this time. During the Hunger Strikes, murals were painted which promoted the support of Bobby Sands and his colleagues. There was even a mural painted depicting Bobby Sands clutching rosary beads with the Virgin Mary watching over him. (See fig.5) The propaganda value of these murals, which had only been painted by Loyalists prior to 1981, was recognised by Republicans and they continued to paint them long after the Hunger Strikes ended.

Plate 5

Blessed are those who hunger for justice; dying Bobby Sands with rosary beads, H of H-Block, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Rockmore Street, Belfast, 1981

CATHOLICISM AND NATIONALISM

The use of Catholic imagery in the wall mural depiction of Bobby Sands is very interesting. Here he is portrayed in relation to the Virgin Mary, who watches over him as if he is her own son. This depiction has parallels with the 'pieta' image where Mary holds the martyred Jesus in her arms when he is taken down from the cross. The 'pieta' image is very strong as it combines the martyred Christ and the compassion of his virgin mother, in whose arms he lies. It is an obvious allusion to the situation of the hunger strikers and their relationship with their mothers (See figs. 3 and 5). This is reminiscent of the posters erected around Dublin after the execution of Padraig Pearse and the other members of the 1916 Rising. These posters depicted Pearse lying in the arms of Mother Erin.

"Post executions posters on Dublin walls depicting Pearse in pieta position supported by Mother Erin, indicates how pervasive was the image of his self-willed immolation." (Cairns, 1988, p.109)

Throughout *Some Mother's Son*, the representation of Bobby Sands in prison is Christ-like. In fact, the first words, Gerry Quigley exclaims, when he meets Bobby Sands in prison is; 'You look like Jesus Christ!'. This reinforces in the viewer's mind the similarities between the image of Sands; with his gaunt features, long dark beard and hair, bare torso with prominent ribs and the cloth around his waist, with the crucified Christ. The image of the crucified Christ is a familiar one to the Catholic community of the North, and is loaded with meaning. In fact, the portrayal of Bobby Sands is almost identical to portraits of Christ from Medieval and Renaissance times, when the cult of Christ's suffering was at a high point. (See figs. 3 and 7.1)

The traits and virtues of Jesus and Mary in the Catholic Church are considered the most pure and noble characteristics for men and women. The scene in which the priests come to say mass in the prison also reinforces the notion that the cause is being sanctified. This image is reminiscent of images of John the Baptist, an anchorite, baptising Jesus.

In these images both men are portrayed, generally, wrapped in blankets with devotion and sacrifice depicted as their virtues. (See fig.6) The water of Baptism is a symbol of eternal life, as is the bread of communion. The image of these prisoners receiving communion wrapped in blankets and gaunt from starvation, seems to suggest that the only sustenance they need is that of the Holy Spirit, and that through their sacrifice they will be granted ever-lasting life. This eternal life may take the shape of their political achievement, and their recognition long after they are dead.

The fact that the Catholic Church refused to condemn their mass suicide strengthened the idea of the strikers as being martyrs. This sanctification and romanticization of the Republican cause through the use of Catholic imagery and symbols was a device employed by Pearse in his literature, and particularly plays, prior to the 1916 Rising. In his poem *'Renunciation'*, Pearse rejects the sensual life and embraces the sensual death. He portrays himself as hermit-like and he embraces an opportunity to emulate the sacrificial Christ and Christian martyrs. *"Sensual pleasure was suppressed with the resolution an anchorite."* (Ibid. p.109)

Bobby Sands is presented as living like a hermit, as are his comrades in the adjacent cells. Their isolation does not weaken their morale, but seems to make them spiritually stronger, as if a rejection of the sensual only serves to strengthen their beliefs. Sands wakes early each morning, and is the physical and psychological instructor of his fellow prisoners. He is presented as firm but well loved and initiates early morning exercises with the vigour of a monk initiating morning matins. 'He takes this prisoner of war stuff very seriously', Frankie, remarks when he is awakened by Sands. This is quite ironic since Frankie takes the cause very seriously also and dies eventually for it. Also, when Gerry protests about the exercises, Sand replies, 'We've got to keep our discipline'. This discipline is reminiscent of the strict lifestyle adopted by Jesuit monks and hermits. The stark simple cells, the grey morning light, and the dark blankets and beards are depicted in a fashion which is reminiscent of the ascetic religious orders. The sanctifying of their motives through the use of religious imagery could be interpreted as propaganda for the I.R.A. This could also represent how the Republicans reconciled their identity as both Catholic and Nationalist. Terry George appropriates the imagery

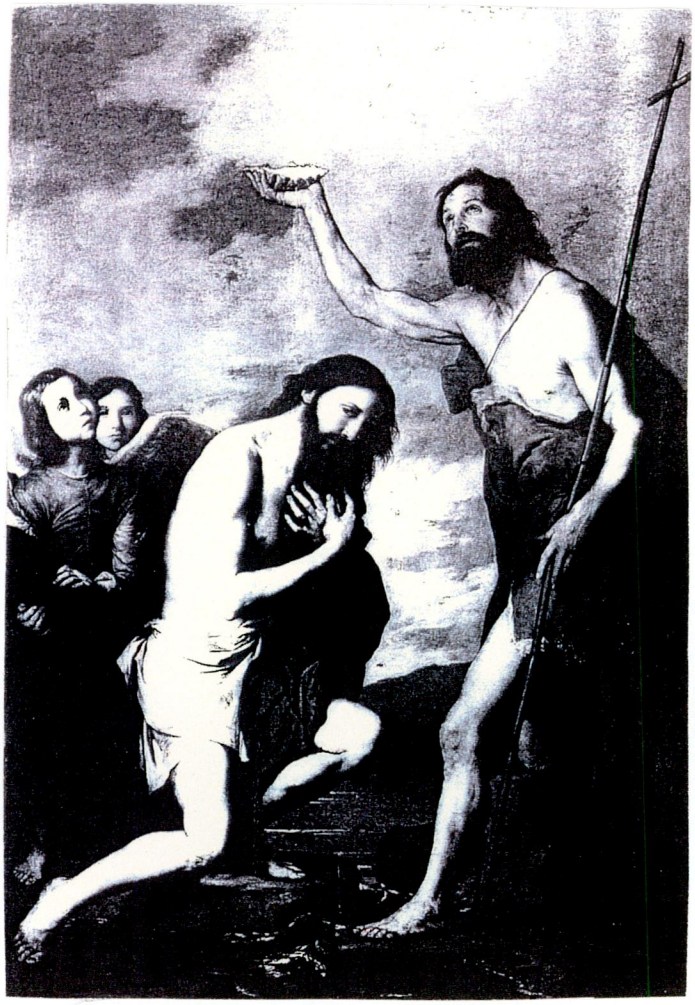

Plate 6
Baptism of Christ, Jusepe de Rivera, 1643, Nancy, Musee des Beaux-Arts, canvas

of the prisoners' community and its religion, which has an abundance of strong icons and lends itself well to film, for the cause of these Republicans.

The connections between the Republican cause and the Catholic faith can be traced back to before the 1916 Rising. Nationalism is intricately linked with Catholicism both in the community and in the paramilitary organisations. There is an attempt in *Some Mother's Son* to interpret the prisoners' political beliefs in conjunction with their moral beliefs. This aspect of the nature of the I.R.A. gunman, the conflict between his ethics and his politics, is perhaps one of the most relevant.

It is interesting that in *Some Mother's Son*, the political dilemma is undertaken by the men, while the moral dilemma is the domain of the women. In the films of Neil Jordan which depict the Republican cause, he emphasises the tension between ethics and politics therein. To describe this he employs a male character, always acted by Stephen Rae, such as Danny in *Angel*, Fergus in *The Crying Game*, (1992), and Ned Broy in *Michael Collins*, (1997). This character is forced into difficult situations between his moral and Republican beliefs. *"This device of the Irish Everyman ... faced with the need to choose between his politics and his ethics, is a favourite device of Jordan's when he asks us to consider the political/moral dilemmas of recent Irish history."* (Terry Byrne, 1997, p.91)

The prisoners in *Some Mother's Son* are not faced with this conflict. They clearly believe themselves to be morally and politically correct. It is their mothers and loved ones, the women of the community, who must deal with the ethical problems this situation proposes.

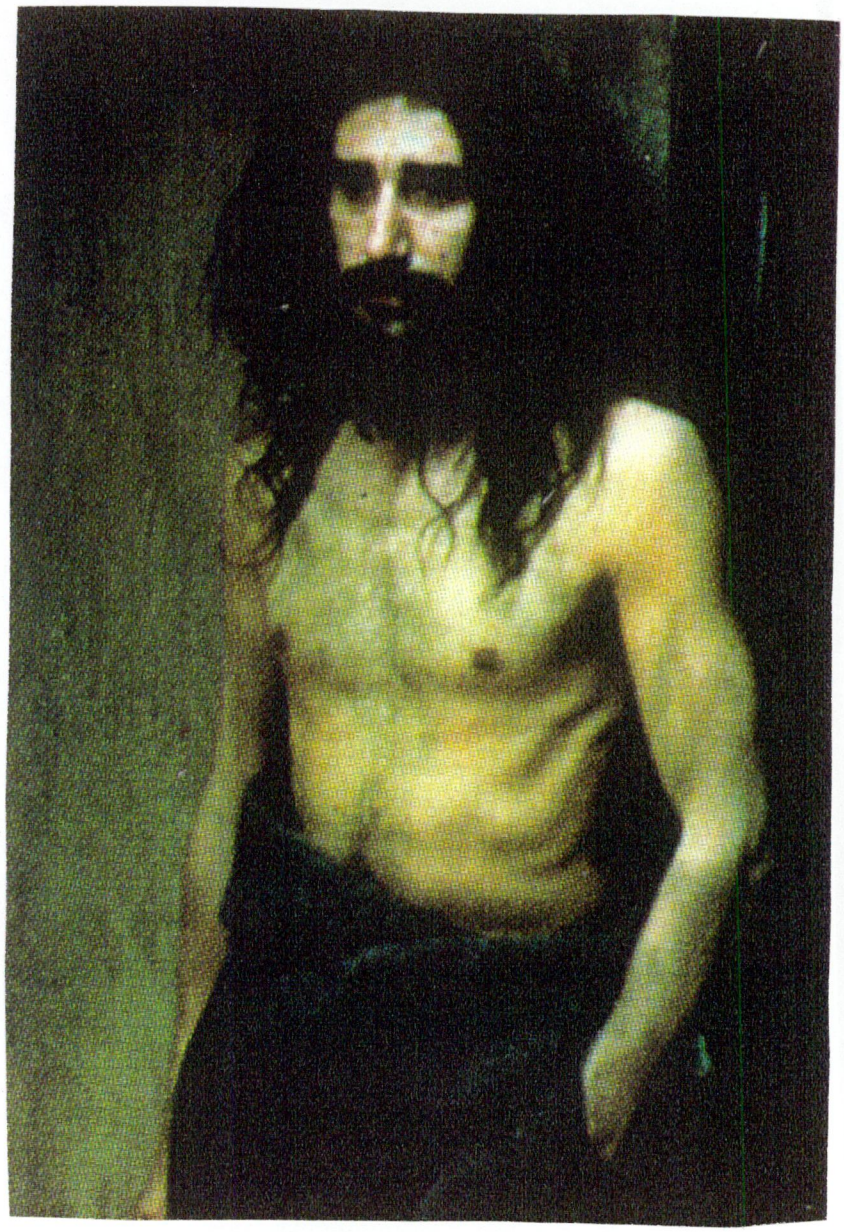

Plate 7.1

Some Mother's Son, John Lynch as Bobby Sands, the 1981 Hunger Striker

REPRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENCE

The representations of paramilitary violence in *Some Mother's Son* are not very explicit, and are generally seen from a distance. The mortar attack on a British army patrol on the bridge is presented in a military fashion. It is presented as impersonal, guerrilla warfare. This stresses their belief that they are not criminals involved in terrorism, but an army practising guerrilla warfare.

There is a crucial scene in *Some Mother's Son* where Kathleen is teaching her class Irish dancing, when a bomb explodes in close proximity to the convent school she is in. Irish dancing is traditionally linked with Nationalism as one of the old customs of the 'native' Irish. It is symbolic in that it demonstrates the way in which the Catholic Nationalist community employs memory of the past as a *"component of resistant against a dominant culture, bent on absorbing all difference."* (Lucy Lippard, 1996, p19)

It also combines the different elements of the Catholic Nationalist community. The men are actively politically involved, while the women are involved by teaching the young about Nationalist ideology in a Catholic convent school. Here they are involved in the revival of traditional Irish dancing. The Nationalist aspect of this is emphasised by the green uniforms, curly red hair, and most particularly, by the strong tones of Celtic music composed by Bill Whelan, the composer for *Riverdance*.

The intrusion of the explosion into the classroom is the moment the roles of women like Kathleen begin to change. The editing of this piece is particularly important. The male activists are portrayed at speed, which is juxtaposed with the women and girls in the classroom who are seen in slow motion. This seems to demonstrate the shock of the young women and Kathleen at the consequences in reality of Republican activity. The scene is flamboyant and the music is fast and emotional. The formalism of the girls dancing in unison, their traditionally Irish dresses all moving together, are like a wave of green. They seem to be strangely unaware of the sinister side of their community, which is just below the surface, and at times rears its head.

The fact that the composer for *Riverdance* composed the score for *Some Mother's Son* served as a reminder of the emotional success of the show itself. *Riverdance* was immensely popular nationally and internationally. It instilled a sense of national pride in many, not just because of the success of an Irish show, but the success of the modern translation of Celtic Irish music and dance. The way in which it is employed in this film, not only as the soundtrack for an Irish dancing class but also for an I.R.A. mortar attack is problematic. It seems to suggest that I.R.A. activity should instil national pride just as Irish dancing and even *Riverdance* does. Perhaps, this is an allusion to how these I.R.A. gunmen feel they are expressing their Nationalism. This appropriation of a *Riverdance* style of music is unsettling and could be interpreted as propagandist.

This music is loaded with emotion, particularly sentimentality and national pride. It could be interpreted as leading the audience by associating Irish national culture with the Republican agenda. *"For this is Irish Hollywood, where to walk and talk and kill you've got a ready made soundtrack."* (Andy White, 1996) The actual bloody aftermath of the mortar attack is not portrayed. Kathleen and her students escape unscathed by the blast. This glossing over of the actual effects of the violence has disturbed some critics. *"But we will never see him, (a dead British soldier), or the pieces of his body, we will only hear the whistles of the new Celtic dawn ushering its children over the hill of history into a new world of pipes and bodhran."* (Ibid.)

Terry George's film is a description of the Nationalist agenda of the Irish Republican Army, and an insight into their motives and attitudes. Their mothers, as outlined in *Some Mother's Son,* seem to share a sense of their Irishness and Nationalism, and a belief in their military status and righteousness bordering on religious zeal.

WOMEN IN RELATION TO NATIONALISM

The female characters in *Some Mother's Son* have central roles. They are in the foreground because the men are indisposed and behind bars. In the film, the majority of the women are drawn into the political arena because of their emotional and familial ties. However, once they become involved they discover a new political awareness. The different traits of women in the Nationalist community are portrayed through the characters of Kathleen and Annie. Kathleen's character that of a strong-willed pacifist, whereas Annie is a determined Nationalist. Kathleen is, in many ways, unaware of the realities of Republican politics, whereas Annie is aware of the situation but has never really been so involved before. Their bond is the fact that they must both deal with the emotional side of the fact that their sons are starving themselves in prison, and that they are both women becoming more active in a male dominated political situation.

The portrayal of women in relation to incarceration is not a particularly new one to the films of Northern Ireland. *Hush-a-Bye-Baby*, *The Visit* (Orla Walsh, 1992) and *The Boxer (*Jim Sheridan, 1998), all deal with women's relationship to the incarceration of their Republican men. There is friction between feminism and Republicanism, mainly due to the fact that the latter is a male-dominated traditional organisation: *"... in Northern Ireland the familiar socialist/revolutionary feminist camps are fragmented even further by differences over Republicanism and the I.R.A. campaign."* (Megan Sullivan, 1997, p.30)

This tension between feminism and Republicanism is to some extent demonstrated in the tension between Kathleen and Annie. The scene in which the two women have a couple of drinks in a bar is symbolic of this. Kathleen finds it difficult to understand Annie's protests about sitting underneath a photograph of the Queen, which Kathleen has not noticed. Kathleen feels further alienated from Annie when she cannot understand the Republican slogan 'Tiofaidh ar la' ('Our day will come'). Kathleen does not understand its meaning, nor can she agree with its Republican message.

However, this tension between them is eased when they talk about their common grief. Kathleen sympathises with Annie's loss of a child. It is through this that they find an intimacy and bonding from which a friendship grows. This slogan represents the history and Irish tradition of the conflict.

The film seems to suggest that Kathleen is not interested in this aspect of the situation and that it is ultimately her emotions which have led her in the direction of politics. Annie seems to be more interested in the historical concept of the conflict. However, it soon emerges that she lost a child through 'the troubles' and it is this which prompted her distrust of the British authorities and thence her interest in Republicanism. The women in the film have different reasons than the men for their involvement in Republican politics. The men are interested in the wider cultural and historical picture, while the women are associated with the natural and emotional aspects of the present. This is problematic and there are many feminist discourses about the traditional and oppressive notions of women being associated with nature and men's affiliation with culture.

In 1981 many women in the Nationalist community found a political voice through the cause of the Hunger Strikes. It was the women who took on an active role in the politics while the men were in prison. In the film, *The Visit*, Orla Walsh wished to depict the Bobby Sands wall mural on Sheila's journey to visit her husband in jail. She wanted to use it as a reminder of the strength of women at the time of the early eighties, and to use that to reflect Sheila's strength. *"I wanted to show the mural of Bobby Sands to suggest prisoners and their families and the mass politicisation of women through this (the Hunger Strikes). It was women who took on the R.U.C. while the men were in prison."* (Ibid. p.38)

The women in *Some Mother's Son* are not depicted as sexual women, their primary role is as mothers. This is different to *The Visit* in which Sheila is portrayed as having sexual needs. *"Sheila is going to challenge the role of being asexual, the Catholic idea of the woman who doesn't have sexual needs."* (Ibid. p.38) The Irish Catholic mother has a history for being intricately linked with the Catholic agenda, which dates back to the mid- nineteenth century. The phenomenon of the alliance between the Catholic

priest and the mother has been very influential on Irish society. It was through this alliance that traditional notions of women's roles were reinforced. The time of the Hunger Strikes was a time when such notions were challenged. In *Some Mother's Son* the handling of these issues is glossed over to a certain extent by focusing on the emotions of the women.

Plate 7.2
Some Mother's Son, Helen Mirren as Kathleen Quigley, Mother of a 1981 Hunger Striker

Chapter 4:

Nothing Personal
Loyalist Paramilitaries or Gangsters?

Plate 8
The Subject, Richard Hamilton, 1982-83, oil on canvas, two canvases

Thaddeus O' Sullivan's film, *Nothing Personal* is set in Belfast in 1975, on the eve of a cease-fire brokered by Loyalist and Republican leaders. Kenny, (James Frain), is a Loyalist gunman having doubts about his violent vocation. His right hand man, Ginger, (Ian Hart), is a psychopathic killer who mutilates his victims. Amidst this ongoing violence a Catholic man, Liam Kelly (John Lynch), is doing his best to raise his two young children.

During a street battle, between the barricades, a fifteen year-old Catholic boy is killed. Liam gets lost in the Protestant sector and is beaten up. He is taken in by a Protestant nurse, Ann (Maria Doyle), who turns out to be Kenny's estranged wife. Meanwhile, Liam's daughter Kathleen (Jennifer Courtney), is worried for her father. She crosses the divide, into the Protestant sector, in search of him.

Kenny is disgruntled with the decision by Loyalist and Republican leaders to call a cease-fire, which he sees as a sell-out. The Loyalist leader, Leonard (Michael Gambon), also informs Kenny that he must dispose of Ginger. Through the course of the night tensions have been rising. Kenny decides to torture a Catholic man, Liam, who is wandering the streets on the wrong side of the 'peace-lines'. However, Liam turns out to have been a childhood friend of Kenny. The eventual result of these events and situations is a loss of innocence highlighted by the accidental shooting dead of Kathleen. *"The film is about Loyalists... what they're doing and why they're doing it, but the film is very angry about the loss of innocent life and that's why I made it."* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan in, Nicky Fennell, 1995, p. 17)

Thaddeus O' Sullivan's approach to film making is a visual one. He studied at the Royal College of Art in London, which reflects his interest in aesthetic concerns. His 'painterly' and reflective style is evident in his previous films such as *December Bride* (1990). However, while *Nothing Personal* is informed by such visual concerns it also follows a narrative format and is more physical than reflective in style.

He has chosen to depict the Protestant community and the Loyalist paramilitaries. In the past, portrayals of Loyalist gunmen were very few and filmmakers have generally chosen Republican paramilitaries as their subject. *"Quite simply, filmmakers display*

little interest in developing approaches to the Protestant community, preferring to rely on comfortable stereotypes." (Brian McIlroy, 1993, p.105) However, O'Sullivan's portrayal of the Protestant community has much in common with these stereotypes. The main focus of depictions of this community has been the men in it. These men have been depicted as violent and intimidating. In *Nothing Personal,* Kenny and his gang are portrayed as men of violence. *"Violence, and malicious violence at that, seems integral to most filmmakers' conceptions of the Protestant male community."* (Ibid. p.106)

Nothing Personal focuses on the tensions between Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Loyalist, and even within sections of each community. This tension and division is highlighted by the depictions of the barricades, 'peace-lines' and enclosing streets. *"I've taken the area in which these people live as an enclosed ghetto where Protestants and Catholics are side by side, divided by this line."* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan in Nicky Fennell, 1995, p.16) This sense of an insular and entrapped world is also evident in the depictions of interiors and the streets outside. The interior of both Liam's and Ann's houses are portrayed as warm, bright and quite safe. The children seem safe there but on the cold, dark streets the viewer feels anxious for them.

The streets are depicted in a dramatic and enclosing way. This is reminiscent of *Odd Man Out,* which employs a film noir style. For instance, when Liam is lost and beaten up in a side alley, the walls seem to close in on him. The street is very narrow areas of the screen are out from below him and either side of him. This emphasises his sense of entrapment as her has no visible avenue of escape, and the viewer has no where else to look. Therefore, the streets are employed not so much as a backdrop to the activity but as an integral part of the performance. In this scene it is as if the streets and walls are actually playing a part in helping the two men to beat Liam up. In a way this is true because on these alien streets he is not safe, but on his own, (the streets in the Catholic section), he is.

In *Cal* John Lynch also played the role of the likeable Catholic man caught up in 'the troubles'. Cal (John Lynch) is shown being beaten up by intimidating Protestant men on the street on his way home and in the shed on the Protestant farm. *"Since John Lynch takes another beating as the sympathetic Liam and the needless death of his daughter*

Kathleen provides the film's key moment of Rossellinian moral outrage, it's easy to read the film's over-riding sensibility as green-tinted." (Trevor Johnston, 1996, p. 51)

In *Odd Man Out* it is an I. R. A. gunman who is on the run, whereas in *Nothing Personal* it is a Catholic family man who is not safe on the streets of his own city. Liam is portrayed as an outsider, someone who has lost his way and found himself in unfriendly territory. "*The pursuit of an I. R. A. gunman through the streets of Belfast provided Reed with a convenient metaphor to explore the metaphysical themes of the outsider – and of salvation.*" (Brian McIlroy, 1993, p.95) Odd Man Out was a British production in which the main character, Johnny (James Mason), was portrayed as inherently violent. The politics of the situation were not explored and Johnny's violent activities were explored in a universal way. This was achieved through the use of universal cinematic conventions and genres. *"Reed's combining of the thriller genre with film noir allows him to suggest the universal aspect of the gunman's actions, and consequently viewers will be disappointed if they seek only a political statement from the film."* (Ibid. p 95)

In *Nothing Personal* universal conventions are also adopted to depict the situation and characters. Thaddeus O' Sullivan chose the gangster genre and its iconography to portray the Loyalist paramilitaries. He was anxious to convey the futility and attraction of violence. *"O'Sullivan dismisses the Protestant violence of the 1970's as 'completely useless' to their cause."* (James Leahy, 1996, p. 19)

The film's structure was intended to convey the similarities between the communities by giving equal time to each and by constantly cutting back and forth from the Protestant to the Catholic community. He didn't want the audience to be more sympathetic to one or the other. O'Sullivan was rather attempting to convey how the violent situation in the North of Ireland is not confined to one community but exists in both. *"The narrative of the film clearly argues that violence begets violence."* (Ibid. p. 19) However, in many ways, *Nothing Personal* fails to achieve this even handed effect.

Liam Kelly, the Catholic character is clearly portrayed as victim of the violence, while Kenny and his gang are shown as attackers. Liam is a likeable character and a good, if at times negligent, father. He goes to the street battles at the 'peace-lines' to keep the peace. Kenny and his band go to the riot to join in and Ginger even burns a young Catholic man to death. He has no remorse about this and later says that the boy's mother was to blame for not keeping her son off the streets.

Liam is a good family man and his children love him. The only mistake he seems to have made was to marry an Englishwoman, a woman outside his community. Kenny, on the other hand, is unable to be a good father and his children are clearly frightened of him. This seems to be reverting to stereotypes of the Catholic family as opposed to the Protestant individual. Cinematic depictions of Protestant men, especially those involved in paramilitary violence, have depicted them as often unable to treat their women in anything but an oppressive way. *"As Richard Kearney (1988) observes, Edward Bennett's 'Ascendancy' (1981) and Kieran Hickey's 'Attracta' (1983) show male violence paralysing and repressing women to an extent that they assume mythic proportions – essentially the all suffering Mother figure."* (Brian McIlroy, 1993, p. 106) Liam, his daughter Kathleen and Ann are portrayed as decent people with no interest in the violence or sectarianism, except in ways of stopping it. They are depicted as the innocent victims of the situation. *"The film's emotional identification is clearly with those who suffer from violence: Liam, Kathleen and Kenny's wife Ann."* (Ibid. p.19)

The opening sequence is vital to the way in which the audience sympathises with the characters. The atrocities committed by the I.R.A. and therefore the motivation for the Loyalist violent retaliation is established in this scene. Republican violence must be depicted as, at least, equally horrific as the portrayals of the Loyalist violence. *"Unless the reality and effects of I.R.A. violence are established by the initial sequence, the balance of the film is tipped against the Protestants."* (Ibid. p.18)

This bombing is the only example of Republican violence in the film. From this scene on the violence depicted is almost entirely Loyalist. It is a young Catholic girl who is shot dead at the end of the film. She is not actually shot by Kenny or his men but it is as a consequence of their violent actions. Kathleen is Liam's beloved young daughter and

the audience is familiar with her by the end of the film. She is portrayed as attractive, bright and innocent. Her loss is visibly felt by Liam and even Kenny is remorseful about her unnecessary death. The killings at the pub are not portrayed in the same way. The character of these victims has not been established and the tragic nature of their deaths is not emphasised in the same way as Kathleen's is. In fact, Liam is shown remorseful about the pub killings and lends a hand to clear up the debris afterwards.

The loss of lives at the Protestant pub does not have the same impact for a number of reasons. For instance, the bodies in the aftermath are not as realistic as media coverage and so lack authenticity. The burning of the Catholic teenager and Liam's torture, on the other hand, are realistic. The Catholics who are killed by Kenny's men are all individuals and this has a stronger effect than the mass murder in the Protestant pub. Thaddeus O'Sullivan wanted to convey that all violence is personal but the portrayal of the pub bombing does not demonstrate the same intimacy as the individual murders of the Catholics. *"The effects of violence are always personal, at least from the victims point of view, even if, as Protestant paramilitary leader Kenny tells his Catholic childhood friend Liam, the perpetrators of violence intend 'Nothing Personal'."* (James Leahy, 1993, p.19)

The sympathies of the viewer are ultimately with the Catholic community. Kenny's men, especially Ginger, are portrayed enjoying the violence. Ginger is a psychotic who genuinely enjoys hurting and killing Catholics. *"Ginger is fighting for a time when Catholics: 'Get down on their knees and crawl across the fucking border'."* (Ibid. p.19) There are no portrayals of psychopathic Republican gunmen and only one image of a cruel act of terrorism committed by them. It is the Loyalist paramilitaries who are shown torturing, burning, shooting and mutilating Catholics. The Catholics are portrayed as the victims of this violence and they attempt to make peace. Liam and Kathleen are both opposed to guns and Liam goes to the 'peace-lines' to see if he can keep an eye on events. It is suggested that the Republicans welcome a cease-fire, while the Loyalists are disgusted by the idea of one.

The images of the meetings between the Republican and Loyalist leaders were meant to express the similarities between the two organisations. However, they seem to spend

most of their time discussing the incidents when Ginger has crossed the line and has killed innocent victims. Their similarities exist in their common sense of community spirit and their common distaste for perverts like a young Protestant man who has been exposing himself in the Catholic sector. Again it is the Catholics who are the victims of the Protestants' actions. *"O'Sullivan chuckles: 'They do have a strong sense of community spirit. Which is why Kenny's gang knee cap this guy who's been causing trouble in the Catholic streets, flashing or something like that. It's the same on the Nationalist side as well'."* (Ibid. p. 20) A trait, which is common to the gangster and the paramilitary, Republican and Loyalist, in *Nothing Personal* is their disgust with unprofessional terrorists and gunmen. All the members of both paramilitary organisations were able to agree that the young Protestant man who had been exposing himself to members of the Catholic community was a disgrace. Leonard calls him a 'nutter' and even Kenny feels he is doing both communities a favour by knee capping him. In the gangster film both gangster and cop are *"united in their contempt for the amateur, the unprofessional, the 'punks' interested only in profit, the 'freaks' who kill fun or terrorise without point."* (Ibid. p.7)

Whenever the characters are shown out of doors it is always within Belfast and on the streets. This serves as a reminder of the insular lives of the two communities living there. Their entire world seems to consist of one city and for the most part only a section of that. *"Usually, we don't go into the outside world, we stay within this very, very enclosed community and that is reflected in the way the film is shot. We never leave the streets and the streets are very much treated as a stage."* (Ibid. p.16) This importance of the cityscape is emphasises by artificial lighting, which makes them more noticeable and therefore almost competing for recognition with the characters. *"Everything is cleared off the streets and they are lit and presented in a way that is more theatrical than naturalistic."* (Ibid. p.17)

In *December Bride*, the obstinate and defiant community is portrayed in relation to its harsh agrarian lifestyle. Here too, the environment of the characters, in this case bare cityscape, reflects the nature of the situation. The absence of any houses or life around the Loyalist club is reminiscent of the desolation of the ongoing conflict. The 'peace–lines', which divide Catholic areas from Protestant ones with barricades are depicted

like a war-zone. The fire of the petrol bombs, the broken glass and general debris visually demonstrate the breakdown in communications in a community divided.

The riot at the 'peace-lines' occurs at night. This allows for the use of stark colours and dark backgrounds. This strong use of colour reflects the high feelings on both sides. The 'peace-lines' mark the border between the streets. The importance of what street one lives on is emphasised on a number of occasions. Even a child understands the significance of the question; 'What street are you from?' in Belfast. For instance, when Kathleen is in the Loyalist club a man repeatedly asks her this, but she is careful to avoid answering it. *"It's only in the section where Kathleen goes looking for her Catholic dad in the Protestant drinking club that the paranoia endemic in such surroundings and the awful, inevitable feeling of divisions being handed down through generations, is really most effective."* (Trevor Johnston, 1996, p.51)

It is as if there are two different cities within Belfast; one being Catholic Nationalist, and the other Protestant Loyalist. When the girl, Kathleen goes in search of her father she must physically cross the divide between these two sections, by climbing through the border of barricades, which are the 'peace-lines'. The division of the city and the community is one of the focal points of the film. The two sections are depicted in different shots, which are clearly divided. In one of the final scenes, Kenny drops Liam off near his house. However, they do not leave him directly to his door, but rather watch him hobble over to it from their own street. It is as if there is an invisible barrier between these streets. There is a stand off between Kenny and the boy Michael, (Garreth O'Hara), across the place that divides their streets. *"Of course, there has been 'ethnic cleansing' as the territories of the two religious groups have become more rigorously defined, with people of both religions moving out of areas where they were once comfortable."* (James Leahy, 1993, p.20)

The film is set against the high feelings of the Northern Ireland conflict of the seventies. The cinematography seems to echo this in the sharp tension between the strong blacks of the costume and the primary bands of colour, particularly red, of the setting. Kenny's bedroom and the club are mainly depicted in deep red with no windows and only glaring artificial light. The environment of these men is in many ways a construction they

created. They are also often shown in a car, which seems to act as a protective device. There seems to be a void in their existing ideologies, which they must fill with surrogate myths. In the absence of appropriate cinematic imagery the film seems to adopt the iconography of the gangster movie. For instance, the use of the car as a force of protection and violence was part of the iconography of the early gangster film. *"There the car functioned as an instrument of protection, aggression and ostentation."* (Robert Philip Kolker, 1988, p.43)

The image of the gangster is particularly apt for the application to the ideologies of these Loyalist gunmen. The identity of the gangster traditionally combined both violence and charisma. The tension between these two, seemingly incompatible, characteristics is demonstrated through Kenny in *Nothing Personal.* Kenny is portrayed in the club through the eyes of Tommy (Ruaidhri Conroy), a young man who is attracted to the glamorous world. However, Tommy is appalled when he learns the violent realities of the other aspect of Kenny's world in the torture scenes. *"Our ambiguous attitude to criminals, figures both of menace and glamour has formed the basic gangster film character, the urban wolf'."* (John Baxter, 1970, p.7)

The traditional gangster character was often interested in his appearance, and how people saw him. Kenny also seems to be interested in how he looks, he is clean- shaven and his hair is kept well. His clothes are slick and neat. Ginger too dresses well and always wears a suit. He is upset after knee-capping a young man, not about the violent act he has committed, but about the fact that he has got blood on his clothes. This does not seem to be about being afraid of being caught, since they constantly seem above the law, but just about his appearance. *"The figures of a conventional gangster film .... Rico is Little Caesar, Tony Camonte in Scarface ... are concerned about their image, about how they look to the world."* (Robert Philip Kolker, 1988, p.30)

The cease-fires of the early seventies were a time of crisis for the Loyalist paramilitaries. This was to a large extent, a crisis of identity. The Loyalist slogans of 'Ulster Says No!' and 'No Surrender' were difficult to reconcile with the fact that they were consenting to talks with Republicans. *"Kenny in the film sees the cease-fire as a surrender to the demands of the I.R.A. Kenny is 'uneasy' about the cease-fire and views it as a sell-out."*

(Kevin Rockett, 1996, p.74) Nationalists, on the other hand, see cease-fires as representative of a victory since they suggest that the British government recognise their agenda. The crisis of identity manifested itself in a number of places and ways. One of these arenas was the Belfast wall murals (See fig.2). *"Coming from a tradition which had been grounded for decades in one major slogan - 'No Surrender' - Loyalist muralists have been at pains to inform people that a cease-fire is not a surrender."* (Bill Rolston, 1996, p 5)

One of the most interesting aspects of the Loyalist paramilitaries, during the seventies, was the way in which they seemed to be, almost, above the law. Their campaign of violence began in 1972 and was largely not covered, or even recognised by the British media. Loyalist violence was played down to a large extent, while I.R.A. violence was condemned at any given opportunity and this policy was encouraged by the authorities. *"While I.R.A. violence was treated in the media as senseless and horrid, loyalist violence was handled in a guarded and ambiguous way."* (Liz Curtis, 1984, p. 99) It was out of this sense of justification, from both the media and the authorities that the Loyalist paramilitaries of the time operated.

The gangsters of the American genre of the thirties also seemed to live above the law. They are depicted as self-made crooks, who are to be admired, to some extent, for their success through their own personal effort. The gangster was portrayed as *"an economically disenfranchised individual who began working his way up in an urban 'business' organisation."* (Robert Philip Kolker, 1988, p.45) Kenny is such an individual. There is no evidence that he is from anything but a working class background, and yet he is a respected and fairly successful man. His club is very popular and when he walks through it the men want to talk to him, and be seen talking to him, while the women make sexual advances towards him. He may not have all the possessions of the self-made gangster but he has one of them: respect. The Hollywood gangster *"gathered to himself the tangible properties of a man of means; a fancy lady, clothes, cars, a penthouse, hangers-on and a reputation."* (Ibid. p.45)

It seems to be suggested that Kenny and his gang are encouraged, and even in a way supported, by the community. The club's profits may even go, in part, to fund their

paramilitary activity. *" Few gangster films are free of the imputation that criminals are the creation of society, rather than rebels against it."* (John Baxter, 1970, p.7) The Loyalist activists appear to be portrayed as criminals in *Nothing Personal*, especially when there are parallels made between them and gangsters of the genre. In *Some Mother's Son*, on the other hand, the Republican gunmen were prepared to die for the right to be called prisoners of war and in protest to their criminal status. This is interesting as it reflects some of the key differences in the ideologies of the Republican and Loyalist groups. However, both groups resort to violence, and both are the products of the same brutal environment.

The effect of such an environment, and the attraction of crime, personified through the charismatic Kenny, are portrayed from Tommy's viewpoint. Tommy is young and impressionable. He is growing up in violent surrounding where killings are commonplace. It seems to be because the norm is violence that this is what he becomes involved in. *"He, (a gangster), is the product of |his harsh environment, violent, laconic and tough, but his involvement in crime seems a matter of change rather than choice."* (John Baxter, 1970, p.7) For Tommy it is a matter of being in the right place at the right time. His use of violence to solve a disagreement in the club not only wins Tommy the girl he wants, but it also warrants Kenny's approval. He is quickly offered a place in Kenny's organisation, which it is implied, will take care of Tommy if he takes care of them. Tommy is honoured by Kenny's proposal and accepts. However, things soon go sour for Tommy as the brutal realities of torture and Ginger's psychotic nature becomes apparent.

In the early gangster genre the characters possessed an '*attractive repulsiveness*.' (Robert Philip Kolker, 1988, p.45) In the Hollywood tradition there is a moral code which does not allow approval of gangsters. Therefore, they were rarely completely likeable. The thirties gangsters were invariable depicted in seedy urban surroundings and their charisma was contrasted with their corrupt and avaricious deeds. *"The viewer must separate the gross charm of the characters with the sordid urban background, their viciousness, the ugly people that surround them."* (Ibid. p.44) The urban background in this film is anything but picturesque. There are no trees, shrubs or greenery of any kind. The cityscape beside the club is a barren wasteland. The streets are

cut short with ugly corrugated iron barricades, which serve as a reminder of the violence and division. Hence the associations the viewers makes with these characters are with a city of waste, fear and tension. The majority of the story occurs at night, so this city is often a dark one.

In the shocking scene in *Nothing Personal* the vile and sordid side of the Loyalist paramilitary organisation is depicted. In this scene Ginger places his gun in Liam's month and proceeds to play Russian Roulette with it. Tommy is quite frightened and disturbed by those turn of events, even More so then Liam. Ginger notices Tommy's uneasiness and turns the gun on him instead. Kenny's attitude to violence: Kenny is more politically minded. There is clearly a conflict of views between them. *"As Liam is being violently interrogated, tension escalates between Kenny's political Loyalism and Ginger's anti-Catholic sectarianism."* (Kevin Rockett, 1996, p.)

Ginger's psychopathic nature is portrayed when he murders and mutilates an unarmed Catholic man, who as it turned out had no affiliations with the I.R.A. He also maliciously throws a petrol bomb directly at a young man during a riot on the peace lines. Kenny is genuinely distressed by this and puts the boy out of his misery by shooting him. Kenny also appears distressed by Liam's daughter's untimely death. It is interesting in the final scenes it is Catholic who kills Catholic, albeit by accident and Protestant kills Protestant, Kenny kills Ginger. This seems to suggest that all violence is futile and that in the end it is neighbours who are killing neighbours.

The depiction of the Loyalist paramilitaries in *Nothing Personal* is not a romanticised one. It is not sanctified by the use of religious imagery. The violence represented is brutal and often sectarian. Unlike the depiction of the disciplined and selfless, (in that they were willing to die for their cause), I.R.A. members in *Some Mother's Son*, these Loyalist activists are depicted as uncontrollable and, at times, immoral. Kenny and Eddie are shown in meaningless sexual encounters. For instance, Kenny dismisses a mistress like she is a servant when his leader, Leonard, pays him a visit. Also, Eddie's sexual intercourse with a woman in the barren yard beside the club is quite sordid. While the pair are laughing and joking before and during the encounter, she is disgusted

missing page

house there is a mural. This mural depicts King William in triumph at the Battle of the Boyne (fig.11). This kind of triumphalist mural was painted as part of the annual celebrations for King William's victory. They were an assertion of Protestant identity. *"With the formation of the Northern Ireland State in 1921, the murals also became part of the identity within what was seen as both unionists and nationalists as a Protestant state."* (Bill Rolston, 1996, p.5)

This idea of the murals being only the property of the Loyalists is challenged in *Nothing Personal*. When Liam is leaving the home of Kenny's wife, he tells Ann how he spent some of his childhood in this area of Belfast. To illustrate the point he covers the first three letters of the word 'William' on the wall mural. The name is then transformed to the traditionally nationalist name of 'Liam'. They both share the joke and there is a feeling that perhaps the differences between Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist, are not so great after all. However, the next time they meet it is at the funeral of two more casualties of the conflict, Kathleen and Kenny.

The cause of the Loyalist in *Nothing Personal* is portrayed in a different way to the cause the Republican in *Some Mother's Son*. Both films are set in times of crisis for each organisation, but this factor is handled differently by each. The Loyalists seem to lose some of their control, while the Republicans seem to gain more of theirs. The former chose the iconography of the gangster and the gun, while the latter choice to imitate Christ with their self-sacrifice. The nature of the gunman is complex and nowhere more so than in the Northern Ireland situation. These films can only hope to suggest the motives and attitudes of immensely complex characters. Eventually, these films only scratch the surface of the nature of the situation and people by the mood, tone and visual style of the films which conforms restrictively with conventions of film and past representations of paramilitaries in the North of Ireland.

Plate 9

Nothing Personal, 1995, Michael Gambon as Leonard, Leader of the Loyalists in the film. The Union Jack is on the wall of Kenny's club

Conclusion

> *In Northern Ireland they don't count angels on the top of pinheads, they just ask them which school they went to, which football team they support and listen whether they pronounce H-Block with an 'aitch' or a 'haitch'. It's no surprise that this nation (if it is one) produced a Noble Prize-winning poet in Seamus Heaney, for the decoding of language and cultural information for any lurking indications of bias or covert intent is an ongoing pastime.*
> *(Trevor Johnston, 1996, p. 50)*

Northern Ireland is a state of partitions, divisions, tensions and boundaries which exist not only on the streets but in the minds of the people. Both communities are at pains to express their own identities separately and in line with their two very different traditions. These two traditions are influenced by their particular religions, the British Empire and Celtic Ireland. Films about Northern Ireland face a number of problems when they approach the subject of Northern Ireland. One of these difficulties is the fact that past depictions of the communities of this state have been biased by the cinematic traditions and conventions which have dominated them. Certain themes and stereotypes have prevailed and seem to prove too strong to ignore, even in very recent productions. These conventions are at times too narrow to contain all the complexities of the situation and communities of Northern Ireland.

Nothing Personal and *Some Mother's Son* are retrogressive in many ways. They do not challenge these prevailing traditions, they rather utilise them in a standard way. *Nothing Personal* is a conventional genre film, while *Some Mother's Son* is embedded in Nationalist symbolism.

Republican paramilitaries are coming from a tradition, which has a long history for appropriating Catholicism for their own ends. The Republican leaders of the 1916 Rising in the South of Ireland employed images such as those of martyrs to sanctify their cause. The cinematic depictions of Southern Ireland's Republicans have also employed Catholic iconography to further the cause. In *Some Mother's Son* the Republican

prisoners are presented as martyrs. Their leader, Bobby Sands is even portrayed in a similar way to conventional images of the sacrificial Christ.

The films, which deal with Loyalist activists, find reconciling their religion and occupation problematic. There appears to be an absence of cinematic depictions of Loyalist paramilitaries. In *Nothing Personal* the conventions of the gangster film are adapted to the situation of Northern Ireland in the 1970's. This borrowing of a style and image from a different tradition suggests that they lack a style expressive of their identity within their own cinematic traditions and conventions.

The portrayals of Northern Irish communities are diverse. *Some Mother's Son* is emotional and stylistically flamboyant. The character of the prisoners is devout and evangelical while their mothers are emotional and virtuous. The men and women depicted seem to have many parallels with the Catholic icons of Jesus and his mother, the Virgin Mary. The persona of the Loyalists in *Nothing Personal* is very different. They are portrayed as immoral and egotistical, their characters are like gangsters rather than religious icons. Emblems and territorial markings are prominent in the film, which reflect the character of the Unionist community. However, neither film seems to effectively delve into the identities of these communities or the conflict. The attempts of these filmmakers to investigate the nature of the situation seem ultimately superficial.

Plate 10
King Billy crossing the Boyne, with Crown and flags: Union Jack, Ulster flag and flag of St. Andrew. Coleraine, Co. Derry

Filmography

Angel, Neil Jordan, (Irl.), 1982

Cal, Pat O'Connor, (G.B.), 1984

December Bride, Thaddeus O'Sullivan, (G.B./Irl.), 1990

Hush-a-Bye-Baby, Margo Harkin, (G.B./Irl.), 1989

The Visit, Orla Walsh, (Irl.), 1992

Odd Man Out, Carol Reed, (G.B.), 1947

The Gentle Gunman, Basil Dearden, (G.B.), 1952

Some Mother's Son, Terry George, (Irl.), 1996

Nothing Personal, Thaddeus O'Sullivan, (G.B./Irl.), 1995

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